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THREATS AND PROVOCATIONS ORIGINATING FROM THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TOWARDS THE WATER RESOURCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

(AZERBAIJAN CUMHURİYETİ'NİN SU KAYNAKLARINA
YÖNELMİŞ ERMENİSTAN CUMHURİYETİ KAYNAKLI
PROVOKASYONLAR VE TEHDİTLER)

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Abstract: *Ecological irresponsibility and ecological terrorism are concepts discussed both in terms of ecology and politics. While ecological irresponsibility entails negligence of varying magnitude on part of an actor that results in environmental harm or destruction, ecological terrorism involves an actor deliberately damaging a country's flora and fauna and destroying its natural resources for specific purposes. For more than 25 years, the Republic of Azerbaijan has suffered from the ecological harm and destruction committed by its western neighbor, the Republic of Armenia. At present, the aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan is carried out in different ways, morphing from a hot war involving active armed struggle to a cold war phase. This irresponsible and belligerent policy pursued by Armenia against Azerbaijan has cybercrime aspects, and has implications in ideological, scientific, cultural, moral and social*

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spheres. Polluting of the rivers, which form the sources of drinking water of Azerbaijan, by chemical, biological, and radioactive waste has a continuous character. This factor deeply violates the right of the regional population to live securely.

Keywords: *water resources, ecology, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kur-Aras basin, Sarsang reservoir*

Öz: *Ekolojik sorumsuzluk ve ekolojik terörizm, ekoloji biliminde ve siyasette tartışma konusu olan kavramlardır. Ekolojik sorumsuzluk bir aktörün farklı çaplardaki ihmali sebebiyle ortaya çıkan çevresel zarar veya yıkımı kapsarken, ekolojik terörizm belirli amaçlar doğrultusunda bir aktör tarafından kasıtlı olarak bir ülkenin florasına ve faunalarına zarar verme ve doğal kaynaklarını imha etme eylemidir. 25 yıldan fazla bir süredir, Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Batı komşusu Ermenistan Cumhuriyeti'nin yarattığı ekolojik zarar ve yıkımdan mağdur olmaktadır. Günümüzde, Ermenistan'ın saldırganlığı aktif silahlı mücadele içeren sıcak savaştan soğuk savaş aşamasına geçerek farklı şekillerde yürütülmektedir. Ermenistan'ın Azerbaycan'a karşı yürüttüğü sorumsuz ve kavgacı politika; ideolojik, bilimsel, kültürel, manevi ve sosyal alanları kapsamış ve siber-suç öğeleri de barındırmaktadır. Ermenistan'ın topraklarından akan nehirlerin kimyasal, biyolojik ve radyoaktif atıklarla kirletilmesi Azerbaycan'da içme suyu kaynaklarına sürekli zarar vermektedir. Bu faktör, bölge halkının güvenli yaşama hakkını derinden ihlal etmektedir.*

Anahtar Sözcükler: *su kaynakları, ekoloji, Azerbaycan, Ermenistan, Kura-Araz havzası, Sarsang baraj gölü*

Introduction

The water-related aspects of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan in international law, as well as the use of fresh water sources and hydrotechnical devices in the conduct of hydrological, hydropower and ecological sabotage actions are not sufficiently studied. The irresponsible and belligerent policy of Armenia against Azerbaijan is quite diverse in terms of its essence and its implementation mechanisms. In this context, two concepts can be used to categorize Armenia's actions: ecological irresponsibility and ecological terrorism. Both concepts have rising importance in terms of ecology and politics. While ecological irresponsibility entails negligence of varying magnitude on part of an actor that results in environmental harm or destruction, ecological terrorism involves an actor deliberately damaging a country's flora and fauna and destroying its natural resources for specific purposes.

The sheer scale of the damage and destruction towards the ecology of Azerbaijan emanating from Armenia gives the impression that Armenia's actions are deliberate and as such may be deemed as "ecological terrorism". However, there is no definitive proof that Armenia's ecological harm and destruction towards Azerbaijan is based on a deliberate policy. We can therefore state that, at the very least, due to gross negligence, incompetence, lack of inspection, or a combination of these, Armenia is engaged in grave ecological irresponsibility that is constantly victimizing Azerbaijan.

At the same time, the unconstructive approach shown by international organizations in the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict serves to deteriorate the situation in the region. Armenia, by taking advantage of the ineffectiveness of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group and its co-chairs' (Russia, the US, and France) lenient approach towards Armenia regarding the resolution of the conflict, extends the settlement of the conflict by baseless excuses. By support given by third party countries that serve as its patrons, official Yerevan is delaying the conclusion of any contract with the regional states on the management, utilization, protection of the transboundary water resources and the determination of water quotas. This further intensifies ecological harm and destruction directed against Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, Armenia makes up excuses on being a legitimate successor of the USSR, and thus continues to lean on the provisions of the USSR's agreements with Turkey in 1924 and with Iran in 1957.¹

1 "Russia ii. Iranian-Soviet relations (1917-1991)," *IranicaOnline.org*, July 20, 2009, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/russia-ii-iranian-soviet-relations-1917-1991>

Ecological problems of the Kur-Aras basin

75% of Azerbaijan's territory is located downstream of the Kur River basin. Each year, 350 million cubic meters of water passing through Armenia is polluted with tons of chemical and biological items and flow into the Kur River basin. Moreover, microflora and microfauna in the territory of Azerbaijan along the 43 km of the Aras River has been completely destroyed.² As a result of the direct impact of Armenia's ecological irresponsibility, the level of water pollution in the Aras River has reached abnormal levels. The acidity indicator in the river -the pH level- has decreased to 2.4, and the microflora by decreased by 180-200 times. At the same time, valuable fish species have been cut off in the Aras River. It has been determined that 21 species of fish were reduced to 16 species in the last 10-15 years.³

Organic contaminants that are detected in the Aras River are also at abnormal levels. The amount of phenols in the indicated area is 220-1160 times, heavy metal salts (copper, molybdenum, etc.) 36-48 times, nitrogen-phosphorus salts 26-34 times, chlorides 28 times, and oil hydrocarbons are 73-113 times higher than the solids. At the same time, high-temperature industrial wastewater has a negative impact on the temperature and gas regime of the river. The results of the analysis of samples taken from the bottom of the river indicate that the amount of heavy metals in the Aras River is much higher than normal. The amount of toxic substances in the water is more than 50% above the norm. Therefore, contamination of the Aras River with various toxic wastes threatens the existence of flora and fauna.⁴

The main sections of the Aras River flow through Armenia and despite all international pressure, the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant operates in the territory of the country and its waste is flowing through the left tributary of Aras – Zangi (Razdan) river.⁵ The activities of Metsamor NPP have direct impact on Aras River, as 12-16,000 m³ pollution is discharged to the river per day. So, it will eventually cause great harm for Aras and its arms in the future.⁶

2 Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, "Country Study on Biodiversity of the Republic of Azerbaijan - First National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity," *UN Convention on Biological Diversity* website, Baku (2004): 27, 38, <https://www.cbd.int/doc/world/az/az-nr-01-p1-en.pdf>

3 Azərbaycan ərazilərinin Ermənistan tərəfindən işğalı nəticəsində itki və tələfatların qiymətləndirilməsi üzrə İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin məlumat materialları əsasında erməni silahlı təcavüzü və işğal nəticəsində ətraf mühit və təbii sərvətlərə vurulmuş zərərlərin qiymətləndirilməsi (hesabat)* (Bakı: Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyi, 2015), 156-158, <http://eco.gov.az/az/nazirlik/xeber?newsID=6574>

4 A. Qurbanov, *Hidrobohlan, hidromünaqişələr və hidrostrategiya* (Bakı: Azərbaycan Respublikasının Prezidenti yanında Strateji Araşdırmalar Mərkəzi, 2013), 97-100.

5 P. Велизиде, *Мецаморская АЭС-экологическая бомба для региона* (Баку: ЭЛМ, 2017), 69, 110.

6 Q.Ş. Məmmədov və M.Y. Xəlilov, *Ekologiya, ətraf mühit və insan* (Bakı: Elm, 2006), 362-364, http://files.preslib.az/projects/azereco/az/eco_m2_3.pdf

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Considering that Armenia has not joined the 1992 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) “Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes” and the amount of highly hazardous substances flowing from Armenia into Azerbaijan, it is possible to conclude that the region is heading towards an ecological catastrophe.

Additionally, there are wide-spread opinions both in neighboring Turkey and Azerbaijan that the activity of the Metsamor NPP is a serious threat to the health of the population living in the Iğdır region of Turkey, which is located only 15 km away from the powerplant.⁷ According to experts, Armenia’s Metsamor and Bulgaria’s Kozladuy nuclear power plants are the most dangerous energy enterprises in Europe.⁸

The Okhchuchay River, flowing through Shirikan village of Zangilan region, is polluted with chemical contaminants of Qajaran copper-molybdenum, Gafan copper ore-extraction plants and biological polluted waters of Gafan-Qajaran cities (including villages, hospitals, agricultural facilities) located in Armenia. This has turned the river basin into a “dead zone.” The 43 km² area of the river falling into the territory of Azerbaijan and 455 km² of the catchment area are constantly polluted. As a result, microflora and microfauna have been destroyed, and the self-cleaning process of the river water has stopped. The main reason for the pollution of Agstafachay, the right bank of the Kur River, is the discharge of one million cubic meters of waste from Armenia’s Ijevan and Dilican settlements, and industrial enterprises. Thus, the amount of phenol in the river has exceeded the norm by 35-45 times. The water reservoir built on it is a serious threat to the population of the North-West region of Azerbaijan.⁹

The Armenian population in the Khojavand region of Azerbaijan, which is occupied by Armenia, discharge wastewater from industrial enterprises to the transboundary water. The Hanashan River, flowing from the west to the east, is contaminated by wastes of the central hospital of Khojavend (Martuni) 200-300 meters away. It is also situated 200 meters away from the pig and cattle complex in that area. It should be noted that, as a result of the intervention by Armenian farmers who cross the occupied area, a small lake has emerged. This water source is the sole source of water in the area and is used for

7 “Metsamor Nükleer Santrali Iğdır İçin Son Derece Tehlikelidir,” *Türksam*, Haziran 29, 2006, <http://turksam.org/metsamor-nukleer-santrali-igdir-icin-son-derece-tehlikelidir>

8 “Is Armenia’s Nuclear Plant the World’s Most Dangerous?” *National Geographic*, April 14, 2011, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/energy/2011/04/110412-most-dangerous-nuclear-plant-armenia/>

9 V. Vəliyev, “Araz çayının ekoloji durumu həyəcan təbili çalır,” *Azərbaycan Milli Kitabxanası*, May 31, 2014, <http://www.anl.az/down/meqale/zaman/2014/may/374173.htm>

drinking water, as well as for various purposes (e.g. planting areas, watering animals, etc.). In the ecological and sanitary specimens taken from that water source, microbes have been found to be more than the norm. Especially in the rainfall, the river is even more polluted due to the increased water as a result of floods, all of which flow into the Khangızı (Orcenikidze) Channel.¹⁰

Other rivers, flowing from the west to the east, are fed mainly by rains and snow waters and are polluted with various waste near Agdam, Asgaran, Khankendi and other settlements. The absence of any information about the current ecological situation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan creates great difficulty. Armenia, which exercises effective control over these areas, seems to be concealing the real ecological situation there, and it is only possible to make general judgments about the situation.

Hydrometeorological observations have a great importance in the study of the environmental conditions of any country, especially for meteorological forecasts. This is also true for the assessment of water resources in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. It previously had long-term observation equipment in meteorological stations such as in Khankendi, Shusha, Lachin, Kalbajar, Agdam, Fuzuli, Madagiz, Khargonchay, Lachin, Minkend, Sarsang water reservoir in Umutlu, and Khachinchay Vankeli Bridge. The hydrometeorological stations possessed all manner of high-end equipment of the time, such as the one in Oxfar Jayla, but as a result of occupation, hydrometeorological observations were discontinued in the 17 hydrological sites that were destroyed. The forced stopping of observations at stations does not allow the study of hydrometeorological conditions of the area. When calculated at market value, the loss of the hydrometeorological observation stations in the occupied territories and the related infrastructure amounts to about 7.7 million Manats (approximately 4.5 million US Dollars).¹¹

The water resources of Kalbajar and Lachin districts, occupied by Armenia, are of strategic importance, because the Lachin district was a buffer zone that protected the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan from Armenian occupation. After the occupation of Lachin district on May 16, 1992, Armenia was easily able to enter the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Armenian statistics predicted that in the future, the population of the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region could reach 200,000 people and estimated that annual freshwater demand for agricultural and domestic use would be 365 million m³. This was 59% more than the reserves of Sarsang reservoir. It is no coincidence that

10 Azərbaycan ... İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin...*, 156-158 ; E. Paşayev və F.H. Həsənov, "Azdövsütəsləyihə" *Institutunun Tarixi Və İnkişaf Yolu* (Bakı: Şərqi-Qərb, 2010), 38, http://anl.az/el/p/pe_ait&iy.pdf

11 Azərbaycan ... İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin...*, 140-149.

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official Yerevan alleged that the water problems of the Kalbajar and Lachin regions are somehow due to Azerbaijan's hydro-politics towards these regions.¹²

The control of the flow of water resources into Azerbaijan by Armenia entails significant risks for Azerbaijan. Armenian politician Melik-Shahnazaryan explains the essence of the situation of the water resources and how it is hoped to affect Azerbaijan as follows:

“The Armenian state must limit the supply of water to Azerbaijan by all means, and should take the example of Turkey in the transformation of water resources into political influence and should not ignore the complaints addressed to international organizations by Azerbaijan. Today, Armenia's activities should be directed against the food security of Azerbaijan and create serious water shortages in the country to achieve social-political tensions, mass protests and clashes on the national ground. The sharp reduction of water resources flowing from the territory of Armenia will have a crushing blow to Azerbaijan's agriculture. At the same time, the population living in Armenia's and Nagorno-Karabakh's border areas (Agstafa, Tovuz, Gazakh, Goranboy, Terter, Barda, Agjabadi, Beylagan, Aghdam and Fuzuli) will be displaced voluntarily after the deprivation of irrigated lands and pastures. The water crisis will have a serious impact on the socio-economic situation of Shamkir, Gadabay and Imishli regions. Moreover, Armenia must minimize the transboundary water supply to Azerbaijan by building new water reservoirs and hydroelectric power stations on transboundary rivers.”¹³

Melik-Shahnazarian proposed the idea of firstly cutting off the rivers. According to him, the part of Agstafa, Tovuz, Gazakh, Goranboy, Terter, Barda, Agjabedi, Beylagan, Agdam and Fuzuli regions controlled by Azerbaijan depends on the rivers starting from the territories completely controlled by Armenian and Armenian groups. Therefore, Armenia should make use this “advantage”. The Armenian author writes that if at least half of these rivers can be cut-off, then Azerbaijan will face severe shortage of water, and the volume of water in Aras and Kura Rivers will be sharply reduced.¹⁴

The National Environmental Monitoring Department of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources conducted further monitoring for

12 Azərbaycan ... İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin...*, 140-149.

13 Qurbanov, *Hidroböhran, hidromünaqişələr və hidrostrategiya*, 97-100.

14 Qurbanov, *Hidroböhran, hidromünaqişələr və hidrostrategiya*, 97-100.

the first quarter of September 2015 to study pollution of Kur and Aras transboundary rivers. In the first quarter of September, water consumption in the Kur River increased by 15 m³/sec to 124 m³/sec in the third quarter of August. According to the results of the monitoring, the amount of biogenic substances in the Kur River has exceeded the norm by the impact of wastes and industrial wastewater discharges directly to water bodies from Georgia and Armenia. Specific pollutants in water contain phenols at multiple times the normal levels: 4.6 in Shikhli-2, 4.3 in Agstafachay and 3 in Agstafachay water reservoir (YVQH). Again, according to the results of the monitoring, the phenol crossed the HVDC on the Aras River by multiple times the normal level; 3.3 in Horadiz, 2.7 in Shahsevan, and 2.2 times in Bahramtepe. Meanwhile, copper compounds in the Kur and Aras Rivers have varied within the norm at every point. The oxygen regime of water has changed at all points within the sanitary norms of 6.74-7.43 mg/l. In general, it is possible to monitor the contamination of copper compounds in all three stations of the Araz River throughout the year.¹⁵

The occupation of Azerbaijan villages, Gulustan and Talish, are another episode of irresponsible acts by Armenia. On November 19, 2010, there was severe pollution in the Inchiçay which is not far from Murov Mountain. Harmful activity was detected emanating from Tapkaragoyunlu Village, where water flowed to İnciçay, and this was reported to the Territorial Ecology and Natural Resources Department of Azerbaijani Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (Goranboy, Naftalan, Samukh, Dashkasan, Goygol). A team of experts from the Ministry was created to assess the environmental situation. Analysis were made at the central analytical laboratory of hazardous chemicals in the samples taken from the water and a considerable deterioration in the quality of river water was recorded. The analysis shows that the hydrogen indicator in the giant water of the hydrocarbonated water group has dropped sharply from the alkaline to the acidic environment and the water oxygen regime has been severely damaged. The amount of active synthetic organic substances (detergents), nitrogen compounds, mainly ammonium and metal compounds, from harmful contaminants, was higher than the norm.¹⁶

The next significant event by Armenia occurred on August 31, 2011, was the presentation of a series of new environmental sabotage actions against Azerbaijan. Thus, the territory of the Voskepar River flowing from Armenia to Azerbaijan has been changed, the water is directed to the newly constructed concrete irrigation canal. The river, which had previously been poured into the Joghaz reservoir, would now “meet the needs of thirsty Armenian villages”

15 Azərbaycan ... İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin...*, 140-149.

16 Azərbaycan ... İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin...*, 140-149.

without reaching the borders of Azerbaijan. The project and construction work of the new channel was funded by the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development, with a total budget of 5.4 million US Dollars. Armenian President of the time Serzh Sargsyan, who attended in the opening ceremony, congratulated the Armenian people on the “historic event,” adding that besides the Voskepar Project, more than eight hydropower facilities would be built and put into operation in the near future.¹⁷

The territory of Azerbaijan is rich in various types of mineral waters. It is known that more than 200 mineral water springs, distinguished by the diversity of chemical and gas composition, variety of heat, and containing more than 1,000 natural output, depend on the geological structure and hydrogeological formation conditions. The hundreds of diverse mineral-water springs in the occupied areas constitute 39.6% of the total geological reserves of Azerbaijani mineral waters. The area, especially the Shusha, Lachin and Kalbajar regions, have very large mineral resources. In the Lachin-Kalbajar region, 63 springs are divided into two areas, Istisu (Kalbajar region) and Ilisu (Lachin region).

Because of their composition, quality and therapeutic properties, these waters are on par with world-famous “Karlov Vary”, “Narzan”, “Kislovodsk”, and “Jeleznovodsk” springs, even though they are some of their properties. The mineral waters in the Kalbajar region differs especially in terms of their favorable gas and chemical composition, high temperatures, and great natural resources. These mineral waters have healing properties for both external and internal diseases. Thus, a large spa and mineral water filling plant was built over the Istisu Spring in the 1980s. That plant produced 800,000 liters of water a day. Different internal diseases were treated with Turşsu mineral spring, located 17 kms from Shusha City. Water was supplied from the Turşsu mineral spring to Shusha. The polluting of the natural water basins such as Big Alagol, Small Alagol, Zalkhagol, Canligol, Garagol, Alagol, Illigli Garagol in the occupied territories also caused additional environmental problems for the Azerbaijan in the proceeding years.¹⁸

The thermal waters of the area distinguished by their unique composition. Hydrogeological exploration works were being carried out in Kalbajar District, Upper and Lower Istisu, Bağırsağ, Kashdek, Lachin, Tursu, Shirilan and other mineral water fields in Ilisu, Minkand, Shusha regions to build lucrative factories and health facilities. By the decision of the Council of Ministers of the Azerbaijan SSR dated November 1, 1990 on reconstruction

17 Qurbanov, *Hidroböhran, hidromünaqişələr və hidrostrategiya*, 97-100.

18 Azərbaycan ... İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin...*, 152-155.

of mineral water disposal enterprises and construction of new plants, the reconstruction of Istisu and Turshsu mineral water plants was resumed. Unfortunately, the occupation of the territories did not allow the realization of the mentioned project. Very precious resorts located in the central part of the Lesser Caucasus, 1500-2800 meters above sea level -Top Istisu, Low Istisu, Goturlu, Chartakar, Ilisu, Turshsu and other mineral springs- are vacant today.

The destruction of forests that are an integral part of the biosphere is also causing serious damage to nature. The fires in the occupied territories have damaged the land cover. Forest areas of Kalbajar, Lachin, Aghdere regions of Azerbaijan are currently occupied. These forests are used for various purposes by cutting Eldar pine, oak, peanut, pine, lime and other valuable trees. Also, the decline in forest spaces also affects the water cycle in the ecosystem. Destruction of the plant cover accelerates the flow of water because trees, bushes and herbs have the ability to catch water and deaccelerate its flow. Thus, forests play an indispensable role in the protection of lands and water resources. Destruction of forests also causes erosion, increased flood risk and water scarcity.

The damage caused to nature of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan does not end there. Armenia has occupied several preserved sites and many valuable natural-historical monuments in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan Republic. These include the Basitay State Reserve, Karagöl State Reserve, Lachin, Gubadli, Dashalti, and Arasbay. Besides, 269 thousand hectares of forest areas and 6 geological objects have been destroyed. The preserved sites in the occupied zone are in a very poor state. In the place called Argunash, near the Fuzuli region, the forest area was completely destroyed by Armenian groups in order to carry out construction, cut valuable trees, and to construct a road between Hadrut and Tug.

Occupied Sarsang Water Reservoir

The development of irrigation agriculture in Azerbaijan, which is considered as a dry region, is an important issue for the city and villages to supply water. Small Caucasus Mountains, currently under the occupation of Armenia, are of great importance for the formation of water resources of Azerbaijan. All the rivers deriving their source from these mountains, especially Tartar, Hakari, Khachinchay, Kondalanchay and others, which are the right sides of the Kura, bring plenty of water to the flat areas. Artificial lakes and irrigation canals have been created on some of them. One of such complexes used for irrigation and electricity generation is the Tartar Hydrocomplex. The Tartar River begins in Kalbajar region and passes through the territory of Agdere,

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Tartar and Barda and flows into the Kur river. Tutqu, Lev and Ayrim are the rivers of the Tartar River. The Sarsang Reservoir was built on the Tartar River in 1976 on the octaves known as the Garia Bridges. There are 3 bridges in Agdere region. The first bridge is located in the Sarsang Valley where the present water reservoir was built. That bridge was built in such a safe location that it was planned to construct a corridor in the 1970s, just as the bridge was built. Because in this section and in the area, the right and left coast of the Tartar River consisted of rocky cliffs and favorable geographical location, which could be used in the future.¹⁹

The Sarsang reservoir was created by the capital investment allocated to the Azerbaijan SSR. Its total water capacity is 560 million m³ and the height of the dam is 125 meters. Sarsang Water Reservoir is the highest water reservoir in the country. This reservoir is currently in the occupied Agdere region.²⁰ It provided irrigation water to nearly 100,000 hectares of land in 6 districts of Azerbaijan (Terter, Agdam, Barda, Goranboy, Yevlakh and Agjabedi). Regular maintenance work had been carried out by Azerbaijani specialists to ensure the safety of the projects. However, ecological and technical crisis in the water reservoir is continuing because of the disruptive activities of Armenia in the region. The use of this water is extremely dangerous for the population of the nearby villages.²¹

It should also be noted that the Sarsang Hydroelectric Power Station, established at the Tartar Hydroelectric Complex, produces electricity for Armenians. The so-called Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh regime does not fulfill any responsibility regarding the protection of the ecological situation in the occupied territories, so the environmental conditions are getting worse in these territories.

19 İ. Qasimov, "Qarabağ müharibəsi veteranı, II qrup Qarabağ əlili, yerli sakin. Sərsəng su anbarı," *Yeni Tərtər qəzeti*, Noyabr 15, 2017.

20 R. Rzayev, "The Occupied Sarsang Water Reservoir As A Means Of Hydro-Diversion And Hydro-Terror By Armenia Against Azerbaijan" (Global And Regional Hydropolitical Problems In The Context Of International Cooperation And Security, International Conference, Baku, 2014): 33-36.

21 Tuğba Evrim Maden, *Weaponization of Water: The Case of Sarsang Reservoir* (Ankara: Berikan Yayınevi, 2017), 111.



Sarsang Water Reservoir in Agdere

Due to the occupation of the Sarsang Reservoir, the inability to supply irrigation water to 100,000 hectares of land has had an irreversible damage to this region of Azerbaijan. At present, the Sarsang Reservoir is in a state of emergency for over 25 years due to the lack of technical maintenance. That is why, the Sarsang Reservoir remaining under occupation causes serious problems for the 138,000 people of Nagorno-Karabakh (located in its low-relief) and the 400,000 people in the Lower Karabagh region whom rely on it for drinking water. It should be noted that, if a dangerous situation arises, the destruction of the dam can destroy the territory and population within one hour.²²

There are two approaches to calculating the damage to Azerbaijan's economy as a result of the impossibility of using the Sarsang Water Reservoir: electricity generation and irrigation of cultivated lands.

As mentioned above, the Sarsang reservoir gathers 125 million m³ per year for electricity production. According to the Decision of the Tariff (Price) Council of Azerbaijan, the retail price of electricity is 0.06 manats/kWh for all consumers. This means: 125,000,000 kwh/year x 0.06 kWh = 7,500,000 Manats (4,400,000 US Dollars) per year of economic damage.

22 H. Sarikaya, "How to Reduce the Water Shortage Problem in the Context of the Global Water Analysis" (Global And Regional Hydropolitical Problems In The Context Of International Cooperation And Security, International Conference, Baku, 2014): 21-26.

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Also, the Sarsang reservoir was designed to irrigate 120,000 hectares of land: 120,000 hectares of planting area x 220 kg/ha crop/year x 0.25 Manats = 6,600,000 manats/year (3,900,000 US Dollars)

In this case, the amount of damage in other reservoirs was estimated at 7,700,560 Manats/year. Thus, the loss of water dams approaches 219,560 Manats/year, or for 22 years of occupation – about 480 million Manats (282 Million US Dollars).²³

The Sarsang Water Reservoir was very important for agriculture in Azerbaijan. However, 20% of Tartar (Agdere) Region was militarily occupied by Armenia and Azerbaijan lost control of the highest water reservoir, of which the total water capacity was about 80 million m³ in the Caucasus. Other water reservoirs among them are the Khachinkay Water Reservoir built in 1964, Ganligol Water Reservoir built in 1965, Arpachay Water Reservoir built in 1977, Agdamkend Water Reservoir built in 1962, and more than 160 other water reservoirs turned that have turned into a real threat for Azerbaijan. The water tanks in the Zangilan Region are also occupied and the Azerbaijani side is deprived of their use.

According to the Azerbaijan State Committee for Treatment and Water Management, 29 irrigation systems, 26 main facilities, 1202 km-long 112 inter-farm canals, 713 installations on canals, 5580 km of permanent domestic irrigation canals, 84 pumping stations, 74.4 km of drainage network, the Mil-Mugan watercourse, the Tortchak right-lane channel etc. have been occupied.

In response to such inhumane and destructive acts that are contrary to international law and norms - a delegation of the Association for Civil Society Development in Azerbaijan (ACSDA) started to inform the international community about the project “Sarsang-Humanitarian Disaster Prevention” in May 2013. The project aims at to attain prevention against the danger for life and possessions of people who live near the Armenian occupied zones with all water reservoirs including Sarsang Water Reservoir. The intense activity of the Association in numerous meetings and conferences resulted in the mobilization of European circles into the region’s monitoring processes in 2015. Representatives of the Association have informed the world community that the Sarsang reservoir, which has been under no care for more than 20 years, is in an emergency condition.²⁴

23 Azərbaycan ... İşçi Qrupu, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyinin...*, 152-155.

24 “YUNESKO-nun ‘Ümumdünya mədəni və təbii irsin qorunması haqqında’ Konvensiyasına Azərbaycan Respublikasının qoşulması barədə - Azərbaycan Respublikası Milli Məclisinin qərarı,” *UNESCO.preslib.az*, Dekabr 6, 1993, <http://unesco.preslib.az/az/page/ZkBp5YPq2F>

As a result of the above-mentioned reasons, the Sarsang Reservoir has now become a major threat to Azerbaijan. The Reservoir constitutes a potential ecological crisis that may lead to the destruction of 400,000 civilians residing in the untouched surrounding areas of Azerbaijan. Thanks to regular meetings of the Delegation of ACSDA, Azerbaijani representatives sent the proposal of resolution to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the Committee on Social Issues, Health and Sustainable Development of the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE) on September 1, 2013. A draft resolution to the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development and to the meeting in Dubrovnik (Bureau) to be appointed as rapporteur was recommended. The Bureau approved the proposal of the resolution “On the humanitarian disaster which could create a hazardous situation for the Sarsang reservoir in the occupied Azerbaijani territories”. The final decision of the Committee also noted that the chemicals and pollutants of water entering Azerbaijan from Armenia were many times higher than normal and drew attention to the growing and spreading of various diseases among the Azerbaijani population living in path of the waters.²⁵

Unfortunately, Armenia, which has not yet been identified by international law as an aggressor despite its actions against Azerbaijan, continues to violate the legal regime and international law by keeping one-fourth of the territory of Azerbaijan, especially the Sarsang Reservoir. Official Yerevan has refused to accept international commitments and has cited financial difficulties as an excuse but has not hesitated to prevent European authorities from monitoring the relevant border areas. In spite of the obstacles created by Armenia, the resolution of PACE titled “Inhabitants of frontier regions of Azerbaijan are deliberately deprived of water” was adopted by the majority of MPs with 98 yes and 71 no votes during the winter session (January 26, 2016). The document outlines the lack of control over the obsolete technical facilities of the Sarsang Water Reservoir for more than 20 years, the limited access of the population to water, and the inevitable poor social conditions of the population as a result of the abandonment of land. The said PACE resolution states the following issues:²⁶

1. The Parliamentary Assembly reminds all its member States that the right to water is essential to life and health, in accordance with the 1966

25 Gülnar Bəşirova, “Ermənistandan növbəti təhdid: Sərsəng su anbarı partladıla bilər,” *Modern.az*, Fevral 5, 2014, <https://modern.az/az/news/51485>

26 “Inhabitants of frontier regions of Azerbaijan are deliberately deprived of water,” *Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*, Resolution 2085 (2016), January 26, 2016, <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=22429&lang=en>. Also see the relevant report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development that indicates that Armenia is “using water resources as a political tool”: Milica Marković, “Inhabitants of frontier regions of Azerbaijan are deliberately deprived of water,” *Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*, Doc. 13931, December 12, 2015, <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-DocDetails-en.asp?FileID=22290&lang=en>

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Helsinki Rules on the Uses of the Waters of International Rivers and the 2004 Berlin Rules on Water Resources, and thus constitutes a prior condition for the enjoyment of other human rights. The Assembly emphasises the obligation of States to secure their population's access to sufficient, safe and affordable water resources.

2. The Assembly regards unimpeded access to drinking water, which cannot be restricted by the existence of borders, as a basic right, a source of life and an asset of strategic importance to every State. It confirms that deliberate deprivation of water cannot be used as a means to harm innocent citizens.
3. The Assembly considers that the deliberate creation of an artificial environmental crisis must be regarded as “environmental aggression” and seen as a hostile act by one State towards another aimed at creating environmental disaster areas and making normal life impossible for the population concerned.
4. It deplores the fact that the occupation by Armenia of Nagorno-Karabakh and other adjacent areas of Azerbaijan creates similar humanitarian and environmental problems for the citizens of Azerbaijan living in the Lower Karabakh valley.
5. The Assembly recalls that, in their statement of 20 May 2014, the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs expressed their hope that the sides would reach an agreement to jointly manage these water resources for the benefit of the region.
6. It notes that the lack of regular maintenance work for over twenty years on the Sarsang reservoir, located in one of the areas of Azerbaijan occupied by Armenia, poses a danger to the whole border region. The Assembly emphasises that the state of disrepair of the Sarsang dam could result in a major disaster with great loss of human life and possibly a fresh humanitarian crisis.
7. In view of this urgent humanitarian problem, the Assembly requests:
 - 7.1. the immediate withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from the region concerned, thus allowing:
 - 7.1.1. access by independent engineers and hydrologists to carry out a detailed on-the-spot survey;
 - 7.1.2. global management, throughout the catchment area, of the use and upkeep of the Sarsang water resources;

- 7.1.3. international supervision of the irrigation canals, the state of the Sarsang and Madagiz dams, the schedule of water releases during the autumn and winter, and aquifer overexploitation;
 - 7.2. the Armenian authorities to cease using water resources as tools of political influence or an instrument of pressure benefiting only one of the parties to the conflict.
8. The Assembly firmly condemns the lack of co-operation of the Armenian parliamentary delegation and the Armenian authorities during the preparation of the report on this issue. The Assembly regards such behaviour as incompatible with the obligations and commitments of a country which is a full member of the Council of Europe. The Assembly will consider what measures to take in this case and in any similar cases which may arise during the terms of office of its parliamentarians.
 9. The Assembly calls on all sides concerned to step up their efforts to co-operate closely in the joint management of the resources of the Sarsang water reservoir, as such co-operation can constitute a confidence-building measure necessary for the solution of any conflict.

It should be noted unambiguously that the problem with the Sarsang Reservoir cannot be viewed as a problem between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This problem was caused by the armed aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan, the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and other territories by Armenia. Thus, long-term solution to this problem cannot be achieved without the liberation of Azerbaijani territories from occupation. Just as the world community demonstrates respect and objectivity to international norms, the fact of occupation must be abandoned, and the Sarsang Water Reservoir should be rebuilt in accordance with the modern requirements after appropriate restoration and reconstruction.

Conclusion

In the modern times, ensuring environmental security, preserving the environment, and the rational use of its resources are based on international legal regulations. The magnitude of the risks of political, socio-economic and environmental problems related to water issues are widely accepted. So, the pollution of the Kur and Araz Rivers, the destruction of the occupied mineral springs of Azerbaijan, the destruction of forest areas, and the illegal acquisition of mineral and raw material resources by Armenia, the occupation and potentially lethal neglect of the Sarsang Reservoir are serious threatening

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factors for Azerbaijan. According to the analysis of Armenia's hydro-strategy, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh must be resolved before regional water shortages become a real threat to peace and security. Otherwise, the process of environmental degradation can have regional and perhaps global consequences. The only way out of this situation is for Armenia to immediately put an end to its ecologically irresponsible behavior and then to relinquish control over the occupied territories, through which Azerbaijan will be able to build a useful, efficient, and sustainable relationship with the resources of the relevant territories.

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