

**Azerbaijan has started its traditional anti-Armenian campaign related to the 1992 events in the settlement of Khojalu - a village in the territory of Nagorno Karabakh, which, in 1988-1990, was intensively populated by the Azerbaijani SSR authorities, in particular, with Meskhetian Turks from the Fergana valley of Uzbekistan, to give it the status of a town. The official propaganda doesn't disdain any means to make the Armenian party guilty of the tragedy and inject a new portion of hatred towards Armenians into the conscious of the international community and in the thought of its own people.**

On February 25-26, 1992, the authorities of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic organized a military operation for lifting the blockade off the airport near the settlement of Khojalu and for neutralizing the enemy's fire points just in Khojalu, from where, since the spring of 1991, the NKR settlements had been periodically attacked by the Azerbaijani OMON (Special Purpose Militia Detachments) groups and systematically shelled from *Alazan*, *Crystal*, and *Grad* rocket volley fire facilities. In the period before the neutralization of the fire points in Khojalu, over 20 Armenian civilians were killed and hundreds were kidnapped, cattle and small cattle numbered in thousands were driven away from the nearby collective and private farms.

Due to the lasting blockade, the inflow of a great number of refugees, the lack of fuel, the forced stagnation of enterprises, the siege of the inter-regional roads and others, the situation in the NKR, and especially in its capital town of Stepanakert, worsened with the passage of time, the food products, medicines, and fuel were exhausted, and so lifting the blockade off the airport and neutralizing the enemy's fire points in Khojalu became a matter of life-and-death for the population of Nagorno Karabakh, which Azerbaijan tried to subject to death.

The necessity of neutralizing the military base in Khojalu was, in particular, caused by the fact of concentration of manpower and offensive weapons there. The Azerbaijani authorities deployed numerous OMON units in Khojalu; besides, fighters of the Azerbaijani Popular Front were positioned there. The NKR leadership had to prevent the intended operation of the Azerbaijani armed forces on attacking the Armenian regional center of Askeran and later - the capital town of Stepanakert.

The military operation on liberating Khojalu and deblocking the airport started on February 25, 1992, at 11:30 pm and ended on February 26, at 3:00 am. The units of the NKR self-defense forces left a corridor for the civilians to safely leave the military operations area, of which the Azerbaijani party had been informed beforehand. The corridor extended from the eastern end of Khojalu to the north-east, along the Karkar River bed and from the north end of the settlement to the north-east. But, the Azerbaijani authorities did nothing to evacuate the civilian population from the military activities area.

During the military operation in Khojalu, the NKR self-defense forces freed 13 Armenian hostages, including one child and six women, took as trophies two *Grad* MM-21 volley fire rocket facilities, four *Alazan* facilities, one 100-milimeter howitzers, and three units of armored equipment. The NKR *Artsakh* Rescue Service discovered 11 bodies of civilians in Khojalu and its suburbs. The area, where shots with numerous bodies of killed civilians were made later, is situated in three kilometers from the town of Aghdam and 11 kilometers from Khojalu, and it had been under the permanent control of the Azerbaijani units up to Aghdam's fall in the summer of 1993, which excluded any access to the area for the units of the Nagorno Karabakh Army.

The NKR authorities had informed the Azerbaijani party about the scheduled operation on neutralizing the fire points in Khojalu two months before its start, which was repeatedly confirmed even by the Azerbaijani officials, in particular, the then President, Ayaz Mutalibov. But, the column of civilians, as it was noted above, was fired at the approaches to Aghdam, on the border between the NKR and the Aghdam region of Azerbaijan, which was later confirmed by Mutalibov who interpreted this criminal act as the opposition's attempt to dismiss him from the position, making him answerable for all had happened.

Later, the shots made by the Azerbaijani cameraman Chingiz Mustafaev, who was also given access to the place of exchanging the bodies of the deceased Armenians and Azerbaijanis, were disseminated. It is known that Mustafaev made the filming twice, with a two-day break. The film testifies that some bodies had been disfigured by the second filming.

During the second flight over the area of mass killing of the people, March 2, 1992, the journalists noticed that the bodies' position on the land and the degree of the injuries and wounds had strikingly changed, in comparison with the first examination. And this was in the territory fully controlled by the Azerbaijani Popular Front till the summer of 1993. Just this very fact is thoroughly concealed by the Azerbaijani propagandists. It is quite obvious that the bodies' position was changed to put all the blame for the events on Armenians, making semblance as if the Khojalu inhabitants had been killed as a result of the fire from the Armenian side.

This fact was so shocking for Mustafaev that he presented it to President Mutalibov who had obviously guessed the tragedy's reasons by the moment. Mutalibov answered with really prophetic words, "Chingiz, do not tell anybody that you have noticed that something is wrong. Or, you'll be killed".

Doubting that it was committed by the Armenian party, Mustafaev started his own independent investigation. But, after his information appeared in *DR-Press* Information Agency in Moscow on the possible participation of the Azerbaijani party in the crimes against the Khojalu inhabitants, the journalist was killed not far from Aghdam, under unclear circumstances.

By the way, the fate was shared by field commander Ala Yakub who had stated carelessly that "...he could cast light on the slaughter near Nakhijevanik (an Armenian village near Khojalu), as well as give sufficient details on the recent downfall of the helicopter over Karabakh, with statesmen in it", for which the Azerbaijani Popular Front, on coming to power in the summer of 1992, arrested him and brought to death in the prison ward...

Czech journalist Dana Mazalova, who, by an oversight of the Azerbaijanis, was included in both groups of the mass media representatives, to whom the "bodies disfigured by Armenians" were demonstrated, noticed a considerable difference in the bodies' condition. Having visited the place immediately after the events, Mazalova didn't see any traces of barbarity on the bodies. And two days later, the journalists were shown the disfigured bodies already "prepared" for filming.

Some details of the military operation on neutralization of the enemy's fire points in Khojalu are still vague, on which official Baku actively cashes in for achieving its political goals. The topic of 'Khojalu' is still one of the corner-stones of the Azerbaijani domestic and foreign information, or rather, misinformation policy in the context of the Karabakh issue. Meanwhile, the statements on and assessments of the Khojalu events made by some high-ranking Azerbaijani officials, human rights activists, journalists, and inhabitants of Khojalu refute completely the false theses of Baku.

Thus, Azerbaijani human rights activist Arif Yunusov wrote: "The town and its citizens were deliberately sacrificed to the political goals" (*Zercalo* Azerbaijani newspaper, July 1992).

Following is the testimony by Tamerlan Karaev, the then Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijani Republic: "The tragedy was committed by the Azerbaijani authorities, specifically – by a top official" (*Mukhalifat* Azerbaijani newspaper, April 28, 1992).

Even Heydar Aliev admitted that “the former leadership of Azerbaijan is also guilty” of the Khojalu events. According to *Bilik-Dunyasi* Agency, yet in April 1992, he expressed an extremely cynical idea, “We’ll benefit from the bloodshed. We shouldn’t interfere in the course of the events”.

Later, when representatives of the Popular Front came to power, Azerbaijani former Minister of National Security Vagif Guseynov stated shortly before his arrest: “The January events of 1990 in Baku and the events in Khojalu are the doing of the same people”, hinting at some political figures from the Azerbaijani Popular Front.

The abovementioned facts testify unambiguously that the Azerbaijani party is guilty of the civilians' killing in Khojalu, having committed a monstrous crime against its own people for political intrigues and power struggle.

It is noteworthy that the number of victims stated by the Azerbaijani party increases from year to year. A few days after the neutralization of the fire points in Khojalu, the number of casualties stated by the Azerbaijani officials made 100, increasing in a week to 1234; the parliamentary commission “corrected” it to 450, and in Heydar Aliev’s decree “On the Azerbaijani Genocide” the casualties were estimated at thousands.

Meanwhile, by the start of the military operation in Khojalu the settlement had not comprised such a number of civilians, which is, by the way, confirmed even by the Azerbaijani official sources. The majority of about 2000-2500 inhabitants of Khojalu, or those who really lived there and were not just registered during its intensive construction for giving it the status of a town, had left the village beforehand.

Thus, in late April 1993, at the CSCE Conference in Prague, the AR MFA disseminated document #249 entitled as “The list of the Azerbaijani-populated and mixed villages occupied by the Armenian armed forces”. In this document, the ‘population’ column stated 855 inhabitants for ‘Khojalu’.

In the first decade of March 1992, Azerbaijani journalists Ilya Balakhanov and Vugar Khalilov brought to the office of *Memorial* Human Rights Center a videocassette with the recording of the place of Khojalu inhabitants' killing made by Baku TV reporters from a military helicopter and just in place. Actually, all those present in the office admitted that the number of the casualties in the video didn’t exceed 50-60 people.

It should also be noted that the NKR Foreign Ministry disclosed a false photo placed at some Azerbaijani websites, including their honorable webpage of *The Heydar Aliev Fund*, which allegedly testifies to mass killings of Azerbaijanis in Khojalu. In fact, the photo has a direct relationship to the events in Kosovo. The Azerbaijani propaganda uses also other false materials, in particular, photos of the Kurdish pogroms’ victims in Turkey, to mislead those uninformed.

A month after his resignation, Mutalibov gave an interview to Czech journalist Dana Mazalova, which was published in the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. Speaking of Khojalu, Mutalibov noted, “According to the Khojalu inhabitants who escaped, all this was organized to dismiss me. Some forces acted to discredit the President. I don't think that the Armenians, who act very skillfully and accurately in similar situations, could let the Azerbaijanis gain any documents exposing them in fascist actions... The general reasoning is that a corridor

for the people to escape was really left by the Armenians. Then why did they need to fire? Especially in the area near Aghdam, where sufficient forces were available for coming out and assisting the people”.

About 10 years later, the Azerbaijani ex-president confirmed his own idea in an interview to *Novoye Vremya* magazine, “The massacre of the Khojalu inhabitants was obviously organized by somebody for achieving coup d'état in Azerbaijan”.

In February 2005, Azerbaijani journalist Eynulla Fatullaev from *Monitoring* independent magazine spent ten days in the NKR, describing his visit in his materials and interviews. He also dared to doubt the truthfulness of Baku's official version on the death of some Khojalu inhabitants, “...Once, ten years ago, I met with the Khojalu refugees, temporarily living in Naftalan, who frankly told me... that a few days before the attack, the Armenians, with the help of loudspeakers, kept warning the population of the scheduled operation, suggesting the civilians to leave the settlement and break out of encirclement via a humanitarian corridor, along the Karkar River. Even according to the Khojalu people, they took advantage of this corridor and the Armenian soldiers on the other side of the corridor didn't really fire at them... Getting acquainted with the geographical area, I can confidently say that the inventions on the lack of an Armenian corridor have no grounds. The corridor really existed; otherwise, the Khojalu people, fully encircled and isolated from the outer world, couldn't have run the rings and broken out of encirclement. But, having run the area over the Karkar River, the refugees divided into groups and, for some reason, a part of them made their way to Nakhijevanik. Apparently, the APF battalions sought more blood on their way to Mutalibov's dismissal and not the liberation of the Khojalu inhabitants”.

A few days after the *Monitor's* publication of Eynulla Fatullaev's first report from Karabakh, the magazine's editor, Elmar Guseynov, was shot, March 2, 2005, at the entrance into his house in Baku by a stranger. And Eynulla Fatullaev was convicted of a series of accusations, including of high treason...

Azerbaijani former Minister of Defense Ragim Gaziev also confirms that “a trap was prepared for Mutalibov in Khojalu”. In this way, the organizers of the mass massacre of the Khojalu inhabitants achieved two goals at once – dismissed Mutalibov, who became needless after the USSR collapse, and gained a reason for starting a noisy campaign on accusing the Armenians of inhuman war methods. The fact that since February 13, the Azerbaijani army had been systematically firing *Grad* rockets aimed at destroying the town of Stepanakert with its 55-thousand inhabitants and other nearby Armenian settlements was pushed back.

A Khojalu woman said in her interview to the *Helsinki Watch* on April 28, 1992, “The Armenians delivered an ultimatum... that it was better for the Khojalu inhabitants to leave the town with a white flag. Alif Gajiev (leader of the Khojalu defense) informed us about it on February 15 (10 days before the attack), but this didn't frighten either me or the rest. We didn't believe at all that they would be able to capture Khojalu”.

However, following these warnings, the majority of the civil population of Khojalu, being informed of the planned operation, moved to a safe place beforehand. The mass out-migration of the Khojalu population was widely covered by the Azerbaijani TV and Radio. The Azerbaijani mass media created deliberately a negative attitude to those leaving Khojalu and disgraced them constantly. We should note that Khojalu, which was turned into a town, was first left just by the people who had been forcedly moved here, mainly Meskhetian Turks, though they were constantly obstructed. Moreover, the municipal administration of Khojalu, which had been warned by the Armenian party, asked for assistance in evacuation of the population, but in vain. The Khojalu Mayor noted in his interview to *Megapolis-Express* Moscow newspaper that “after getting the news on the expected operation on the town capture I asked Aghdam to send helicopters for evacuation of the old people, women, and children. We were assured that a deblocking operation was being

prepared. But, no assistance was provided”. And board member of the APF Aghdam branch R. Gajuev stated, “We could help the Khojalu people, having the corresponding forces and abilities. But, the republican leaders wanted to demonstrate to the people that they had no forces, wishing to call upon the CIS Army for help also to suppress the opposition with its support”.

As we see, the Khojalu inhabitants were merely left at the mercy of fate; moreover, they were destined to become victims of a power struggle.

However, by the start of the military operation, part of the civil population of Khojalu had left the settlement, and by late February 1992, according to different sources, about 1,000-2,500 people had stayed there, the majority of them making soldiers of the Azerbaijani armed forces. Investigating the destructions in Khojalu, the observers of *Memorial* Human Rights Center confirmed the fact of artillery shelling and not persistent street battles, which could have resulted in numerous casualties. It should also be noted that the corresponding order, regulating the behavior of the NKR self-defense forces, strictly prohibited any violence against the enemy's civilians.

All the civilians left in Khojalu were moved to Stepanakert, and a few days later, according to their will and without any conditions, they were passed to the Azerbaijani party. After a thorough investigation, the fact of voluntary passing of the Khojalu citizens to Azerbaijan was confirmed in the conclusion of Moscow-based *Memorial* Human Rights Center, as well as testified in the documentary film of Petersburg journalist Svetlana Kulchitskaya.

After the operation, the teams of *Artsakh* Republican Rescue Service, besides members of the armed detachments dressed in military uniforms, found 11 civilians' bodies, including a child and four women, in Khojalu and its suburbs. So, the assertion of the Azerbaijani party on the alleged mass massacre of Azerbaijani civilians in Khojalu is exposed. This is also testified by radio interceptions of the Azerbaijani servicemen in Aghdam, later published even in the Azerbaijani mass media.

It is noted in the report of Moscow-based *Memorial* Human Rights Center that a state forensic medical examination of 181 bodies (130 men and 51 women, including 13 children) was made in Aghdam, where all the refugees came. The experts' conclusion testifies that 151 people's death was caused by bullet wounds, 20 people's – by missile wounds, 10 people's – by blow with a blunt item. The NKR official structures informed the observers that they had passed to Aghdam about 130 bodies (all those killed in Khojalu and near Nakhijevanik), 96 of which were buried in Aghdam, and the bodies of the rest were taken by their relatives.

The comparison of the information of different sources, including the Azerbaijani ones, convincingly demonstrates that the NKR self-defense forces didn't plan and especially didn't carry out any actions on mass massacre of the civilians in the settlement of Khojalu.

It should also be noted that as of February 26, 47 Armenians were being held hostages in Khojalu, but only 13 were left there after the operation (including 6 women and a child); the rest 34 hostages were taken by the Azerbaijanis in an unknown direction and there is no information confirming their further stay in the Azerbaijani imprisonment.

**Summarizing the abovementioned, we can state that the inhabitants of Khojalu became hostages of the dirty games of the Baku authorities who later turned this tragedy into a speculative political capital. Official Baku tries to present the Azerbaijani authorities' betrayal of the Khojalu inhabitants as Armenians' revenge for the bloody bacchanalia in Sumgait. And the entire propaganda is realized with expressive insinuations and aggravation of the ethnic intolerance and hatred towards Armenians. Regularly launching the issue of 'Khojalu', official Baku tries to draw the attention of the international community away from the Armenian massacres in Sumgait, Baku, Kirovabad, Khanlar, and other**

**settlements of Azerbaijan, in the whole territory of which open extermination of Armenians was, actually, carried out; it also took place in the borderline settlements of the NKR, in particular, Maragha village where, in April 1992, the invaded subunits of the Azerbaijani regular army fiercely killed about 100 civilians.**

**Unfortunately, the crimes committed by Azerbaijan are not given yet a corresponding assessment by the international community.**