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AZERBAIJAN-ARMENIA PEACE TREATY PROCESS AND ATTEMPTS TO UNDERMINE TÜRKİYE-AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS

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Azerbaijan and Armenia are reporting that they have agreed upon the text of the peace treaty that is to be signed by the two sides. With the signing of this treaty, the missing piece of the South Caucasus cooperation network will finally be put in place. This has been a protracted, painful process that required the resolution of the Karabakh Conflict, something that had persisted ever since the First Karabakh War that broke out between Azerbaijan and Armenia as the Soviet Union was collapsing at the end of the 1980s. After years of Armenias intransigence and futile negotiations under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, Azerbaijan was forced to take matters into its own hands.[1] It should be emphasized here that, no matter how Armenia and its traditional backers in the West spin this,[2] Armenia was the aggressor and Azerbaijan was the victim throughout the Karabakh Conflict that persisted for around 30 years.

Now that it has emerged victorious by beating the odds that were stacked against it, Azerbaijan is taking its time to form a lasting peace framework with Armenia that will be resilient against provocations from both inside (domestic politics) and outside (the Diaspora) of Armenia. This necessitates Azerbaijan and Armenia finalizing border demarcation and the changing of the Armenian Constitution so that there are no more any territorial claims being made against Azerbaijan.[3] There is also the discussion over the realization of the Zangezur Corridor that will offer direct connection between Azerbaijan proper and its exclave of Nakhchivan through Armenia. Although Azerbaijan has indicated that it desires to sign a peace treaty with Armenia, it will not do so under foreign pressure that could taint the peace treaty and leave the door open for Armenia to claim Azerbaijans territories in the future.

In comparison to Azerbaijan, Armenia is in a hurry to sign the peace treaty for three reasons: 1) The Nikol Pashinyan administration is worried that mounting domestic and Diaspora opposition could make it politically unfeasible to sign a treaty that forces Armenia to relinquish its territorial claims against Azerbaijan, 2) The Pashinyan administration is worried that Russia, which loathes Pashinyan but is currently bogged down in Ukraine due to the ongoing war of attrition, could eventually find the opportunity to turn its attention to Armenia and use its substantial influence there to jeopardize

Pashinyans political future, 3) The administration is keen to forge a path towards the West, but this requires passing through Türkiye, which has stipulated that Armenia must first make peace with Azerbaijan (this will be elaborated below). Hastily trying to finalize the peace process without truly alleviating Azerbaijans concerns, Armenia has resorted to word games to argue that it has fulfilled its responsibilities,[4] something that has failed to convince Azerbaijan.

Türkiyes staunch support for Azerbaijan seems to be causing considerable frustration both in Armenia and in Western circles that are trying to create a status quo in the South Caucasus in favor of Armenia. Türkiye has repeatedly made it clear that it will only normalize its relations with Armenia after the Azerbaijan-Armenia peace treaty process is finalized. There is a very simple explanation for this insistence; Türkiye is Armenias direct land access to the European Union. Having grown increasingly wary of Russias choking influence over it, Armenia is carefully attempting to move away from Russia and towards the EU (and by association, the United States). Normalization with Türkiye is therefore Armenias top priority. Were Armenia to first normalize its relations with Türkiye, it would have no need to establish peace in a way that will address Azerbaijans grievances. Türkiye is therefore using its position to force Armenia to come to an agreement with Azerbaijan and ease the realization of Azerbaijans foreign policy objectives.

Reacting to Türkiyes stance, Armenia and its Western backers have accused Türkiye of complicating the Azerbaijan-Armenia peace process and delaying the advancement of regional cooperation in the South Caucasus. They have also argued that Türkiye is damaging its own economic and political interests by causing the perpetuation of closed borders in the region. These arguments, however, have failed to change Türkiyes stance, because they do not change Türkiyes importance as an access route to the West for Armenia. Faced with this obstacle, an alternative method is used with the hopes of changing the current situation; using provocative statements meant to trigger emotional reactions in Türkiye and Azerbaijan and thereby play the two brotherly countries against each other.[5]

This method involves portraying Türkiye as the big brother/patron of Azerbaijan who cannot keep its little brother/client under control and is thus put into an embarrassing situation by Azerbaijan. Türkiye is therefore made to look like a humiliated and impotent major power that cannot pursue an independent foreign policy. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan is portrayed as an ungrateful minor power reacting to the tutelage or domination of a brotherly larger power. Azerbaijan is made to look like it has used its substantial wealth to hijack Türkiyes foreign policy and is forcing Türkiye to act in ways that are contrary to its interests.

No matter how cunning Armenia and its traditional backers may believe this method to be, it fails to work because Türkiye-Azerbaijan bilateral relations are based not just on emotional bonds, but realistic expectations and common interests. In this relationship, Türkiye is not the big brother/patron and Azerbaijan is not the little brother/client. They are two equal countries in the international arena that share a common history and culture, and seek strength in unity through constructing a robust Turkic world. There is for sure a strong emotional bond between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, but there are also strong

economic and military bonds. Both countries have substantial investments in each others economies, and their military cooperation enhances each others security in the region. Lastly, unlike the US, the EU, and Russia, Türkiye does not view foreign relations as a means for achieving domination through coercion or bribery.[6]

Rather than coming up with cunning ways to drive a wedge between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, it would be more prudent for Armenia to start doing the work necessary to finalize the peace agreement process with Azerbaijan, and for Armenias traditional backers to stop encouraging Armenia with false promises that could derail the peace process.

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