



Nagorno-Karabakh Republic will Vanish

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The separatist Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh will cease to exist on 1 January 2024, and its power structures will self-dissolve. This is the result of Nagorno-Karabakh's losses in battles with Azerbaijan. However, this will not end the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and bilateral negotiations will continue. The humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh remains difficult, with more than 88,700 Armenians already having fled the region.

What is the reason for the dissolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic?

The protracted peace talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, the rights of its population, and delimitation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border after the 2020 war won by the Azeris led to growing frustration on the part of the Azeri authorities. It eventually came to a decision to resolve the conflict militarily. After a quick victory in fighting with Nagorno-Karabakh forces on 19-20 September this year, Azerbaijan forced the authorities of this separatist republic to negotiate terms of surrender under the auspices of Russian peacekeepers present in the region. As part of the demilitarisation process agreed with Azerbaijan, the Karabakh side pledged to hand over armaments at their disposal. Subsequently, Nagorno-Karabakh President Samvel Shahramanyan signed a decree on 28 September liquidating the republic as of 1 January 2024, by which date its state structures are to be self-dissolved.

What is the humanitarian situation for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh?

Azerbaijan, which will take full control of Nagorno-Karabakh, is offering the choice to local Armenians to stay where they are and take Azerbaijani citizenship or leave their homes and go to Armenia. So far, 88,700 Armenians, or two-thirds of the official local population, have left Nagorno-Karabakh, doing so in haste and out of fear of ethnic cleansing. Kilometres-long traffic jams formed roads out of the region. It is very likely that almost all ethnic Armenians will decide to leave.

The Azerbaijani side has agreed to allow International Red Cross transports with food to enter Karabakh and has resumed supplying electricity and gas to the region, but the humanitarian situation on the ground remains very difficult.

Is this the end of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict?

Azerbaijan's seizure of Nagorno-Karabakh does not end the wider conflict with Armenia. Azerbaijan is demanding that Armenia open an extraterritorial route, the Zangezur transport corridor, through the southern part of Armenia to connect its territory with the Nakhichevan exclave. Armenia agreed to its establishment on the condition that the "corridor" remains under its exclusive control, although it is possible that it will eventually agree to have it overseen jointly with Azerbaijan with the support Russia. In addition, the issue of the delimitation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border remains unresolved. The disputed issues will be the subject of further negotiations between Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, scheduled for 5 October this year in Spain under the auspices of European Council President Charles Michel. However, as long as the two sides fail to reach an agreement, it is doubtful whether a peace treaty will be signed.

How can the EU and the U.S. respond to the crisis?

EU and U.S. representatives are calling on the Azerbaijani authorities to ensure the safety of Karabakh Armenians and to allow them to leave Nagorno-Karabakh freely, as well as to refrain from any renewed use of force against Karabakh (should there be resistance from local Armenians once again) or Armenia itself. In a telephone conversation

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between Aliyev and U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Michel, among others, the Azerbaijani side reportedly made such pledges. In addition, the U.S. and the EU are demanding that Azerbaijan agree to send an international monitoring mission to Nagorno-Karabakh, although at the current rate of the exodus of the local population, it is possible it will soon be pointless. If Azerbaijan violates its pledges to the EU and US representatives, Western leaders may decide to impose sanctions on the country. That prospect is for now unlikely, as the EU has a vested interest in importing Azerbaijani natural resources (oil and gas) and in preventing Turkey, Azerbaijan's ally, from allowing further waves of migrants and refugees from the Middle East to Europe.

How will the fall of Nagorno-Karabakh affect the situation in Armenia?

Anti-government protests have been sweeping through Armenia's capital, Yerevan, since Azerbaijan resumed military action against the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic on 19 September. The demonstrators are demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, accusing him of passivity and granting over-reaching concessions to Azerbaijan. The protests have so far been limited in nature, and for the moment are unlikely to lead to a change of power in Armenia. However, the anti-government sentiment could deepen if Pashinyan is forced to make further concessions to Azerbaijan on the course of the border or the transportation corridor. Pashinyan's removal from power would likely be in Russia's interest as it has expressed increasing dissatisfaction with his criticism of it and Armenia's pro-Western reorientation of its foreign policy.