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ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS OF AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS ARMENIA AND GEORGIA²

On February 28, 2024, at the session of the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Sadig Gurbanov, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources, Energy and Ecology, stated that most of the water entering Azerbaijan through the Kura River is polluted by Georgia and Armenia³.

According to Gurbanov, 62% of the total water resources of the South Caucasus fall on Georgia, 28% on Armenia, and only 10% on Azerbaijan. *“The Kura River is the main source of drinking water for the population of Azerbaijan”*, – the parliamentarian said, complaining that these waters are constantly polluted by neighbors. Gurbanov also stressed that according to forecasts, the water content of all Azerbaijani rivers will decrease by 15–25% by 2040. According to him, the problem of maintaining the water-ecological balance in the South Caucasus is complicated by the fact that Georgia and Armenia have not yet joined the International Convention on Environmental Protection.

Gurbanov's statements and the overall discussions in the Milli Majlis on the topic of environmental *“lawlessness”* of neighboring countries is not a coincidence. In this regard, it is worth recalling the recent initiative of the Azerbaijani government to draw up a map of Armenia's fossil deposits, ostensibly to determine and assess the degree of pollution of rivers and streams flowing into Azerbaijan with waste from the Armenian mining industry, causing irreparable damage to its ecology⁴. The map will be completed on the eve of the 29th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-29) and distributed in brochures to all its delegates from participating countries, according to Mugabil Bayramov, Chairman of the Public Association of Cartographers of Azerbaijan.

Thus, it seems that Baku is launching a well-considered propaganda campaign aimed at compiling a huge dossier of “environmental violations” committed by

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² The original article (in Russian) was submitted to the Editorial office on 03.03.2024.

³ Haggin.az. (28.02.2024), “Azerbaijan has the least amount of water” (in Rus.), <https://m.haqqin.az/news/309421> (дата обращения: 03.03.2024).

⁴ Verelq. (02.02.2024), “How Azerbaijan “thanked” Armenia for the opportunity to conduct SOR29” (in Rus.), <https://verelq.am/ru/node/140053> (дата обращения: 03.03.2024).

Georgia and Armenia, to be used soon for filing lawsuits against them. Such initiatives to identify the “*negligent*” and even “*criminal*” attitude of the neighbors to the natural and climatic environment of the region will only multiply with time and eventually be collected in a “weighty folder” to be presented at the 29th UN Environment Assembly to be held in Baku. We are talking about the event, the right to host it, which Azerbaijan obtained from Armenia in the beginning of December 2023 by means of blackmail and the offer to release 32 Armenian soldiers from captivity⁵. Baku intends to present itself at the COP-29 meeting as the victim of the environmental “*lawlessness*” and uncontrolled use of vital natural resources by its neighbors Georgia and Armenia, and at the same time as the main supporter of the struggle to restore the disturbed balance of the regional biosphere. This is despite the fact that, according to objective data, Azerbaijan is the undisputed leader in industrial and domestic pollution of the region, poisoning its geological, water and atmospheric segments. How the regime of I. Aliyev together with the international syndicate of gold producers mercilessly exploits the subsoil of Azerbaijan through corrupt schemes without taking any measures to ecologize this sphere, and why Azerbaijan is in the ecological ranking of the world countries due to the total pollution of the Caspian shelf and the Apsheron peninsula, we have already told in our [previous article](#).

On the eve of the COP-29 Assembly, Azerbaijan urgently needs to rehabilitate its image and correct the indicators of the catastrophic deterioration of the environmental situation in the country. It is obvious that Baku considers unjustified accusations against its neighbors, belittling their environmental image and demonstrating its own, rather dubious, merits in this sphere as the main way of such rehabilitation, instead of showing political will and initiating practical actions to restore order in this field in the country.

At the same time, it would be a mistake to believe that Baku's main objective in the context of the COP-29 meeting is to optimize its position in competition with its neighbors and to create a favorable image of Azerbaijan as a prosperous country with social, economic, and ecological attractiveness. In general, Baku seems to be motivated by such a goal. However, this is only an external and not the main task of the Aliyev regime.

It is much more logical to assume that Baku, using the platform and the agenda of the Assembly, is actually preparing the necessary ideological and legal basis in the international arena to transfer its claims against its neighbors from the purely environmental sphere of interest to the political sphere. There is a tendency to politicize the issue of pollution and siltation of the rivers flowing into Azerbaijan

⁵ Armenia Today. (07.12.2023), “Yerevan and Baku announce an Agreement to release 32 Armenian prisoners in exchange for 2 Azerbaijanis” (in Rus.), <https://armeniatoday.news/region-ru/688356/> (дата обращения: 03.03.2024).

from the neighboring countries, as well as the allegedly environmentally harmful exploitation of the mining subsoil of these neighboring countries. It is a question of launching a new narrative to legitimize Azerbaijan's territorial claims on Georgia and Armenia, which Baku may openly present in due course under the guise of the declared need to comply with the generally accepted norms of international law in the sphere of ecology and social issues. In particular, it can be assumed that Baku intends to juggle with the wording of the UN General Assembly Resolution “On the Right to Water” adopted in 2010, according to which every person has the right to have access to sufficient water for personal and domestic needs⁶. It may be a manipulative interpretation of the paragraph of the resolution “Sustainable Development Goal 6” (SDG 6), according to which countries should cooperate with each other in order not to limit access to water for all states and to preserve the purity of drinking water sources of common use. Thus, Azerbaijan, referring to the data on the scarcity of its water resources, on the “*irrational*” withdrawal of water by Georgia and Armenia from the Kura and Araks rivers, on the “*deliberate pollution*” of the springs and rivers feeding these great water arteries, will try to create another “legitimate” reason for aggressive actions and territorial claims against its neighbors, first of all Armenia, with the active use of propaganda support.

The propaganda outline of the catastrophic situation with drinking and irrigation water in Azerbaijan, as well as a number of “throw-ins” that are currently being consolidated in the information environment, suggest that Baku, in particular, is preparing the ground for a sharp introduction of the Lake Sevan issue on the international agenda, claiming that this water body is the largest natural reservoir of fresh water in the vast region and that its water resources are subject to “*equitable distribution*” among all “*needy*” countries of the region.

In this regard, it should be noted that the international law and the relevant UN resolutions do not provide for coercive acts of “taking away” water and water sources from some countries for the benefit of others; however, in this case, Azerbaijan can be content with referring only to the moral and ideological background of the UN resolutions and the extensive platform of its “educational and propaganda” work, which is knowingly carried out in order to commit aggression by force. In today's conditions of general stagnation of international law and mechanisms of its implementation, it may seem to Baku that the above will be quite enough for it to avoid legal and moral responsibility for the implementation of “water-environmental” aggression against its neighbors.

⁶ Water Resources/ United Nations Organization, <https://www.un.org/ru/global-issues/water> (download date: 03.03.2024).