
What Makes Kosovo & Eritrea Better Than Karabakh?

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Post-Soviet self-proclaimed republics intend to achieve international recognition

WHAT NAGORNO-KARABAKH COUNTS ON IN CONNECTION WITH THE KOSOVO PRECEDENT?; An interview with David Babajan, Chief of the Main Directorate of Information of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Kosovo set a precedent for non-recognized republics of the post-Soviet zone. Here is an interview with David Babajan, Chief of the Main Directorate of Information of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Question: Recognizing Kosovo as a sovereign state, the Western community all but denies other self-proclaimed states similar acknowledgement. Is it all right to draw parallels between Kosovo and Nagorno-Karabakh?

David Babajan: The Kosovo precedent is unique because it amends international law and introduces something new into nations' right to self-determination. Regardless of all claims that Kosovo is not a precedent, this episode will certainly have far-reaching consequences.

The United States recognized Kosovo as a sovereign state promoting its own geopolitical interests. The situation with Nagorno-Karabakh is different. Our foreign policy may be well-balanced, democratic institutions may develop and so on, but all of that will be a waste of time and energy unless our actions suit movers and shakers. We should use this period when we are not recognized as a sovereign state to develop our state. The day will come when we are recognized.

Question: Necessity to return Stepanakert to the Azerbaijani-Armenian negotiations is speculated on, these days. What will its return to the talks mean?

David Babajan: The negotiations were trilateral until the middle of the 1990s. They are bilateral now, and they entered a blind alley. It will take Stepanakert's involvement to do away with the deadlock.

Unfortunately, Azerbaijan is not ready for it and it is unlikely to be ready for it in the foreseeable future. Direct negotiations with Stepanakert will signify recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh's status and Baku does not want it. It knows better because there are other ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan that may get ideas and follow in Nagorno-Karabakh's steps. That is why the Azerbaijani leadership views the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a purely territorial conflict and not as something to be regarded from the standpoint of nations' right to self-determination. Hence its thoroughly non-constructive stand. Broad autonomous rights or actual recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh's independence may encourage other peoples in Azerbaijan.

Question: A joint Azerbaijani-Armenian delegation visited Nagorno-Karabakh not long ago. Is it correct to treat it as the beginning of reconciliation and return of fugitives?

David Babajan: We feel no animosity with regard to the Azerbaijani people. Before coming to the return of fugitives, however, some other steps should be taken. Psychological and historic reconciliation is necessary, and that will take permanent contacts at the level of non-governmental organizations and

political structures. There is a legal nuance here as well. Let's say the fugitives do come back but where will they go? To the jurisdiction of what state? Political issues should be addressed first.

Question: But the threats to conquer Nagorno-Karabakh again and subdue it by sheer strength of arms made by Baku every now and then do not exactly improve matters, do they?

David Babajan: They do not, indeed. We are sorry to hear these threats. Still, impressive economic parameters and fantastic military budgets do not guarantee victory in war. Another war in Nagorno-Karabakh is a matter of prestige for Baku but for Stepanakert it is a matter of life and death. This asymmetry of the motives may play an instrumental part, you know. There are purely military and geopolitical nuances as well, and they preclude a military solution to the problem. If the war begins, however, it will be on a scale larger than the one before. It will mean a new bloodshed and new victims. Nobody needs it. That's what our stand comes down to.

Question: Is independence from Armenia possible as well?

David Babajan: Researchers usually view the Yerevan-Stepanakert connection from the economic standpoint. Stepanakert does depend on Yerevan from this angle. On the other hand, there is more to the general idea of sovereignty than this. It cannot be measured.

Nagorno-Karabakh is an important ethnic and political component for Armenia. The Armenians lost their statehood more than once, their territories were subjected to ethnic purges on more than one occasion. The last one took place in the Ottoman Empire in 1915. All of that developed a complex of victims in the Armenians resulting in assimilation abroad. After all, it is more preferable for people to identify themselves with winners, say with the Americans.

Nagorno-Karabakh is different. It offered an alternative.

Nagorno-Karabakh restored our faith in our own strength. Hence its importance in the pan-Armenian world.

Question: Does Nagorno-Karabakh count on sovereignty or on becoming a part of Armenia?

David Babajan: We fought for reunification but this movement eventually evolved into the struggle for complete sovereignty which is more attractive from the standpoint of economic development. In any case, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh have a lot in common, the degree of integration is quite high. What counts, however, going back is no longer an option. There are various options we may choose among, but not a single one of them stipulates being a part of Azerbaijan. As for whether Nagorno-Karabakh becomes sovereign or a part of Armenia, time will show.
