

## **Lack of democracy is not a factor in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict**

Since the recent escalation in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, certain experts and members of global media have pinpointed the lack of democracy to be a major factor in the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict. While leaning on the argument of a democracy deficit seems like an easy fit towards the already existent pro-Armenian narrative of the global media, the reality could not be further from the truth.

Among the arguments that eliminate the relevance of lack of democracy problem firstly, without doubt, is the history of the conflict. To comprehend the origins of the conflict, one can go as far as to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian Empire (when imperial borders shifted demographic balance of the Caucasus), which leads to the understanding that there is a legacy of Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union surrounding the basis of the conflict, which did not begin only after the independence of the two states. The incumbent leaders' lack of responsibility for the origins and ignition of the conflict, does not hold with the democracy deficit argument laid by some experts.

Apart from history, there is also the question of the nature of the dispute, which is also not based on democracy deficit (or religion as some like to claim), but rather on territorial claims of Armenia that revolve around the concept of "miatsum", meaning unification of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan with Armenia. Until the rising nationalist claims of Armenians, the two nations peacefully co-existed; first expulsion of Azerbaijanis by Armenian extremist started in fall of 1987 from district of Kapan, long before the Sumgait events of 1988.

Identifying the conflict as the result of a democracy problem also implies that in an event of a more pro-democratic state, the West would be more sympathetic of Azerbaijani position. The events of 1992, more specifically the adopted Article 907 of the "Freedom Support Act" (banning US aid to Azerbaijan) implemented during the presidency of the pro-western Abulfaz Elchibay debunks these claims. All leaders of Azerbaijan have become victims to Western villainization, regardless of their politics.

Another important factor to take into consideration here is the current political situation in Azerbaijan, where all political forces, be it governmental or opposition, share a common aim and are all united behind the military operations in hopes of finally restoring territorial integrity and bringing back IDPs and refugees to their homes. The rally in Baku on July 14 also proved that it is not only political entities, but the public as well demanding liberation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. The entire nation, not lone part of it, accepts the official position.

Moving on to the situation in Armenia, it should be stated that although the government had suffered from autocracy and corruption all these years, they still got to enjoy a permissive international environment. Even today, Armenia still violating international law and not abiding by UNSC resolutions 822, 853, 874, 884 does not get met with a substantial amount of disapproval from the international community. This again shows that the true concerns of the international community are far from the ones of democracy or lack of it. It is also essential to decode the current Armenian prime minister Nikol Pashinyan's vision of "democracy". The fact that Pashinyan's version of "democracy" within the region can only be extended to the Armenian nationals, with Azerbaijanis ethnically cleansed from both Armenia and the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, makes such vision more resemblant of white supremacist ideology rather than democracy.

Last but not least, the argument that the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict is caused by a democracy problem also implies that were there no democracy deficit, the problem would have been solved. However, such hypothesis does not hold once we take into account the current ethno-territorial conflicts within Western democracies such as Quebec in Canada, Scotland in United Kingdom, Catalonia in Spain as well as Flanders in Belgium. The existence of advanced democracy simply does not solve or prevent these conflicts from happening in their regions.

When assessing some policies implemented in the Western democracies, it becomes clear that those countries themselves have resorted to the use of force in certain instances, even on foreign soil and sometimes without a proper authorization of the UN Security Council required by international law. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, has patiently waited for peaceful negotiations for almost 30 years and now is practicing its legal right of self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

The current position taken by the global media experts exposes the biases within Western media outlets when it comes to discussing the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict and its causes. It is worth remembering that in the past, redrawing borders have caused two global wars in Europe. Formula for durable peace can be based on territorial integrity and minority rights, both principles that Azerbaijan relies on and offers.

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