REVERSE THE NEGOTIATIONS FORMAT

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On May 22, 2022, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev held a summit under the mediation of the European Council President Charles Michel. This summit is the most recent of a series of meetings that were held between the two leaders as of March 29, 2019, within the framework of the so-called peace negotiations between Republic of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Summits between Pashinyan and Aliyev give rise to lots of speculations and analysis especially on the Armenian side due to fears of submitting to Aliyev's aggressive demands and behaviours. While outcomes of these summits and subsequent agreements, if any, remain vague, we can highlight five crucial observations and concerns regarding the format of these ongoing talks:

1. In three years, Pashinyan and Aliyev held at least seven official summits mediated by OSCE – Minsk Group (Russia, USA, France) and separately. It is legitimate to question about the outcomes of these meetings. This shrouded reality creates doubts about this most recent round of negotiations. The current impasse raises the question whether the mediators are powerless in making a breakthrough in these summits. A second speculation might be that due to the persistence of Azerbaijan nothing is being achieved. More worrisome, RoA is still behaving as the weak partner in these negotiations and not resorting to legal points of strength in pushing forward its demands.
2. Why Azerbaijan and the other mediators show high urgency for demarcation between RoA and Azerbaijan? Historically, by focusing on demarcation Azerbaijan aimed at discussing with Armenia the territorial integrity and sovereignty of both countries to exclude Artsakh from the debates. RoA fell in this trap by accepting to place demarcation as an urgency in current negotiations. This should not be an urgent concern. RoA should have refused to place it on the negotiation table before resolving several other urgent humanitarian issues. Furthermore, countries can coexist with pending demarcation problems without any tension; there are dozens of such disputes between countries throughout the world including between countries in Europe that currently have at least 40 cases of border issues.
3. Until 2019 the main mediator between RoA and Azerbaijan was OSCE – Minsk Group. Why is RoA accepting to attend 'negotiations' that are mediated by parties other than OSCE – Minsk Group? Summits and meetings can be mediated by different parties but should not be referred as 'negotiations.' More dangerously, why is RoA submitting to this crucial change in the format of negotiations knowing that this had been a historical demand of Azerbaijan? RoA should have insisted that the only acceptable mediator in its conflict with Azerbaijan remain OSCE – Minsk Group.
4. Since the format of negotiations is being changed, why RoA is not insisting on having Artsakh representatives participate? Excluding Artsakh from the table was an unacceptable mistake committed in the past. The current government should have insisted on having Artsakh at the table of negotiations alongside RoA and Azerbaijan, specially that its status is being discussed.

5. Negotiations over the final status of Artsakh must be based on the principle of right of any people to self-determination. This is a universal right that is not bound by time or certain events. It is an irreversible historical fact that the people of Artsakh voted for their independence on 10 December, 1991 and held a referendum. Current negotiations should not redefine these historical milestones and expose them to revisionist manipulations. Armenians in general and the current RoA government negotiators have a major role to play in defending the right to self-determination for Artsakh people.

Pashinyan cannot justify his submissive attitude by blaming the previous political leadership of RoA. It is true that past presidents made unacceptable and sometimes deadly mistakes during negotiations in the past. It is also true that commitments made by states should be respected; however, past negotiations are not written in stone and Pashinyan should create margins for manoeuvring and redressing certain crucial outcomes. Primarily, he should not accept the alterations in the format of negotiations imposed by Azerbaijan and others. He cannot continue acting as a powerless leader; he can show more rigour and determination in defending the national interests of Armenians in both RoA and Artsakh. Armenians had always been the recipients of proposals and plans in these negotiations and never were proactive by proposing solutions and demands and pursuing them. Isn't it time to change this attitude on the Armenian side? In this effort Diaspora can play a central role if the RoA representatives earnestly plan to recruit the support of Diaspora politicians, intellectuals, institutions, and media in raising the just demands of Armenians.

Comments

G. Nishan Gerj – 2022-06-11 21:41:54
It is so embarrassing to Armenia/Armenians, the cowtowing done by Pashinyan. The players other than Armenia/Artsakh, want to take what they can get. I hope that while this time of negotiations has transpired, that the Army has been strengthened, that modern armaments have bee acquired, that the country has strengthened itself so that negotiations can be made from a more powerful position.

Garabed – 2022-06-10 20:59:27
I do not think that NP is blaming the previous administrations to justify his lowering the bar in the negotiations. I think he is pointing to the previous administration because of the relentless attack on his administration by the extra-parliamentary opposition guided by the ex-presidents and led by sworn parliamentarians. The Diaspora is so much fragmented that it has no constructive role to play other than organizing Cartash car rally and evenings of Zartir Lao patriotic songs.. Also, let us do away with "Negotiations over the final status of Artsakh must be based on the principle of right of any people to self-determination." Negotiations are based on might, pure and simple. But the position of the present government is weakened because of who we are, much like who were and how faced losing historically watershed periods as we are facing now.. In the end, the regional powers will carve something for us. Hopefully the present government can have a larger scoop of the harissa that the regional powers will let us have.

Mardiros – 2022-06-10 19:29:21
I am glad that Keghart highlighted the issue of “demarcation”. It seems all major powers and our enemies are in a rush to get this done. Why? Of importance, Russia declared twice that Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) is part of Azerbaijan and is head over heels in “assisting” the process. Does that mean Artsakh will be forfeited? If Soviet maps are to be used, then for sure. Also, Nakhichevan will forever be gone. Furthermore, it means Armenia will have to recognize the border with Turkey as final. I wonder, the so called Kocharyan-Sargsyan-Vanetzyan-ARF “opposition”, all friends of Russia, what do they think about this extremely dangerous situation. Will they turn against Russia? So far there is not indication, and the contrary is true. May I suggest readers have a peek at Ara Papyan’s article about the issue of the borders? It’s in Keghart’s “Other Takes” section.



Tavo – 2022-06-10 14:23:02
Good ideas. Let's hope Pashinyan and his FM are listening.



Vahe Hayrikian – 2022-06-10 12:49:59
Totally agree with this editorial. Pashinyan should negotiate from strong position and should not blame his failures to others. Blaming others while he is in power will not help keep Armenia and Artsakh territorial integrity. The other options is for Pashinyan to resign giving opportunity to have a stronger leadership.