

The picture of Color Revolutions: Armenia & Azerbaijan

Caught in the whirl of big interests

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the countries of the West and international financial organizations based on the western capitals spent billions of dollars, provided technical and consulting assistance to mold the developmental processes of newly independent countries. The structural reforms which have lasted for more than a decade were to resolve one issue only: to lead the former Soviet republics down a predictable and “safe” road. Whether these reforms have been successful is a question for another time. Putin’s Russia, which is getting more and more active, has posed new challenges for the scenario adopted more than a decade ago. Declaring herself a “Eurasian country” Russia began to demonstrate signs of territorialism toward its neighbors, threatening the multi-billion investments of the West. It is difficult to forgive such a move even among seed sellers.

It seems that the West has decided to act. The drastic turn of the CIS countries towards real democracy and the West, through the necessity of “revolution” appears to have been strongly encouraged.

The West regarded the famous declaration signed by the 9 CIS presidents against OSCE as a rebellion. It appears that this has not been forgotten and will not be forgiven. The West began to deal with these very presidents (plus one) directly. The first “successes” echoed all over the world. Today, the images of Georgia and Ukraine are being artificially boosted and the brightness of roses and oranges are exaggerating the reality. The goal is clear: to encourage the societies of the neighboring countries to follow the same path by instigating jealousy.

Vox populi, vos dei¹

The international community tends to treat the South Caucasus as a whole, a unit comprising similar challenges and prospects. This equation characterizes almost all the western evaluations and approaches regarding Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. However, the Rose Revolution allowed Georgia to bypass that equation. As a result, it is now reserved for Armenia and Azerbaijan. For instance, in the annual assessment of the state of freedom in all countries published by the Freedom House (an international non-profit, nonpartisan organization, promoting democracy and freedom around the world) Armenia and Azerbaijan appear together in the bottom of the list regarding their exercise of democracy.

In what way will the current realities be challenged - indirect pressure, attempts to import and localize “color revolutions”, or does a modest role in the world make it difficult to anticipate such attention? The West offers a route that it has found through trial and error, but the final word is on the people.

However, these very people seem to be little worried about the current state of affairs. Armenia willingly lost its reputation of “an island of democracy”, which she gained through much efforts and hardships, and it looks like Azerbaijan does not even strive for such an image. Thus there is

¹ The voice of the people is the voice of God.

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little competition, but there is inertia that says, “There’s revolution in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. Let’s start one our own”. Advocates of such an approach argue that the public discontent has matured regarding both the internal and external atmosphere, and that the public is willing and is still in the streets. They say that the revolution really started a long time ago even as early as 2003. The leaders have fled home and the people are still in the streets.

Achilles’ heel

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In the cases of Armenia and Azerbaijan the issue has a subtle context and real light hues. History has shown that neither election fraud, nor increasingly congealing actions of the regimes, nor any other socio-political phenomena in Azerbaijan and Armenia can instigate masses to take to the streets. The only issue that can really incite a national movement in both countries is Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. But is it really in the interests of Armenian and Azeri people to develop a revolution or coup d’état through manipulation of the conflict?

The colors of the objective reality

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The status of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict affects the current state of affairs in Armenia and Azerbaijan almost identically. Were the Karabakh conflict put aside for a while, it would foster political change in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Any political change, especially a revolution, for a certain period increases instability and dangers born of uncertainty. Societies are afraid of such perils and choose to restrain their complaints and prefer to stagnate. This is perhaps the reason why it is in the interests of the elites of Armenia and Azerbaijan to keep the Karabakh issue in a state of kindling and not burning: not cold and not hot. In such a stake it will always inhibit demands for internal political changes.

From everything mentioned above, perhaps the best scenario for society and government in Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as peaceful resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict lies in rapid, unreserved democratization on both sides of the border. There is a challenge.

This policy brief was developed by ICHD on June 7, 2005 as a result of the discussion on the topic “Implications of Rose and Orange revolutions to the general situation in the SC region” and is based on the opinions of its participants: freelance analysts, state officials, and representatives of international organizations.

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