
Yerevan In The Clutch Of Geopolitical Poles (Second Round)

By Susanna Petrosyan
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President Serzh Sargsyan's declaration about joining the Customs Union did not put an end to geopolitical processes around Armenia. Moscow won the first round of the struggle. The second round has already started. It is peculiar with topicality of the favourite issue of the West - the violation of human rights. Concerns about the problem were expressed by the US Embassy in Armenia and Human Rights Watch, urging the Armenian authorities to punish people responsible for attacking civil activists.

The reaction of the Europeans was very harsh, in general. But the violence targeted Russia, a country that, according to the EU, put pressure on Armenia, threatening to escalate the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone. The European Parliament considers pressure on any member of the Eastern Partnership program (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus) unacceptable. The countries are close to signing bilateral agreements on EU association.

Such evaluations and threats to alter the status quo of Nagorno-Karabakh if Armenia takes the European path were taken by Yerevan as a sign of intolerance between the West and Russia, a recurrence of the Cold War. Armenia is an object in the clutch of two poles. Using the awkward and hasty attempts by Yerevan to go for the West, the Kremlin expanded its unmeasured influence on the little ally.

Stepan Grigoryan, head of the Analytical Center for Globalization and Regional Cooperation, believes that, by deciding to join the Customs Union, the Armenian authorities handed over the security of their country to Russia: "The authorities hint that there are security problems. I agree with them. Security is in danger after this step.

The most essential problems of Armenia will be resolved in Moscow from now on. Secondly, we lose the chance of becoming a law-governed state."

Maybe Armenia should not have started the process of moving towards the West to avoid the situation of being forced into the Customs Union. Armenia was "asked" to join the Customs Union after numerous declarations by high-ranking functionaries of the Republican Party of Armenia. They said that Yerevan had taken the European path of development. People, including Shavarsh Kocharyan (Vice Chairman of the Republican Party, Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia), praising the association agreement, suddenly changed their attitude and became devoted supporters of the Customs Union on September 3.

Political analyst Yervand Bozoyan, explaining the choice between the EU and the Eurasian Union, noted that it was more of a geopolitical choice than a system of values: "Our society has no problems with choosing a system of values, because we are part of the European system. De facto, Armenia was forced to make the choice of the Customs Union." The political analyst assumes that Armenia, a state that has no common borders with the Customs Union, will have serious problems, including some in Nagorno-Karabakh: "It would be in the national, state interests of Armenia to bring its legal acts closer to the standards of members of the Customs Union, doing the

same process for the EU at the same time. This way we can become a link between the West and Russia. Armenia was not ready to join a big system."

Therefore, Yerevan forced itself into the Customs Union, depriving itself of a chance for manoeuvre. Meanwhile, Armenia's history has examples when some countries patiently waiting for the right moment made well-executed, rather than hasty steps towards the West, without creating threats to its national security or relations with Russia.

* Susanna Petrosyan, Yerevan. Exclusively for Vestnik Kavkaza

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