

The reburial of Manouchian – a message to the French nation

ARVAK Center comment, 25.02.2024

On 21.02.2024 in Paris, a solemn state ceremony was held for the reburial of the remains of a French Resistance hero Missak Manouchian in the Pantheon, where the ashes of France's greatest figures and sons – Hugo, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Marie and Pierre Curie, Voltaire, Emile Zola, Alexandre Dumas and others – rest. The ceremony was timed to coincide with the 80th anniversary of the death of Manouchian, who was executed by fascist occupation forces in France.

In this way, the French authorities and the French nation pay the highest tribute to a hero, a son of another nation, who sacrificed his life on the altar of the French freedom. It should be noted that Manouchian is the only non-French person to have been honored with the right to be buried in the Pantheon.

This is a proof of a special attitude not only towards Manouchian, but also towards the other Armenian heroes of the French Resistance, as well as towards the entire Armenian community in France, who organically joined the life of this country, shared with it the dramas of history, bitterness and victory, and made their great contribution to the greatness of the French nation, its culture, science and military-political power.

The moral and ideological side of the initiative to rebury Manouchian's remains in the Pantheon is obvious. At the same time, there is every reason to believe that the unprecedented festivity of the ceremony and the large-scale media coverage also convey a specific political message to the French society. There is a feeling that in light of the latest world trends and France's ambitions to strengthen itself in a new capacity in the geopolitical arena, especially in West Asia and the South Caucasus, the authorities need to gain the understanding and broad support of the French nation. It is a question of creating a deep ideological and political base in the consciousness of society, on the basis of which Paris can implement the large-scale program aimed at increasing its economic, political and military presence in the RA, which, of course, will entail a tangible burden on the French budget and strategic resources.

Having already experienced public and partially opposition's misunderstanding about France's "excessive" involvement in the campaign to support Ukraine, Paris is trying to obtain nation's mandate to realize its plans in the South Caucasus through the French attitude towards the memory of the Resistance and by reminding them of their debt to "a small disappearing nation" that "raised its last sons to struggle for the liberation of France". Armenia is not the distant and incomprehensible Ukraine, but a country to which France is indebted, and the French can pay back by participating in its life, security, and salvation: this is obviously the message of the French political elites to the society, one of the important symbolic elements of which was the solemn commemoration of the hero of the Resistance. The current unprecedented intensification of military-political and other relations between Paris and Yerevan only reinforces this version.

It seems that the French society is prepared to take the alliance with distant Armenia for granted, which implies in the future the widest range of interaction, starting from finances to the most unexpected steps, for example, the redeployment of the French Legion, which has left Africa.