

## **Dear forum members!**

My name is Gusen Shakhpazov, I am the Executive Director of the Federal Lezgin national cultural autonomy (FLNCA). FLNCA is one of the active Russian public organizations engaged in activities for the protection of national and cultural rights of the Lezgin people, the preservation of the native language, culture, national identity, the study and promotion of its history.

On behalf of FLNCA President Arif Kerimov, I would like to Express special gratitude to the organizers of the forum for their attention to the problems of national minorities around the world, as well as your desire to influence all States to respect and observe human rights.

Lezgins - one of the autochthonous peoples of the Caucasus, historically living in southern Dagestan and Azerbaijan (in both republics is indigenous). The total number of Lezgins in the world according to expert estimates is more than a million people.

In Russia, according to the official data of the last census lived Four hundred seventy-six thousand two hundred twenty-eight Lezgins, of them in Dagestan - hree hundred eighty-seven thousand seven hundred forty-six.

According to official data, one hundred eighty thousand three hundred Lezgins live in Azerbaijan, but according to experts, the number is significantly understated and in reality is from 500 to 800 thousand people.

Given the division of the Lezgian people between the two States and the whole range of related problems, FLNCA considers the international direction of activity one of the most important in its work. FLNCA cooperates with the UN, OSCE, European Parliament, for many years is a member of the two largest international organizations for the protection of the rights of national minorities – UNPO and FUEN.

Lezgins, once living in a single country – first in the Russian Empire, then the USSR, after the collapse of the Soviet Union were divided into two parts. The split of the people led to a number of problems, first of all, the Lezgins, who found themselves in the independent Republic of Azerbaijan, suffered.

The main problem faced by Lezgins and representatives of other national minorities in Azerbaijan is non-compliance with the national and cultural rights of these peoples.

If we compare the rights and opportunities given to ethnic Azerbaijanis in Russia, in particular, in the Republic of Dagestan, and the situation of representatives of the Lezgin peoples of Azerbaijan, we can see two completely opposite pictures.

In Azerbaijan, the Lezgin historical ethno-territory slowly but surely ceases to be Lezgin. This happens in several ways. Language assimilation - in the settlements of the North of Azerbaijan, where Lezgins live compactly, the ratio of the use of Lezgian and

Azerbaijani languages is shifting towards the latter. The trend is particularly acute in district centers. This was a consequence of the lack of the necessary conditions to support the languages of the country's indigenous peoples in an environment where the entire social communication environment - media, education, culture, state and public institutions - works only in the official language - Azerbaijani.

There is no television and radio broadcasting in Lezgian and other languages of national minorities, there are practically no printed publications. The only newspaper (monthly) called "Samur" is published in Baku by a group of enthusiasts exclusively on private donations. They also in the early nineties created the Lezgin organization in Azerbaijan – the Lezgin cultural center "Samur", which still exists only at the expense of charitable contributions, without the help of the state.

Since the main theme of the forum is education, we will focus on this aspect.

In Azerbaijan, the teaching of the Lezgian language with great reservations is carried out only in one – Kusar district, despite the fact that a large number of Lezgins live compactly in the neighboring Cuban, Khachmaz, Gabala, Oguz and other districts of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

But even in the Kusar district, where more than 90 percent of the population are Lezgins, education is not conducted in the Lezgian language, it is only present as a separate subject "native language". The number of hours of teaching the mother tongue is reduced to 1-2 hours per week, and these lessons have the status of an elective, that is optional to attend.

There is no normal method of teaching languages, the existing local teaching programs are outdated, there is no one to prepare new ones, since there are no relevant personnel. New footage can also not appear, as in any University or colleges of Azerbaijan, there is no Department for the preparation of teachers of native languages. Azerbaijani specialized agencies rejects school textbooks of Lezgian language from Dagestan. Getting education in your native language (that is, teaching all subjects of the curriculum in your native language) is not even a dream.

That is, in fact, a situation has been created in which not only language ceases to function as a means of communication, but also the scientific and methodological basis and all other opportunities for its teaching in educational institutions are gradually disappearing. Moreover, since the beginning of this year, there have been reports that the Ministry of education of Azerbaijan plans to translate the Lezghian alphabet into Latin script instead of the current Cyrillic one, which caused indignation of the Lezghian intelligentsia on both sides of the border. Now the Cyrillic alphabet of the Lezgin language, created in the thirties of the 20th century, is one of the last factors in the preservation of the common cultural space of our people. All modern Lezgian written culture exists in cyrillic alphabet. If the announced step by the Ministry of education of Azerbaijan is made, the process of assimilation of Lezgins will go even faster.

The situation with the realization of national and cultural needs of other peoples of multinational Azerbaijan is about the same.

All this is happening against the background of the fact that modern Azerbaijan regularly positions itself on various international platforms as one of the most "tolerant" States in the world.

Thus, we see a clear disregard of national and cultural rights (including linguistic and educational) of national minorities on the part of the leadership and relevant departments of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Now let us compare the above with the situation of Azerbaijanis in Russia - the Republic of Dagestan, where they live compactly in the Derbent region.

In Dagestan, Azerbaijanis have opportunities to preserve and develop the national language and culture. Azerbaijani language is taught in 79 schools and 11 pre-school institutions. In schools with a mono-ethnic composition of pupils, all subjects in primary classes are taught in the Azerbaijani language. The necessary educational and methodical literature is regularly received from Azerbaijan on the basis of Latin graphics.

In Derbent higher pedagogical College, training and advanced training of teachers for Azerbaijani schools is carried out. At the Dagestan state University, the faculty of Dagestan Philology trains specialists in the Azerbaijani language.

Thus, ethnic Azerbaijanis living in the two countries maintain a common cultural and educational field.

Baku television broadcasts 6340 hours a year in the districts of southern Dagestan. In the Azerbaijani language are published in the Republican newspaper "Derbent" and "Watan".

There are two Azerbaijani folk theatres and one State drama theatre in Dagestan, as well as various national-cultural and social movements. Successfully functioning in the Directorate of national broadcasting in the Azerbaijani language in the framework of the national public broadcasters (state Republican broadcaster).

All these tools for the preservation and development of the national language and culture operate at the expense of the state budget of the Russian Federation.

If we talk about the whole of Russia, in addition to the Federal Azerbaijani national and cultural autonomy and regional autonomy, there are 128 officially registered national organizations of ethnic Azerbaijanis. Many of these organizations, in turn, receive state support from Russia, various grants, subsidies, etc.

The Russian state presents the same opportunities to all other indigenous peoples and national minorities, focusing both on its domestic legislation and international legal norms.

According to a number of international treaties to which Azerbaijan has acceded, including the European Charter of regional or minority languages, the framework Convention for the protection of national minorities, the Convention on the rights of persons belonging to national minorities (within the CIS), the UN Declaration, etc., conditions must be created in this country for the realization by peoples of their national and cultural rights. Unfortunately, these agreements and commitments are not being implemented.

We are convinced that extraordinary steps are required in Azerbaijan to improve the situation of national minorities and to fulfil their national and cultural needs. If we talk specifically about the field of education, then, in our opinion, the following steps are necessary:

- construction of new schools in the areas where national minorities live compactly,
  - development of high-quality scientific and educational materials in minority languages using existing alphabetic systems
  - inclusion of minority languages in school curricula as compulsory subjects
  - development of bilingual education in pre-school institutions and schools (in the state language and the language of the national minority)
  - establishment of a training system for teachers of national minority languages in colleges and universities
  - organization of training courses for teachers of national minority languages
- and etc.

We are convinced that only through the efforts of international organizations in cooperation with the leadership of Azerbaijan we will be able to achieve the desired results and the rule of law in this country.