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PLAYING AT "ELECTIONS"

Armenia is undertaking another political provocation on the occupied territories of Azerbaijan

The so called "parliamentary elections" - farce elections - that the Armenian occupation regime is organizing in Nagorno-Karabakh is having a negative impact on the negotiating process related to the settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

This is the reaction of Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry to the anti-constitutional attempt by the separatists to hold these "parliamentary elections" on a sovereign part of Azerbaijan.

"The holding of these so-called 'elections' on the Azerbaijani territories occupied by Armenia is a political provocation. With these illegal elections Armenia is pursuing a policy of deceiving the world community. What is more, in keeping with the essence of Armenia's political regime, the 'elections' being held involve large-scale falsification. This is in complete contradiction to the Constitution and Legislation of Azerbaijan and is aimed at torpedoing the negotiating process," the head of the Foreign Ministry press service, Hikmat Hacıyev, stated to Region plus

magazine. The Azerbaijani diplomat said that the illegality of these "elections" is yet again being stressed in the statements of foreign states.

Moreover, the Armenian side is reckoning on the fact that, just as before, a large number of foreign observers will monitor these "elections". In the separatists' view, this will also testify to the "international recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic" or this will at least help to facilitate this recognition. The Armenian media recall that at the previous "parliamentary elections" organized by the separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh five years ago, something like 120 observers from 15 states were monitoring them. Naturally, in their customary manner the Armenians prefer not advertise the composition of these "monitoring missions".

At best the foreign observers conducting the checks are members of parliament with a penchant for material rewards and jollies from individual countries whose authorities then hasten to cross themselves, officially recognizing Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan. There were not even a dozen and a half of these monitoring-countries; to make it look more respectable, the Armenians included on the list of states that made the trip to the occupied lands unsanctioned by Baku, not only Armenia itself, but puppet regimes like that in Nagorno-Karabakh, in the Transnistria [Prinestrovian Moldovian Republic], Abkhazia and South Ossetia [Georgia]. Incidentally, this is a serious reason for the authorities in Georgia and Moldova to give thought to the fact that the parts of their territories recognized by the UN are gloried in by journalists in Armenia to whom they appear no different from "independent states".

But times are changing and not in favor of the Armenian side. Azerbaijan has set about taking more effective measures to put a stop to foreign citizens visiting the occupied lands. These visits unapproved by Baku and even more so the statements of support for separatism in Nagorno-Karabakh may not only mean that foreigners are "black-listed" by the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry, but may also face criminal charges.

A few days ago the Foreign Ministry and Azerbaijan's Office of the Public Prosecutor stated that the former speaker of the Slovak parliament, Frantisek Miklosko, who has lobbied in support of the separatists' aspirations has been

declared by the Azerbaijani side to be the subject of an international criminal investigation for perpetrating anti-Azerbaijani activities and visiting the occupied territories illegally.

During the investigation it was established that F. Miklosko had visited the territories occupied by Armenia repeatedly without the consent of Azerbaijan's relevant state structures and that he had participated in the so-called "elections" held there as an "observer" and incited racial discrimination there on an ethnic and religious basis. The Serious Crime Directorate of Azerbaijan's Office of the Public Prosecutor has instituted a case against F. Miklosko for urging the public to seize power by force and for crossing the frontier illegally. The District Court of the city of Baku has demanded this Slovak citizen's arrest and issued an international warrant for his arrest.

According to the Foreign Ministry press secretary, H. Hacıyev, the criminal investigation on this case is continuing and in this connection the Azerbaijani side envisions to appeal accordingly in the bodies of law and order in Slovakia.

As it can be seen, Azerbaijan has armed itself with Georgia's practice according to which foreigners making unauthorized visits to Abkhazia and South Ossetia risk getting a prison sentence.

Nor will any such "elections" with the involvement of any kind of observers help to legalize the occupation regime in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is not recognized by a single country in the world, including Armenia. The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh recognition periodically raised by certain groups in the Armenian parliament is being put on the back burner by the ruling party as "inexpedient" and "the time not being right time for it". The last time this happened, in November last year, the faction from the Ruling Republican Party of Armenia did not even take part in the voting.

As the Armenian authorities have evasively noted, recognition by Yerevan of the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh at this stage would mean a break-down in the talks on a settlement of the conflict. With an evasive formulation like this, the Armenian side is attempting to conceal its fear that this step would test for Azerbaijan's patience to its utmost and would provoke it to resolve the problem by

force. The Armenians have always feared this, especially today when Azerbaijan is increasingly toughly reminding them of its rights to the Nagorno-Karabakh territory and the Armenian army is suffering unprecedentedly high losses in the conflict zone.

On the other hand, the course of events on the European continent over the last year, in particular the events surrounding Ukraine have drawn the attention of the world community to conflicts throughout the territory of the former Soviet Union. But in the never-ending conflict of the principles of territorial integrity and the rights of nations to self-determination of later preference in the greater part of the world community is being given to the former principle. In this connection, Azerbaijan is quite rightly demanding that sanctions be applied to Armenia which has occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent districts.

It is precisely for this reason that Azerbaijan is unambiguously coming out in favor of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, did not join in the indiscriminate criticism of Russia and blindly back the sanctions' policy of the West. Government officials in Baku rightfully detect double standards over sovereignty and self-determination. They raise a legitimate question why the West punishes Russia for annexing Crimea, but not Armenia for similar behavior in Nagorno-Karabakh. Many raise the question on why the West approves the use of force by Ukraine to restore territorial integrity, but insists on Azerbaijan's peaceful patience. Such a double standard attitude, is leaving the government of Azerbaijan without any other choice but "to begin questioning the ability of the Western countries and the Minsk Group to deter and bring a peaceful solution to the occupied territories of Azerbaijan," says Peter Tase, a contributor of the Eurasia Review Journal in the United States.

What can the puppet regime in Nagorno-Karabakh reckon on, if the puppet-masters in Yerevan are themselves somebody else's puppets? The Armenian public was able to see for themselves that this is the case not so long ago when Russian commanders announced that the Russian military were being drilled, unbeknown to Armenia's Ministry of Defense, to take part in the military parade in Yerevan.

"Armenia's Defense Ministry found itself in a somewhat awkward position owing to statements by the Russian side regarding the parades in Yerevan and Gyumri, since this came as a complete surprise to Armenia's Defense Ministry," the Armenian newspaper "Aykakan Zhamanak" wrote ironically in a tone of impending doom. Well, the expression of the well-known hero of Soviet literature "I will be the one to command the parade" does not refer to Armenians at all and it does not refer solely to the military sphere either.

Over the last few years the balance of forces between the sides in the Nagorno-Karabakh confrontation has cardinally changed. A few years ago official Baku toughly posed the issue in key international organizations of the impermissibility of any kind of activity on the occupied territories, no matter whether it was economic activity or the policy of settling Armenians who had newly arrived there on this territory. To the great dissatisfaction of the Armenians, this matter was placed under international control: a fact-finding mission which included representatives of the UN and the OSCE visited this zone twice and found traces of illegal activity and included the information they obtained in their report.

The diplomatic expansion of Azerbaijan aimed at extending the circle of foreign partners and allies is resulting in countries and even representatives of business circles of Armenian nationality being increasingly less eager to set their sights on the prospects for economic activity in Azerbaijan's occupied lands or to even give them up altogether. Unlike previous times, today Armenians cannot carry on large-scale economic activity on the occupied lands. Everything connected with those pompous projects has ended in failure.

The building called "The International Airport" which has been completed by the separatists continues to lie empty and is today more like a monument to crumbling Armenian hopes of linking Nagorno-Karabakh to other countries or even other regions by air routes. Neither Yerevan's expectations nor the Armenian government's program to resettle Armenian refugees from Syria on the occupied lands have justified themselves. Practice has shown that even those Syrian Armenians who have survived the horrors of civil war have not found the prospect of living on a deserted foreign land and have decided to move in more attractive countries.

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Naturally, all this is the result of an intensive diplomatic activity on the part of Azerbaijan. The unfounded conviction of the Armenians that they could do anything they liked on the occupied lands with impunity has evaporated in an instant when an "Igla" missile released by a portable anti-aircraft missile system shot down an Armenian military provocateur helicopter in November last year.

In the wake of this, several attempts by groups of Armenian saboteurs to commit sorties across the Nagorno-Karabakh border have been stopped in an uncertain fashion, resulting in the deaths of more than 50 Armenian servicemen since the beginning of the year. "If you don't want to die, get out of Azerbaijani territories!" Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev toughly warned the Armenians at the recent expanded meeting of Azerbaijan's Cabinet of Ministers.

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