

There is no Karabakh problem - it's Russia's problem

To the President of the Russian Federation, Mr Vladimir Putin

An open letter

*"History is like authority - when everything is going well for people, they forget about it and ascribe their welfare to themselves. When things get bad they begin to feel its necessity and to value its benefits".
... History imposes strict punishment for ignorance of her lessons.*

V. O. Klyuchevsky

Dear Mr Putin, first of all I would like to admit sincerely that the excessive size of my letter is quite deliberately determined by historical necessity, I would even say by the strategic nature of its subject. I will not take it amiss if you just skim my letter or even if you don't read it at all. This is not some false modesty. It's a reality of life. The fact is, I could not fail to publish my letter today, the two hundredth anniversary of the treaty of Gulistan. And equally there would be no point addressing it to anybody else.

This letter is based on my marginal notes on the Gulistan treaty. I should note that the name of your teacher, Professor Anatoly Sobchak of Leningrad University, is mentioned several times. That's why I want to begin my open letter with his words: "Gorbachev's problem, if not our whole tragedy, began with his designating the logical demand of the Armenians to have the Armenian autonomous region joined to the Armenian union republic as the 'Karabakh problem'. Yet it is much more Russia's problem." Mr Putin, believe me, what Anatoly Sobchak drew attention to is a very serious matter and, I would say, one firmly rooted in history. But first of all a couple of words about how and why Professor Sobchak took up this subject.

Anatoly Sobchak discovered during the First Congress of USSR People's Deputies that from the Nakhichevan autonomous republic, which in fact is Armenian by virtue of being defined as autonomous, there was not one Armenian elected as a people's deputy, which he considered to be nonsensical. Having himself been elected to the Legislative Committee of the USSR Supreme Soviet, he made a speech offering to give up his place to me, simply so that the tiny Karabakh delegate group could have one more permanent representative in the Supreme Soviet. All this, including Sobchak's speech, can be read in the red-leather bound stenographic record of the First Congress of USSR People's Deputies. Many supported his idea, including Academician Sakharov.

Both Sobchak and Sakharov, being scientists, studied the treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Turkmenchay (1828) with a pencil in hand, as they say. They noted first of all that a large part of the territory, on which as a result of the Moscow (March 1921) and Kars (October 1921) agreements an essentially new Turkish republic was formed, had historically belonged to Armenia. In 1639 it had passed to Iran and in 1813 after the treaty of Gulistan had passed from Persia to Russia. Throughout all this time the

Armenian churches and historic buildings had been preserved.

Of Russian leaders in recent times you were the first, if my memory serves me right, to speak up in 2006 about the need for an active defence of historical truth. As a follow-up to your programme, under the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev, a special commission was established to counter "the ever more aggressive attempts to rewrite history to the detriment of Russia". It seemed that something essential and important was getting under way. However, a certain section of Russian public opinion soon reacted to this idea if not with hostility then critically, to put it mildly. It is my deep conviction that the reason for this reaction was that much of the material and debate about historical truth at that time was general, more precisely, generalised, and therefore abstract. One got the impression that the most important thing in such situations had been forgotten: the Aristotelian philosophical formula that "truth is specific".

Truth, however dangerous, damaging or frightening it may be, must be accepted as it is. Goethe, for example, "preferred a damaging truth to a useful error." And when Anatoly Sobchak spoke of the problem and tragedy of Gorbachev, what he had in mind was the distortion of historical truth. The head of the greatest state and most powerful party had no understanding of the true frontiers of his historic homeland – Russia. He didn't know that the essentially Turkish republic of Azerbaijan created in the revolutionary fervour of Stalin and Ataturk, was largely located on the territory of historic Armenia, which had become part of Russia after the treaties of Gulistan and Turkmenchay. Yeltsin was even worse: neither in Belovezhie, nor in the Kremlin, nor on his deathbed did he understand that in 1991 he had not become the president of Russia. He was the president of the RFSFR with its nominal Soviet frontiers. You yourself once noted succinctly in a speech: "Russia was in essence renamed the USSR, but that doesn't mean it stopped being Russia."

That is a truth that is not abstract. It is specific. Tangible. In this instance you can even touch it, in the form of the Gulistan treaty embodying the result of the nine-year war. Its eleven clauses encompass the entire geopolitical concept of both states – Russia and Persia, who prophetically realised that there could be "eternal peace, friendship and goodwill" between them **only if the implementation of the letter and spirit of that historic document was guaranteed**. It emphasises what is perhaps the key thing: responsibility for strict implementation of the agreement lies not only with the current heads of state of Russia and Persia but most importantly with their **heirs (! – Z.B.) and successors (! – Z.B.)**.

Mr Putin, today in great measure this applies to you personally. In this regard it is timely, if not a strategic necessity, to make public, say, the third and fourth clauses of the treaty, especially taking into account that the wider public, both Russian and Russian-speaking is not acquainted with them.: "**Clause III**. His Majesty the Shah, as evidence of his sincere friendship to His Majesty the Emperor of All Russia, recognises both on his own behalf and on behalf of the Supreme Successors to the Persian throne the following khanates as belonging to the Russian Empire: Karabakh, Shirvan, Derbent, Quba, Baku and Talysh, together with those lands of his khanate that are now in the possession of the Russian Empire..." (practically all the territory of Azerbaijan as

created by Turkey in Moscow and Kars). "**Clause IV.** His Highness the Emperor of All Russia, as a sign of his mutual devotion to His Highness the Shah of Persia and in evidence of his sincere desire to see autocracy and state authority on a firm foundation in this neighbouring State of Persia hereby solemnly on his own behalf and on behalf of his Successors (! – Z.B.) promises to whichever of the sons of the Persian Shah who shall be named the Heir to the Persian State to give aid as required so that with the aid of the Russian court the Persian court may be strengthened..." I stress that the words "Supreme successors" and "in perpetuity" are present in the treaty not as diplomatic flirtation or some undisguised Macchiavellian move, but as an expression of responsibility for the future, for their descendants.

So, Mr Putin, I am addressing you, among other things, as the heir and successor of Alexander I himself. Let's go back to 1812 (the treaty of Gulistan would be signed a year later). Moscow was burning. Napoleon was in the Kremlin. And His Highness insisted on "not diverting a single soldier from the Karabakh front". I address you, knowing full well the essence and significance of that "historical truth" of which you spoke in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, when thanks to your efforts the might of the Russian army grew (was restored) after its agony in the nightmarish nineties. For Alexander I the historic truth was more than tangibly specific. For he knew very well of the great census begun at the time of Tsar Alexis and the Karabakh nobles (princes), that was in its own way strategic and even prophetic. I recall that you, Mr Putin, as president of Russia on your first official visit to Armenia in the great hall of Yerevan State University quoted from Peter the Great, adding your own words: "It's as good as done!" The words you quoted were written by Peter on 10 November 1724, when he sent to specific Karabakhi spiritual and military leaders and rulers "imperial indulgence and congratulation to the whole Armenian nation". For at that time (and indeed right up to the October revolution) it was a historical nonsense to view Karabakh separately from Armenia itself.

The strategy of meetings and correspondence of the Russian Tsars in the XVII and XVIII centuries came out of a deeply thought-through and precisely calculated historical perspective. Field Marshall Potemkin, in his missive from Karabakh to the Empress Catherine the Great, insisted on "making every effort to find a solution for Karabakh that would hold the maximum benefit for the Armenian nation." Of course, he had in mind that same strategic importance of the southern flank. Catherine the Great undertook to pass on "particular goodwill towards the Armenian Christian nation" from one Tsar to the next. At the end of the XVIII century, not long before the nine-years war, Paul I expressed his imperial goodwill and indulgence to the "sovereign and illustrious Karabakh region", in whose inaccessible heights, in the words of the eminent Russian poet and scholar Sergei Gorodetsky, "for over two thousand years the Armenian nation resisted the onslaught of nomadic tribes and preserved its culture and defended its national identity."

With the blessing of Catherine the Great an Armenian-Russian dictionary was published that was unprecedentedly comprehensive. That was in 1787. It was absolutely vital long before the final unification of Eastern Armenia with Russia. Incidentally, soon after the treaty of Turkmenchay in 1837 a revised dictionary was

published with an introduction by Nikolai I himself. Not long before, under Alexander I, an Armenian university was opened in Moscow. In a word, the treaty of Gulistan and its organic continuation in the treaty of Turkmenchay, were in essence the embodiment of an historic pattern, of an historic truth not only for the Russians and the Armenians, but also for the Persians, who always had problems with the Turkic tribes to the north of the Araks and Kura rivers.

Let the present generation, especially the young people, not get the impression that the fraternal relationship between Russia and Armenia began only after the adoption of these two historic documents. I think that there will be no harm in making a few historical brush-strokes on the "portrait" of our mutual relations.

... The byzantine Emperor Basil II (who was Armenian in origin) knew very well that the grandmother of Prince Vladimir of Novgorod and Kiev, princess Olga, was the first to adopt Christianity in Russia, and he gave his consent for his sister, the Byzantine princess Anna, to be given in marriage to Vladimir. So at the very source of Russia's saving Orthodox faith there were Armenians. As they say, the ties of friendship were between the families and the states. Since then a thousand years have passed and both the martyr Tikhon and the two patriarchs Alexii II and Kirill I, who saw the renaissance of the Russian church after the Bolshevik nightmare, as though by prior agreement were to pronounce almost identical words about the Armenian Apostolic Church: "We belong to one family of Orthodox Christian peoples who are gradually returning to the bosom of the Christian faith, to the source of morality."

Armenians in Russia were always represented in the sphere not only of trade, enterprise and construction, but also of medicine, painting, architecture and culture (you should read V. V. Stasov). As early as the creation of Orthodox Russia the Armenians translated from Russian "The Lives of Boris and Gleb" and at the same time "The Life of Gregory the Enlightener" and "The Lives of the Blessed Virgins" (Saints Ripsime and Gayane) were translated from Armenian into Russian. The father of Russian history N. M. Karamzin writes in his multi-volume "History of the Russian State": "Even at the time of the Monomakhs Armenian doctors had a good reputation in Kiev..." and he highlights one interesting detail: "One of them, so it is written, just from looking at a patient could always tell whether he would live and if not would usually predict the day of his death."

Do you know, Mr Putin, what I often thought about in the years of the troubles in Karabakh? That His Imperial Highness, the enlightened and sovereign great Lord, Emperor and Autocrat of All Russia Alexander I, would turn in his grave if he knew that the Azerbaijanis, with the help of Turkish naval experts, dismantled the long-distance cannon removed from Soviet (Russian) vessels and installed them in the gun emplacements in Shushi and Lachin, Agdam and Khojalu and aimed them at Armenian villages and at the Christian monuments of Karabakh, at the very same "Gulistan tract of the Russian camp in the possessions of Karabakh" (today's Shaumyanovsk district) where Russia and Persia signed their treaty in perpetuity.

There is an important nuance. In the treaty of Gulistan signed by Alexander I the fate of the Caspian Sea is clearly defined "in perpetuity". **It belonged to one nation – Russia.** You can imagine that this decision also suited Iran. I quote part of

Clause V: "As far as naval vessels are concerned, as before in times of war and times of peace ad for all time (! – Z.B.) the sole flag on the Caspian Sea was that of the Russian navy (! – Z.B.); in this regard the former right is granted so that other than the Russian state no other power may fly its naval flag on the Caspian Sea." As we can see, even before the war the Caspian Sea belonged to Russia.

Now five flags fly in the Caspian. Persia, having fought Russia for nine years and "having a sincere desire to put an end to the miseries of war" and wishing "to restore a firm peace on a solid foundation" agreed that there should be but one flag, that of Russia. And now from nowhere there's a whole plethora. And there can be no doubt that today it is the Azerbaijani flag which most worries Iran. And in order to justify, or rather establish its legal right to fly its flag on the Caspian, Azerbaijan is beginning intensive efforts to invent its own history and identify ancient roots for it.

It's well known that from the first days of the formation of the USSR the frontiers were considered nominal, so to speak, Soviet - and what's more in perpetuity. Futhermore, from time to time whole historic territories that had been part of the homeland of a particular nation were given away to others. It was believed that it was necessary for the good of our common country, that it was necessary for building the Soviet nation, which had been defined as "a new historical community – the Soviet people". How can one not recall the words of Solzhenitsyn: "After all, at that time it was believed that it didn't matter at all where the frontiers were, it wouldn't be long before all the nationalities would merge into one. Perceptive Lenin was the first to describe the issue of frontiers as 'even of tenth importance'. So, Karabakh was chopped off and given to Azerbaijan, what did it matter? At that moment they needed to please that warm friend of the Soviets, Turkey." Indeed Solzhenitsyn could also have given as examples the Nakhichevan autonomous republic and the huge area of Gardamanq comprising many districts (part of Yelizavetpol gubernia). And not only them...

In 1813 all this became part of Russia. And it was on all this territory, comprising the historic lands of the Talysh, the Kurds, the Tats, the Budukhtsy, the Khriz and other nations and national groups, that the essentially unified Turkish republic of Azerbaijan was established in which all these and other Muslim nations that had lived for centuries in their own homelands were forcibly assimilated, especially in the years of the rule of Aliiev senior.

So, what was it that happened on the territory which in all geographical respects and details was defined in the Gulistan and Turkmenchay treaties? How was it that on this territory there appeared a union republic which Ataturk proposed calling the "Turkish Republic of Azerbaijan"? That name was not agreed. However, in autumn 1974 the forty percent of Cyprus that had been seized with impunity was named the Turkish Republic of Cyprus in memory of Ataturk's dream.

To repeat: practically the whole of the Southern Caucasus was officially part of Russia. So, Anatoly Sobchak was right: there really is no Karabakh problem – it's Russia's problem. Of course, it's possible to make a demagogic pronouncement: well, don't you see, there was a change of power in 1917 and the new leaders of Russia decided things however they wanted. In that case, what do you do with the question:

where did Azerbaijan come from? It's not a matter of the specific population made up of different nations and national groups who lived on this territory, but of the artificially created "new" nation. For neither before nor after the treaty of Gulistan did any such nation or country exist. It's very important to be aware of that. I think, Mr Putin, that it is not hard for you to get hold of Yuzhakov's six-volume encyclopedia (of 1904) and look up "Azerbaijan – a province in the north of Iran". There is a map of Persia. The word "Azerbaijan" is written not where the former Azerbaijan SSR is located, but below the right bank of the river Kura. To the north Karabakh appears, and Talysh and Shirvan, but not Azerbaijan. In northern Persia there are several provinces (that is how they are designated). One of them is Azerbaijan (Azerbeijan). The entry is just 36 lines. In the last nine lines there is a description of the population: "To the north there are Turks and Kurds." Two lines later it is stated that "in the lowlands the Kurds are engaged in agriculture". That means that the Turks, later called Azerbaijanis, led an exclusively nomadic lifestyle. This was published in 1904.

One should also remember that this whole geographical area was and remains (with the descendants of those same Turks and Kurds) to the south of the right banks of the Araks and Kura rivers, i.e. south of the Russian border, in Iranian territory. The Azerbaijan Soviet republic, as we have already noted, was created further north, mostly on historic Armenian territory that was part of Russia. I think there is nothing more absurd, not to say dangerous, than to allow politicians to make speculative use of the notorious concept of "fait accompli", saying it's too late. In that case what about "historical truth" and the battle against "aggressive attempts to rewrite history to the detriment of Russia"? Admittedly, in this instance it's a matter not only of rewriting history but of the treacherous and barbaric seizure of someone else's homeland. Let's recall the eve of the Moscow agreement of 1921. Just one example which is quite monstrous.

Turkey, agonising over the loss of everything in the First World War and the loss of its empire, and the first for speculative reasons to recognise Soviet power, sent a delegation to Moscow to negotiate with the Bolsheviks. The talks were led by Stalin, the people's commissar of nationalities. The pact was signed on 16 March. On 4 March Stalin's deputy A. Sachko published in the official organ of the people's commissariat of nationalities "Life of the Nationalities" the text of an appeal to the Armenian nation which had been dictated by his boss. Please Mr Putin, follow the train of thought of this monster very carefully. In the name of the party and for the sake of the triumph of world revolution A. Sachko "calls on Armenia" at the forthcoming conference devoted to the Russian-Turkish agreement **"to sacrifice its former territories and also the remaining part of its people in Turkey"**.

Tell me please, have you ever heard anything like it: "sacrifice part of one's own people"? What's more, it was at the bloody period of continuing genocide precisely in Turkey.

For many years nobody knew exactly what was discussed behind the scenes at the Moscow conference. Only decades later, just after Stalin's death, did the Turkish historian Bakkaloglu write in his book "Ataturk in Anatolia", citing the head of the delegation Yusif Beyzem: "On 22 February 1921, in our first meeting with Stalin he

promised to help us with weapons, money and manpower. (And he kept his promise. Recall the whole delegation – with a lorry of gold, weapons and military supplies – led by M. V. Frunze who paid a visit of friendship to Turkey. Did Russia know that the weapons were used against Armenians? - **Z.B.**) And as for the Armenian question, said Stalin, you have already solved it." Turkey's first ambassador to Russia and a member of the delegation, general Ali Cebesoy, wrote in the Turkish newspaper "Vatan" of 20 April 1954: "Chicherin did not want to agree to decide the issue of the borders in favour of Turkey and it was only thanks to Stalin that we managed to resolve the issues that would have led to an impasse in the negotiations." In the same issue of the newspaper in the article "Stalin and the Armenian question", Cebesoy wrote that during the second meeting with Stalin they asked: "Will the Armenian question be discussed at the conference". He answered: "You have already solved it. And if there are any issues that have not been resolved, you solve them yourselves." What was the final result? Stalin personifies the Moscow agreement. Moscow personifies Russia. And the result is that Russia carried out this whole nightmare against Armenia. No, Mr Putin, all this was first and foremost against Russia, at any rate primarily against Russia.

Seven months later the negotiations in Kars took place in the same spirit and the same style. In the Armenian city of Kars, that then belonged to Russia, there was a Russian church, a Russian cemetery and a Russian school, where, incidentally the great Armenian poet Yeghishe Charents was a pupil. In a word, everything that following the treaty of Gulistan, and, as we have seen, following the treaty of Turkmenchay, became part of Russia with one stroke of the pen at once ended up in Turkey. And yet in both treaties the very same words occur: "His Highness the Shah of Persia for himself and for his heirs (! - **Z.B.**) and successors (! - **Z.B.**) cedes to the Russian Empire in complete ownership..." And there follows a list of former Armenian territories. Two states, which had gone through centuries of endless calamity and grief, at the cost of great losses reached their own saving historical truth, and now this priceless fruit of long searches and courageous compromises is sacrilegiously enjoyed by a third party, which has always in essence been an enemy of Persia and Russia. And logically will always remain an enemy. One example: today Pan-Turkic Turkey is tearing apart Muslim Syria. There can be no doubt that among others this is directed against both Russia and Iran.

I will give an example involving M. Gorbachev for whom "historical truth" was meaningless. During a meeting with him about Karabakh (I was with the outstanding Armenian poetess Silva Kaputikyan) on 26 February 1988, I told him in detail that the whole territory of the Nakhichevan autonomous republic – where there had been about one hundred and fifty Armenian settlements and over three hundred churches, and in the legendary ancient Armenian city of Juba there had been around ten thousand khachkars (stone crosses) that were considered masterpieces of world heritage – had been declared a highly restricted border zone. Neither I nor the unforgettable Silva Kaputikyan were in the least surprised that Gorbachev knew nothing of this nightmare. Of course, apart from everything else, all of our letters to the Politburo complaining about Azerbaijan had been sent by Kremlin officials to the leaders of Azerbaijan. I quote an extract from Gorbachev's speech at the Politburo three days after our

meeting with him: "The whole of Nakhichevan has been declared a border zone. Free access has been forbidden. Yet victims of the genocide were buried there, all their graves are there. There were 90 Armenian cultural monuments, of which one remains, that's all. And they don't let anyone in on the pretext that it is a border zone."

This was said by the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, speaking to all the members and candidate members of the Politburo of the Central Committee, all the Central Committee secretaries and invited leading members of the Central Committee and the government. Nothing happened. Absolutely nothing changed in Nakhichevan. In fact things got even worse.

Let me remind you, Mr Putin, that this was on the evening of 29 February 1988. At that moment the massacre of Armenians in Sumgait was still going on. And during the Politburo meeting the General Secretary asked Minister of Defence Yazov to repeat everything that he had told him in private the previous day. "General Yazov, tell them how people are being killed there." (Note that the verb "being killed" is in the present tense. Gorbachev and the members of the Politburo knew that the massacre was still continuing.) "They cut off the breasts of two women," Yazov replied, "they beheaded one and they skinned the girl. That was the kind of savagery. Some of the officer cadets who saw it fainted."

Forgive me, Mr Putin, for such graphic detail. And please don't think that I am deviating from the theme of "Not the Karabakh problem, but Russia's problem". Everything is really very simple and clear. Exactly two hundred years ago a huge historic Armenian territory (all of Karabakh khanate, Yelizavetpol gubernia and other districts) passed from Persia to Russia after the nine-years war and the Gulistan treaty. Of course, other nationalities and tribes lived on this territory, including Turks. Lenin called them Tatars of the Caucasus. At that time, to distinguish the Muslims of the Caucasus from those in Crimea a new term appeared – "Azerbaijani Tatars". You need to bear in mind the time at which this occurred.

... The First World War. The Armenian genocide. The February Revolution. The October Revolution. Turkey against this troubled background seeking common ground with the Bolsheviks, flattering them by being the first to recognize Soviet rule. Years later Ataturk would write: "We hurried to make contact with the Bolsheviks, hoping that if we succeeded we could destroy the Armenian state which was an abscess on the body of our country." Lenin was convinced that Ataturk was nothing less than a revolutionary struggling against world imperialism. Half a year before the October revolution Lenin demanded that the Provisional Government withdraw Russian forces from Turkish Armenia. However, the head of the Provisional Government, Alexander Kerensky, felt obliged to give a public answer to the Bolsheviks: "We cannot withdraw from Armenia, otherwise nothing will remain of Armenia. It will perish under the Turkish scimitar." On 11 October 1917 on the old calendar, just 14 days before the taking of the Winter Palace, Lenin wrote: "If the Soviets take power into their hands we are obliged (? - **Z.B.**) to withdraw our forces from Armenia." This was called "exporting the revolution" - in this instance to the Orient, to Turkey. The leader of the revolution kept his word. On coming to power, on the eve of the New Year of 1918, together with

Stalin, he signed an ominous document.

And the nightmare began. The forces were withdrawn. "Russia's problem" really began. With Stalin's assistance the results of the Gulistan treaty were violated, along with those of the Turkmenchay treaty. Kars region, Ardagan and Sarikamysh immediately passed to Turkey. At that time most of the Muslims in the Caucasus were under the influence of the effectively Turkish Musavat party. **And then nobody could understand why with cruel devilry and incredible speed there began a thorough-going and widely organized massacre of the Armenians, this time in Baku and Gandzak (Yelizavetpol and Kirovobad) and in Shushi, in order once and for all to cut off Iran and former Iranian lands from Russia. This was the overriding aim not only of Turkey but also of the West. I shall repeat a thousand times that all this happened then on what was legally the territory of Russia.**

This circumstance alone tells us that the main blow, as was always the case, was aimed primarily at Russia with the intention of once and for all cutting Russia off from the South Caucasus. The time will come when England, and the West in general, will understand what a fatal mistake they made. Germany already realises this in a tangible way. One German politician noted in connection with the rapid growth of the number of Turks in Germany: "There is something Byzantine in the air." Here the notorious principle outlined by Lord Palmerston comes into play: "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Or interests are eternal and perpetual." And do you know how the Turks responded to prime-minister Palmerston's formula: "Turkey does not have England's dreadnoughts. Turkey does not have Germany's steel. Turkey does not have Russia's Cossacks. But Turkey has a soft cushion to put under the heads of the great powers and thus solve its problems."

Alas, Russia, overwhelmed by revolutionary fervor, did not understand what these English "interests" – that had become Turkish interests – had led to. Just a year after the Kars agreement, Ataturk smashed the Turkish Communist Party. An artificial state entity had been created with the "provisional name of Azerbaijan", as historian Y. A. Pakhomov wrote. Turkey continued the genocide of Armenians and on the eve of the Second World War prepared to attack the Soviet Union by agreement with Hitler. The signal for the attack was to be the fall of Stalingrad (read the memoirs of the Marshall of the Soviet Union and Chief of the General Staff of the USSR Alexander Vasilevsky). And we (I mean the whole of what used to be our common country, the USSR) were obliged to deploy to the left bank of the river Akhuryan whole armies that were badly needed on the Western front.

Literally on the day of Hitler's suicide, and this was a week before the end of the war, Turkey hypocritically declared war on Germany in order to be on the side of the victors. After Churchill's Fulton speech when the cold war began and the western allies created NATO, military experts believed that nothing could be achieved without Turkey as the USSR's only "non-socialist" neighbour. And then US president Harry Truman, who had dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, declared to the whole world: "Turkey is the easternmost frontier of the USA, Turkey is the 51st state of the USA." At this time in the USSR the "great construction of communism" was beginning and Turkey urged its "daughter republic", as it called Azerbaijan, under cover

of the building programme to tempt Armenian construction workers from Karabakh, Nakhichevan and Gardmanq (Yelizavetpol gubernia) to the chemical complex being built in Sumgait, to the Mingechaur hydro-electric station and other construction sites.

It is well known what fate awaited these Armenian "builders of communism", what happened in Sumgait on 26-29 February 1988, in Shushi in the middle of May 1988, in Khojalu on 17 September 1988, in Kirovabad in October 1988 and in Baku on 13-20 January 1990. Not one Armenian was left on these "communist construction projects". There were pogroms, genocide and massacres, which Gorbachev called "hooliganism".

Mr Putin, please pay attention to how many generals, field-m Marshals, heroes of the Soviet Union, including heroes of the Soviet Union twice over, and recipients of a whole host of glorious medals there were in the Armenian SSR and Karabakh during the war, and how many there were in Azerbaijan. After the war nobody spoke about this. On the other hand Turkey rejoiced that Azerbaijan, as Ataturk had dreamed, had already established itself as a state and that the time was not far off when the roads to the North, to the North Caucasus Muslim republics, would soon open up. And the roads to the East, where the Central Asian Muslim republics lie beyond the Caspian Sea. They even had the Altai and Yakutia in their sights. And as ever, they didn't spare a thought for the fact that they were insulting the dignity of each of these Muslim nations.

In this connection I want to cite something that today is very telling. In June 1918, after the withdrawal of Russian forces from Armenia, at the negotiations in Batumi between Turkey and the Transcaucasian Seim, none other than the commander-in-chief of the Turkish army, Wehib Pasha, said to the Armenian delegation: "You see that fate is pushing us from the West to the East. We have left the Balkans and we are leaving Africa, but we must push to the East – that is where our kin, our religion and our language are. And this attraction has an elemental force. We need access in that direction. And you Armenians are in the way." Note that this butcher spoke relatively "politely". In fact, the day before the meeting in Batumi the Turkish army had tried to reach Yerevan with the aim of once and for all crushing Armenia and to finally cut off the "Southern flank" (the General Staff's term) from Russia. However, the Turkish army was itself routed in Sardarapat, Karaklis and Aparan. It was after this victory that the first independent Armenian republic was created by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the "Dashnaktsutyun".

I emphasise this historical fact as a reminder that all three republics in Transcaucasia were established by national parties: the Georgian Mensheviks, the Armenian "Dashnaktsutyun" and the Turkish "Musavat" party, which attracted not only Turks, but also many of the Muslims of the Caucasus by taking advantage of their common religion. This was an insidious ploy on the part of Turkey. So, if Armenia and Georgia were obliged to establish independent republics after the withdrawal of Russian forces from Transcaucasia, Turkey had a different aim: to "bring together" all the Muslims into a new republic which with time should grow into a monolithic purely Turkish state through assimilation and Turkification. We saw very clearly the horrendous results of this after the Second World War, after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and after the Aliyevs came to power.

A tragic situation came about in Georgia (both after the collapse of the USSR and after the events of 2008). In Georgia in 1959 there were 145,000 Azerbaijanis. In 1989 (the last Soviet census) there were 300,000. Now there are more than half a million. There is a huge problem in Abkhazia and Adzharia. The vigorous flow of Turks and Turkish investment into both these regions has changed the demographic picture. Just in the last few years Turkey has built in Adzharia about 200 mosques and 70 medreses (and these, after all, are higher schools preparing clergy, i.e. Turkish clergy). All this is a big problem for Armenia, for Russia and, of course, for Georgia. It's a problem of transport links, of life support. But the most terrible thing is that the same fate awaits the Abkhazians and Adzharians as befell those nations who lived in Azerbaijan in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

Let me give a few examples, beginning with the tragic fate of the Lezghins which reflects the fate of all the nations and tribes who ended up in what we can definitely now call the Turkish republic of Azerbaijan. The Lezghins were forced to study in the Azerbaijani language. All the history of the Lezghins was ascribed to the Azerbaijani nation, thus arbitrarily making their history more ancient. The Lezghi Mosque in Baku was suddenly renamed in 1980 (under Geidar Aliev) as simply a XVII century mosque. The Lezghin theatre, which had functioned since the end of the nineteenth century, was closed. In the republic where 700,000 Lezghins lived, the only newspaper in the Lezghin language was shut down. Even the 1938 edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia wrote that in Azerbaijan "national unity was destroyed, leading to the Turkification of national minorities". Turkification - already a strategy in action.

A couple of words about the Talysh. According to orientalist W. Miller: "In Lenkoran district the Talysh were 86.3%, in Zuvand district 82.4%, in Astara district 86% and in Massaly district 80%. That was in 1962." And now see what happened to these percentages eight years later. "According to the 1970 census there was not one single representative of this ancient nation." I had a friend who was a Talysh named Talyshinsky. This is what he said about this "fateful census": "Do you know how terrible it is to experience a real genocide on paper? It seems that you are still alive, you believe in Allah, but you have disappeared from history. Your ancestors were Talysh and now we have been turned into 'Azeri-Turks'."

If only you knew how many such terrible facts there are in my journals and books. You above all, Mr Putin, need this information. Russia needs it. These facts show how a new Turkish republic was established on our common territory, carved out on the periphery. In actual fact today this is not all the periphery. Do you think that it was coincidence that Turkey, taking advantage of Stalin in 1921, insisted that Nakhichevan should be given to the newly formed Azerbaijan "without the right to transfer it to a third party"? It was not a coincidence that soon after, by putting its soft cushion under the head of the shah of Persia, it acquired (for a huge sum) a small parcel of territory along the right bank of the Araks river. Thus Turkey acquired a frontier with Nakhichevan of about ten kilometres. And do you think that it was a coincidence that Aliev, when he was first deputy Soviet prime minister responsible among other things for transport, wanted to build "his own road" from Nakhichevan to the main part of Azerbaijan. For this was done with one aim, to cut off Armenia (and Russia too) from

Iran. And it was also no coincidence that the Turkish prime minister called the Megri district, which links Armenia and Iran "that damned wedge". Just as it was no coincidence that the notorious Paul Goble proposed giving Karabakh to Armenia in exchange for this very same "damned wedge". I doubt that the alternating heads of the Minsk group for achieving a Karabakh settlement are at all informed about what I am saying.

And it is no coincidence that slowly but surely the so called small nations were got rid of. In this connection let's mention the Kurds. "The Muslim world is silent today as it watches the Azerbaijanis with the help of various stratagems and by plain deceit trying to "incorporate" a quarter of a million Muslim Kurds. Why does the same thing not happen to the Kurds in Armenia and Georgia? After all, like Azerbaijan, both these republics were part of the same socio-economic system. For example for the Kurds in Armenia there are schools, a centre of Kurdish studies, a branch of the Union of Writers, a publishing house and a newspaper. "The official authorities in Azerbaijan make use of the fact that the Kurds are Muslims to promote assimilation, i.e. genocide. They deliberately substitute religious for national adherence, thus incorporating a whole nation," wrote the famous Kurdish scholar Shakro Mgon.

Tell me, Mr Putin, after all this can you and your colleagues in the Minsk group think for even a moment of giving Karabakh to Turkey?! Is it really not clear to you what would immediately happen to Karabakh – and some time later to Russia?!

Life has shown long ago what an awful catastrophe for whole nations has been brought about by the sacrilegious desecration of the essence, the purpose and the humanity of the Gulistan treaty, to which even the losing side, especially years later, adopted a philosophical and strategically tried and tested attitude. Russia strengthened its frontier by acquiring such a stronghold as Armenia, while Iran in essence disposed of territory that was packed with long-standing enemies.

Look at the persistence with which the Turks and the Azerbaijanis simply desecrate the results of the Gulistan and Turkmenchay treaties. They do so quite cynically. And this cynicism continues to this day. In order to give a legal basis for their fabricated history, and also, I repeat, to give the appearance of ancient roots, Aliiev senior (at the time of Yeltsin in 1998 when you were the director of the FSB) adopted a grotesque law about ... the Azerbaijani genocide. And even invented a special day – 31 March. Indeed, why not? The Armenians and the Jews have such a day. Why should they not have one? And do you know who, according to Aliiev, carried out this "crime" which has been raised to the status of the country's state policy? It's Russia. Admittedly, Aliiev believes that Armenian chauvinists had a hand in it. Imagine the hot sand of the Ter-Zor desert, red with Armenian blood, one and a half million brutally murdered Armenians, millions of refugees deprived not only of their homes but also their homeland, and suddenly at this very time the Armenians carry out the genocide of a nation which doesn't yet actually exist. And in order to establish more ancient roots, and to appear a little more plausible, Aliiev goes back in time making all kinds of accusations against Russia. Most of all he attacked Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Alexander I and Nikolai I and, of course, Russia and Iran in general. In this document it is stated in black and white: "The northern part of Azerbaijan was

conquered (? - Z.B.) by Russia and the southern part ended up (? - Z.B.) under Iranian rule." And this is not trite nonsense. This is typical Turkish policy.

Mr Putin, I urge you to find five minutes of your time to read this gibberish about the so-called Azerbaijani genocide and then you will be convinced that today the absurd provocation named "Khojalu" is being circulated all over the world in exactly the same tone and the same style. With each book published in many languages about Khojalu, there are invented new incidents, new stories and new numbers of victims, which have now reached 10,000. On 25 March 1989 I was elected a USSR people's deputy from the Askeran national-territorial constituency, which includes the settlement of Khojalu, which at that time had already been turned into a gun emplacement. And so, the number of electors in Khojalu, which was inhabited exclusively by Azerbaijanis, was altogether about 800. Incidentally, two months before the election, on 15 January 1989, there was a population census of the USSR, so it is possible to check this figure. The first provocative publications about Khojalu appeared in Turkey, which is always ahead of events. What actually happened in the gun emplacement of Khojalu and the area round about can be read in "Nezavisimaya Gazeta" of 4 April 1992. The author is not just anybody, but the then president of Azerbaijan Ayaz Mutalibov.

Did you notice, Mr Putin, that after the putch, after the last, fifth Congress of USSR People's Deputies, the then president of Turkey Turgut Ozal openly hurried to visit all the Muslim union republics and autonomous entities, establishing embassies even before the end of Soviet power. Then quite legally crowds of Turks flooded into Russia. The "fall of Byzantium" began all over again. In 1453 in Byzantium the Turks became masters of a huge empire without any particular difficulties. In the early 90's whole brigades of cheap labour from Turkey arrived in hungry and cold Russia. For at that time post-Soviet Moscow, or rather Luzhkov's Moscow, began to be totally rebuilt in a new style that had nothing in common with traditional Russian architecture. Then I often thought about the times when Armenians undertook construction and architectural work in Russia. It's appropriate to recall the great exponent of the Russian national spirit, the proponent of Russian national art, the great Russian cultural figure Vladimir Stasov. Affirming that the Armenians and Georgians made their contribution to Russia, he wrote: "... Armenian and Georgian art at one time had a strong influence on Russian art at its formative period and now when studying the early period of Russian art, especially in terms of architecture and ornamental art and also painting, it is impossible to ignore Armenian and Georgian art..."

And now the new Moscow was being built on the principle of who pays the most and builds the cheapest. For this the borders with Turkey were thrown open. There were not only construction workers in this huge army. And the financial expenses of the Turkish seasonal workers were borne not by construction firms but by Turkish educational foundations who were financing lycees in Russia. I am referring to the exclusively Turkish foundations "Ufuk", "Serhat", "Toros", "Tolerans", "Eflak" and others which were subsidiaries of the Pan-Turkic Islamic religious extremist "Nurdjular" sect.

It's not difficult to guess why it was in 1993 that this sinister Pan-Turkic plan began to be devised and put into practice. This was the year of incredible division and chaos in Russian society. And so, taking advantage of the situation and the turmoil, it

was in 1993 that the Pan-Turkists held a congress of the Turkic-speaking peoples of the former USSR in Bishkek. And there they absolutely openly spoke of the determination of Ankara (not Iran, not the Islamic congress or any Islamic religious organisations, but just Ankara, Turkey and the Pan-Turkists) to extend their influence to the Muslim regions of Russia.

I can say with certainty that none of the Muslim nations that have lived for centuries in Russia ever spoke against Russia or Christians. If there were any such cases, then as a rule it was a provocation organised from outside by "The Grey Wolves", "The Nationalist Movement Party", "The Hearth of Turan" etc. The Armenians know this very well. In Armenia neither anti-Semitism, nor anti-Islamism, nor extreme cosmopolitanism can really take root. Having been at the crossroads of the caravan routes for millennia, we have absorbed different philosophies and cultures, which has made us tolerant. For over four centuries now in Iran the mosque and the Armenian Apostolic Church have coexisted in peace. The same can be said about mutually enriching culture, literature, publishing, sport and even politics. For over a hundred years now Armenians have sincerely and warmly expressed deep gratitude to Muslims throughout the Arab world, in North Africa, Central Asia, the North Caucasus and the Volga region for the brotherly refuge and assistance offered to our compatriots who miraculously escaped the genocide in Turkey. Yes, in Muslim Turkey.

That's why it is impermissible to make generalisations: Pan-Turkism is not a religion. It is a fascist political movement. It is no coincidence that Hitler, as he sent his executioners into Poland in August 1939, reassured them: "Who remembers today the massacre of the Armenians in Turkey?" And if the German people found the moral strength to express their repentance to the Jews, Turkey will never do the same. Moreover, over the following decades Turkey carried on the genocide of Armenians not only in Sumgait and Baku, but throughout historic Armenian territory, which, in the words of Solzhenitsyn was "cut off" and incorporated into the newly established republic, "provisionally" (i.e. temporarily) named Azerbaijan. Ataturk was the first to use the formula "Turkey and Azerbaijan are one language, one faith and one blood." Decades later Turkish prime minister Demirel would say in Baku: "Brothers in faith, brothers in language, brothers in blood." A few years later Aliiev senior would put it slightly differently: "One nation, two states," adding "for the moment."

Do you really not understand that another Turkey has been created and that in relation to the Armenians and its other neighbours it is behaving just like Ottoman Turkey? And should one be surprised when Aliiev junior in an atmosphere of festive celebration in the sight of the whole world greets with flowers and embraces the butcher who chopped off the head of a sleeping man with an axe just because he was an Armenian? In your job you must have heard frequently that the president of Azerbaijan himself scores out all Armenian names and terms from his encyclopedias and that despite warnings from UNESCO he razed to the ground all the churches and stone crosses that had survived his father's rule and after all this cynically declares to the Minsk group for a Karabakh settlement that he personally guarantees wide powers to the Armenians of Karabakh. Turkey said the same thing in 1921 in Kars about Armenian Nakhichevan, where today there remains not one native Armenian, not one

church and not one stone cross.

Dear Mr Putin, having been elected once more as president of Russia, you are again the head of a state that is a co-chairman of the Minsk group of the OSCE. Time and again we hear that it's time to do "something". I would like to advise you: don't hurry (along with the presidents of the USA and France) to take a step that has not been thought through and calculated to the end. When you come to the edge of the precipice you have to take the most sober saving step – a step back. Think about tomorrow. Don't forget that in winter it can be cold. This is not anything primitive. It's a normal feeling of concern for the morrow, for the future. I heard something of the kind in the tundra of Kamchatka from wise old Koryak men, about whom I have written many stories. Even a trade turnover of hundreds of milliards (between Russia and Turkey) should not dull the feeling of wisdom and of concern for the morrow and the realisation that rulers need wise men more than wise men need rulers.

Twenty years have passed since the establishment of the Minsk group. Even slightly more. And all this time successive presidents of Russia, the USA and France have tried in vain to come to terms with the dilemma, that in this case is absurd, between "self-determination" and "territorial integrity". Well, "self-determination" can be understood. But who defined the historical frontiers of the union republics? In a unified state they were, as we have already mentioned, nominal. After all, the Final Act of the Helsinki Agreement was signed on behalf of all the republics, on behalf of the whole USSR by one person, L. I. Brezhnev. So, if we are going to talk about territorial integrity then it concerns solely the territory of the whole USSR – all 22,400,000 square kilometres of the combined 15 republics. And in order to allow oneself to talk of the true territory of any republic, including Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, we need a new Helsinki, if one may put it that way.

In this connection, dear Mr Putin, forgive me for being repetitive, I would advise you to think about one truly sacramental question: how did things turn out this way? After all that the Russian and Armenian peoples have been through together, suddenly they have no common frontiers. It's incredible. In the first quarter of the XIX century over 200,000 of your and our ancestors gave their lives to be united, in order to reinforce the "southern flank". Very often they were buried in common mass graves. Probably your own ancestors and mine were there.

I am absolutely convinced that in the very difficult situation that has come about soberly thought out logic obliges you, Mr Putin, and your colleagues in the Minsk group **to take one really wise step – in the direct and literal sense of the word. Go and visit Karabakh, visit the liberated districts**, touch with your own hands the unique church in Amaras, where my great grandfather Hovhannes served as senior priest in the twenties, and who like my father was a victim of Stalinism. The church was built in the IV century by the grandson of the first Catholicos of all Armenians Gregory the Enlightener, thanks to whom in 301 Armenia was the first to adopt Christianity as the state religion. If it seems to you and your colleagues that a fourth century church is going too far back in time, then I can suggest visiting another unique church, Dadivank from the sixth century. If that is too far in the depths of history, then you could visit the XII century world masterpiece of religious architecture, Gandzasar, from where Israel

Ori, who one could say was the first Armenian diplomat, set out to Peter the Great at the very end of the XVII century. You could come still closer to modern times and visit the Church of Christ the Saviour in Shushi. Its construction began in 1868 under the patronage of Alexander II at the time of the patriarchy of Catholicos of All Armenians Gevorg IV and was completed under Alexander III and Catholicos Markar in 1887. You could make it in time for the opening of the Cathedral in Stepanakert, which is being built in place of a church destroyed in 1930, the year when membership certificate no. one of the society of atheists was ceremonially handed to Stalin. But the main thing is to meet the people of Karabakh whose ancestors fought in the Gulistan province at the beginning of the XIX century and who have a direct relationship, a blood relationship, so to speak, to the living history of the Gulistan treaty. **That is the reason why we have the right to invite you to Karabakh, to Gulistan.**

About 150 years ago your colleague, so to speak, English prime minister Benjamin Disraeli put forward a short and very wise formula: "Justice is truth in action." And it is hard to conceive of true justice without law also in action, without trials in open court. Incidentally, Mr Putin, in Armenian the words "Ministry of Justice" are translated literally as "Ministry of fair trials". And returning to our theme of historical truth, which must be specific, I see a fair way out of the seemingly fatal situation in which we all find ourselves: **a fair trial of those who organised and carried out the genocide of Armenians in Sumgait and Baku. Let me remind you, trials took place in Moscow and other cities of the USSR. However, it is still not known who gave the order to halt the court hearings. And it was incredibly cynical that before long the murderers were released and elevated to the rank of national heroes in Azerbaijan.**

Part of the tragedy of the victims of Sumgait and Baku was that almost all of them were either originally from Karabakh or descendants of people from Karabakh. They were people who had lost their homeland which if not today then tomorrow would become Turkish if nothing was done about it. And then (and perhaps this is the most important thing in my open letter) **Russia's borders will pass through Ryazan region that is so dear to my heart** (I graduated from Ryazan Medical Institute). This is of concern to the Iranians, who are already openly threatening Baku with a review of the Gulistan and Turkmenchay treaties. The parliamentary deputy from the province of Urmia has officially warned the leaders of Azerbaijan (which in their words has existed for only 22 years since 1991) that if they do not end their anti-Iranian actions the parliament will review both treaties. And he added: "If a referendum were held among the inhabitants of Azerbaijan who were separated from Iran under the Gulistan and Turkmenchay treaties, they would vote to go back to Iran. And this for one reason only – at all costs not to end up in Turkey."

Mr Putin, please let's hand on heart, sincerely and honestly, think about the dilemma – **what possible compromise can people have in mind, if suddenly tomorrow the Minsk group finally decides to give its conclusive decision.** After all, by the logic of historical truth, if one is to talk about a genuine compromise, in our specific circumstances we should have in mind the whole of Armenian Nakhichevan (the whole autonomous republic), the Shaumyanovsk district, Yelizavetpol gubernia,

the village of Chardakhlu that is legendary for its Armenian field-marshals and generals and many other districts. Is someone really going to say, fatalistically raising their hands, that there are no longer any Armenians left in the Nakhichevan autonomous republic, so there is no problem? Again it is reminiscent of Stalin: “remove the person and you remove the problem”.

Think about it, please: **in the whole territory of the former USSR there is not one autonomous administrative entity where the native population no longer exists. This happened only in Azerbaijan. Nowhere else. And in connection with this, what talk can there be of territorial integrity when before the October revolution there was, as we know, no Azerbaijan? Is it really not obvious that in the list of all possible compromises we should include all Armenian territories which have illegally been incorporated into an artificially created union republic? As far as Karabakh specifically is concerned, it is impermissible to be blindly captive to the monstrous provocation by Stalin, who forcibly reversed the decision of the Caucasus Bureau of the Communist Party of 4 July 1921 and on 5 July cynically “gave” Karabakh to Azerbaijan. This is all documented with full names. It’s a fact. It’s the truth.**

It is both a sin and a danger to suppose that nothing can be done, to shrug it all off as events of the distant past. Please think about the foreseeable future. Sometimes it seems to me as if the great historian bishop Yeghishe, the author of a book about the battle of Avarayr, where the Armenian people’s blood was shed in order to preserve Christianity, is speaking to you and your colleagues in the Minsk group from the depths of sixteen centuries with these words: “The memory of the past is a watch-tower from which the future can easily be seen.”

And all the same, do visit Karabakh, where every mountain is like one of Yeghishe’s watch-towers. Just climb up to Gandzasar and you will see the future. Incidentally while on the subject of Karabakh’s mountains: this is yet another of Stalin’s cunning ploys, to call Karabakh in its constitution only “Mountainous Karabakh”. That made it easier and “more logical” **to draw ridiculous boundaries so as to cut off Karabakh from its huge lowland territories.** Do you know that the native inhabitants of the whole of Yelizavetpol gubernia, of Gulistan province and many other regions speak in the Karabakh dialect? And in all this vast territory – during Soviet times, I repeat – thousands of Armenian churches were demolished, thousands of cemeteries were smashed and cleared away and millions of stone crosses and gravestones were used as building materials – all by the Azerbaijanis. But, Mr Putin, the land remained Armenian. It contains the heart and soul of our people. The earth holds the souls and the mortal remains of many millions of specific people who are my ancestors. In Iran for example, at least nobody sacrilegiously desecrated our land, the spirit of our ancestors. While sailing round the world on the yacht “Armenia” I saw hundreds of Armenian cemeteries outside Armenia, including in Muslim countries. They are reverently preserved by the state.

As for the relationship between Russia, the Armenian Republic and the Mountainous-Karabakh Republic with its own constitution in which its present boundaries are precisely defined, we must be clearly aware that the most important

thing is not to violate the sacred principles of our ancestors, who over the course of long and arduous centuries came up with the magical joint legacy “The price of love is love” – always remembering that in friendship it is more important, honest and valuable to love than to be loved. The great sons of the Russian and Armenian peoples, the true friends and colleagues Alexander Griboyedov and Khachatur Abovyan, knew this very well and put it into practice.

I am sure, Mr Putin, that with conscious critical understanding you reject any cynical suggestion that Armenia with its “arithmetical weakness” has no choice – it will have to do as we say. Historical truth shows in a real way that we always had a saving interdependence – and today as at no other time.

You were correct to note that “attempts to distort historical truth can have serious consequences”, pointing out that the distortion of history leads to a pathological muddle in the heads of new generations. And it was here that you added the most important thing: “In essence key principles of the modern world order can be put in doubt. Very real dangers lurk here – and with unpredictable consequences.” I am absolutely in agreement with you, for in the last analysis, as professor Sobchak said, it is a matter of Russia’s problem, and for me also of the Karabakh problem. And of course, it is impermissible, even a sin, to try to avoid the truth. For if you avoid it you cannot avoid the misfortune which, as is well known, overtakes us always through our own fault.

We need to summon up the wisdom and courage and hand on heart, on “righteous heart” as Jean-Jacques Rousseau put it, admit honestly that **the collapse of our country began at the very start of the October revolution with the violation of the Gulistan and Turkmenchay treaties. Already at that time history was rewritten without the realisation that the value and extent of historical truth is too great and it will not tolerate distortion.** And bearing in mind, as Rousseau also said, that “there is but one path to truth” **we all need to return to that one and only path which had its beginning in Karabakhi Gulistan. The treaty, I repeat, was signed for times perpetual.** And Time, as apposed to Space, has only one dimension, from the past to the future, and constantly reminds us: “If you do not think actively about your future, you cannot have one.”

At the end of the 50s and in the early 60s my generation devoured the books of classical western literature which we did not study at school. We swapped books, we queued up to read them. We felt diminished if we didn’t manage to read Erich Maria Remarque, say, or Ernest Hemingway. There were lots of classics. But I was most deeply absorbed by Galsworthy. Even before his trilogy “The Forsyth Saga” appeared on our television screens we were reading his novels. Since then I have never reread John Galsworthy. However, one short but succinct phrase of his that obliges one to take action has remained with me for all of my life. I wrote it in my notebook half a century ago when I was living on Kamchatka, where I worked as a doctor for a whole ten years. And I would very much like you to remember Galsworthy’s wise advce: “If you do not think actively about your future, you cannot have one.”

Bearing in mind the great authority of the addressee of my letter, I decided to check the quotation against the original. I found that Galsworthy does not have the

word “actively”. Don’t reproach me, Mr Putin, half a century ago I didn’t know that I would one day make use of this wise quotation from the author of “Island Pharisees”. It’s just that I am sincerely convinced that John Galsworthy would have agreed with me that one must think about the future only actively, especially when it is a matter of the fate of one’s homeland.

With sincere respect,
Zori Balayan

PS. I know from experience that immediately after the publication of this letter the leadership of Azerbaijan will, to argue its case, definitely cite my book “The Hearth” (1981), which, incidentally, was devoted to the 150th anniversary of the unification of Eastern Armenia with Russia. In that book I write, for example, of how the Azerbaijanis in Soviet times completely destroyed all Armenian settlements and all monuments of Armenian culture, including in Nakhichevan. They wiped from the face of the earth the pride of Armenian architecture, the town of Agulis, in which since the time of Mesrop Mashtots more than ten unique churches had been built. And I wrote in detail about Agulis without disguising my pain. All copies of “The Hearth” in Baku were publically burned. I cite this example because three decades later also in Baku they burnt a book, this time by the Azerbaijani writer Akram Ailisi, by an irony of fate once again for a section about the tragedy of the Armenian town of Agulis.

... Don’t believe it, if in their reponse they say that I bombed the Baku metro and that I am the subject of an international arrest warrant. The General Secretary of Interpol Ronald Noble officially apologised to me for his failure from the start to check out carefully the forged documents.

... Don’t believe it, if they tell you that I wrote a book describing awful atrocities (they will cite the name, publishers, page numbers, even a multitude of extracts in quotation marks – all this is on the internet). Baku regularly broadcasts abroad pages of “my” book and quotes it from the platform of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. They give page references from “my” non-existent book. This has been going on for years with impunity. I’m absolutely convinced that at some time mankind will tackle the internet. But that’s another issue. But in the meantime many probably believe this nonsense. Please ask them to show you just one copy of this piece of writing. I wrote an article about all this “Slander is defeated only by disdain” (I took this from a wise woman, Francoise Montagnon, the governess of the children of French king Louis XIV) in the Moscow edition of “Politika” and in the “Literaturnaya gazeta”. Of course, there was no reply from the slanderers. For a year or two they were silent and then put out the same nonsense on the internet.

A long list of such “facts” could be compiled.

... Do forgive me, dear Mr Putin, once again for the unavoidably vast size of this letter. Forgive me for troubling you. I very much want to believe that you will understand me. I couldn’t be silent.

With sincere respect,
Zori Balayan