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## COLORED REVOLUTIONS AND SOUTH CAUCASUS; FACTORS WHICH KEPT AZERBAIJAN AND ARMENIA AWAY FROM COLORED REVOLUTIONS

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### Summary

This paper briefly focuses on South Caucasus Region as a case study and aims to analyze the factors which kept Azerbaijan and Armenia away from the Color Revolutions. The wave of Color Revolutions was very evident in post-Soviet countries which also entered in South Caucasus, though it transformed the political scenery of Georgia but it could not proceed any further in the region. This paper compares the historical differences among Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, moreover, the efforts made by the authoritarian regimes in Azerbaijan and Armenia are also studied. Moreover, in this study further highlights the hurdles for Armenia and Azerbaijan in consolidation of democracy.

**Keywords:** Consolidation of Authoritarian Regime, Democracy, Color Revolution, Socialism, Market Based Economy, State Authority, Civil Society, Patronage, Arm Race.

### Introduction

The disintegration of USSR gave birth to fifteen independent republics, it was the time when cold war came to an end, capitalism overshadowed the communism, and the newly formed republics chose the democratic system to function with the market economy. The transition from highly planned and centralized communist economic setup to democratic, market based nation-state building was an uphill task, and proved to be very hard for most of the newly formed countries. The initial years of the post-Soviet republics were full of internal ethnic conflicts, political instability and

economic chaos and civil wars in some regions.

The post Soviet countries started their journey towards creating democratic system on western principles, but on pragmatic grounds, slight changes occurred in the power transfer of almost all the countries of the said regions. The personalities who were in power during the soviet rule, continued to enjoy even more power after the disintegration as now they were in charge of the whole countries respectively. We have to remember that there is a debate among the scholars whether the disintegration of USSR was a result of a revolution, or it was just a consequence of the events. The apparent democratic system and the market based economy were performing dual tasks, at one hand it was being shown to the world that the newly formed states are heading towards the ideas of democracy, their transition towards liberal economic concepts is in progress, but actually the system was acting as a slave to the elite who was not only governing the countries rather taking advantage from the privatization of public enterprises also.

It is said that the epidemic of the revolution is contagious, when this flame is ignited, it is very hard to cool it, the same happened with the rise of the new millennium. The events and the reasons were almost identical in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan which aggravated the Orange, Tulip and Rose revolutions respectively. The tiring rule of the corrupt governments, controversial elections results, suppression of the public as well as media contributed to enrage the public to resist in a non-violent manner against the power players to bring genuine democracy. The main actors of these revolutions were free media, opposition, youth organizations, and civil society and last but not the least the citizens of the countries under study. This paper emphasizes on South Caucasus region, and will analyze the reasons which kept Armenia and Azerbaijan away from the epidemic of Colored Revolution. What were the methods which were adapted by the authoritarian regimes to contain the public to resist and protest?

### **Post USSR Disintegration Scenario in South Caucasus**

*Georgia.* The post disintegration period was quite hard for the newly born independent Georgia; Zviad Gamsakhurdia sworn as the president of the state, and soon his power was discontinued as the consequence of coup. During the early years ethnic conflicts triggered which led the country towards civil war which continued till 1995. The economic situation of the country became worst, devaluation of currency, inflation, unemployment and disturbed balance of payments made it even harder to manage the internal economic affairs of the country. In view of this situation, government opted International Financial debts which at last reached 50% of the total GDP of the country. More currency notes were printed which resulted in more inflation and more taxes imposed on the public which increased the cost of living drastically.<sup>[1]</sup>

*Armenia.* Despite Armenia was one of those post Soviet states which avoided civil war after the disintegration, but the early years of Armenia were hard due to economic crisis due to Nagorno Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan. The full scale war which continued till 1994, at one side crippled the economy due to heavy war expenses; at the other hand it damaged the diplomatic ties with Turkey. Turkey ceased its border to Armenia in support of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Azerbaijan both lost the precious lives of thousands of people during this conflict which is still unresolved.<sup>[2]</sup>

The political situation of Armenia is not much different to the other post Soviet countries; the country was right from the initial day's victim of the corruption, and electoral discrepancies. Most of the elections held in the country were finalized with protest and unrest. The constitution provided quite legal base to the country, but actually it was hardly practiced by the authoritarian regimes. Logistic and energy crisis were at rise which acted as the major obstacle to development, the rail

tracks were badly affected because of the war which consequently locked the borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey, since Armenia is already land locked country, so tensions increased. Authoritarian regime opted the device of suppression to control the masses; hence, true democracy could have not been established.<sup>[3]</sup>

*Azerbaijan.* Azerbaijan got independent in 1991, briefly after the independence, the war on Nagorno Karabakh conflict broke out, which made Azerbaijan to lose 16% of its total territory, around one million people displaced, and thousands lost lives. The ten year rule of President Heydar Aliyev was very authoritarian and he kept strengthening the roots of his rule, democracy was not given the chance to prevail in the country. After Heyder Aliyev his son Ilham Aliyev assumed power through highly controversial elections which were declared highly unfair and not free by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The rule of Ilham Aliyev brought fully authoritarian system in the country, and opposition was hardly suppressed, same was the case of media, and the freedom of expression situation.<sup>[4]</sup>

### **Rose Revolution of Georgia**

The prolonged rule of Shevardnadze from 1992 to 2001 was full of authoritarianism, corruption, obstruction of human rights, economic instability. The tolerance of the people was being tested for a long time, until the parliamentary elections of 2003. The opposition under the leadership of Saakashvili started resistance against the dictatorship, civil society joined hands with the youth organizations and media, and later the masses finalized the revolution which is called as Rose Revolution. This revolution is special because it was non violent and peaceful, yet powerful enough to step down the dictator like Shevardnadze, for the first time after the independence Georgia was going to see a democratic system based on western principles.<sup>[5]</sup>

### **Suppressive Efforts Towards Revolution Devices by Azerbaijan and Armenian Governments**

*Media.* Media played a vital role in bringing awareness among the people during colored revolutions, the reporting of the events in progress was as important as contributing in the events to make the corrupt and authoritarian regimes step down from power. Using suppression tools against the media was a ritual by the governments in the post Soviet countries, but during and after the time of colored revolutions this ritual was taken more seriously as a preempted measure against the freedom of expression.<sup>[6]</sup> In Azerbaijan the media and press has always been targeted in a very severe manner allegedly by the regimes for example, violence, extra judicial arrests, and even murders of the prominent journalists has been in practice. According to the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, around 50 journalists were victimized in the form of violence of several types only during the year 2009. Apart from the physical violence, state interferes in financial matters of the press as well, companies are threatened not to advertise through the free media, in such way the media houses end up facing even difficulties in paying the salaries to their employees. Repressive legislation is also a part of repressing the media houses; moreover government bribes the journalist to report in alignment of the government hence yellow journalism is promoted by the state.<sup>[7]</sup>

The situation of the freedom of media is not much different in Armenia as well, the shutdown of media outlets, direct or indirect control by the government, politicization, strict censorship were the primary actions of the rulers to repress the free voices. Moreover there are many examples of violence and murders of the journalists, the criticizers of the government were called as biased or

challenging the state authority. These pressures were increased after the colored revolutions.<sup>[8]</sup>

*Civil Society.* From the last many decades, the existence of civil society is missing in Azerbaijan in genuine sense; same is the case with democracy. Although there are 2100 registered civil society organizations in Azerbaijan but, they are in quasi-control of the government, opposition or the Soviet-era elites. The people have the impression that the government is the ultimate savior and the safeguard for their rights, because the governments have been quite autocratic, and people have been informed in one way flow of information. Civil society organizations have not been allowed to do what they are supposed to do because this is always a threat to autocracy. In Armenia there is presence of civil society organizations which are working for the promotion of democracy and human rights, at the same time there are civil society organizations which are operated by the government, however the independent organizations are not involved in policy making activities.<sup>[9]</sup>

*Opposition.* The opposition has not been able to perform its role in Armenia, the way it played its role in Georgia during the Rose revolution, because the autocratic governments have never allowed the opposition to get strong enough to retaliate.<sup>[10]</sup> In Azerbaijan, the Soviet elites were the influential people in politics, and they retained their hegemony by strengthening the regime party, it made the opposition parties to be feeble and fragmented. There is another example of the friendly opposition in Azerbaijan, for example the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan was once considered to be the hardliner opposition and anti government, but as the passage of time its stance became softer and it became 'constructive' or 'moderate' opposition. The people have not been sure about any party to be a true opposition; at least once every party has been named to be the government's puppet.<sup>[11]</sup>

There are several similarities between Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding the shortcomings which were the factors to prevent colored revolution virus to spread in both of the countries. The autocratic regimes learnt the lesson from Georgia that the opposition should be made limited by using any mean, for example in Azerbaijan YAP created a new elite group "the young elite" by providing different advantages to the youth to win their support. In both of the countries the opposition did the same mistake of being unorganized and isolated with each other. The Russian support to the Armenian regime kept it strengthened the abundance of oil and gas revenues enabled the Azerbaijani government to deal with the virus of revolution before the epidemic breaks out.<sup>[12]</sup>

*Elections.* It is very hard to say that there were transparent or free and fair elections conducted in Armenia, right from the time of independence people are doubtful regarding the election results, it is also common to employ the rigging and fraud devices in the election to change the results in the favor of the ruling party. The genuine political competition is lacking, the opposition's role is also ambiguous and sometimes friendly towards the ruling party.<sup>[13]</sup> The situation in Azerbaijan is also similar, the authoritarian regimes strived best to remain in power through every mean majorly through manipulating the elections, for example during the elections of 2005 the Central Election Commission of Azerbaijan though had the direction to media to equally cover all the candidates equally, but it never stopped it to extensively cover the party of the president.<sup>[14]</sup>

### **Critical Hurdles for Armenia and Azerbaijan in the way of Genuine Democracy**

*Energy Resources of Azerbaijan.* There are scholarly debates going on regarding the pros and cons of the natural resources of the country particularly the energy resources like oil and gas. The scholars like Terry Lynn Karl and Michael L. Ross have asserted the concept of "resource curse", according to their theory the main hurdle for a country to become democratic is the natural resources, especially when the country is depending on a single natural resource. The government takes the control of the sole resource, and become a monopoly, which makes limits the economic

role of the private sector limited rather private enterprises become midget, for every single thing they have to depend on the government. The increased and inevitable dependence make these private organizations to take government's side and endorse all blacks and white the government does. The influential people within the government sector make connections with the private sector influential people and end up in the form of an unbeatable cartel. The affects of such phenomenon are deep, the governments are earning large sum of revenues so they hardly need public to pay taxes, when citizens are not paying taxes, they have very little or no representation remained. It is to be remembered that a country works like an enterprise, the people pay taxes and they need the government to serve them in return, when there is no tax mechanism, the people become totally dependent and voiceless which strengthens the authoritarian roots of the regimes. Authority speaks in the form of powerful law enforcement agencies to silent the voice of the people, at the same time governments do not allow civil society to nurture in the country, hence the people are left unaware, unrepresented and underdeveloped regarding the ideas of freedom and democracy. The same things happened in Azerbaijan, with the disintegration, oil resources were the sole available solution to repair the shattered economy. By the rise of Hayder Aliyev, the foreign investment in the country started arriving in the energy sector, government was the in charge of the oil resources, and the supreme negotiator as the head of the state, who received legitimacy from the private sector too. The oil money was used to spend on the social activities to win the support of the people and to crack down the civil society organizations, these measures by this time made Azerbaijan a completely authoritarian regime led country.<sup>[15]</sup>

*Russian Patronage to Armenian authoritarian regime.* The relations between Russian and Armenia are of a prime importance in the South Caucasus geo-politics, Russian is the main investor, holds its military base in Armenia, and Armenia see Russia as the sole guarantor of the peace in the region as well as the safe guard for Armenia. Moreover Armenia is dependent on Russia regarding the supply of energy resources, as it has quite hostile relations with Azerbaijan which has consequently made its relations mutilated with Turkey as well, in such scenario, Armenia remains in an isolated position in the region. There is a discussion regarding Russia's role to stop democratic transition in Armenia, there are many reasons for this, first, Armenia is a tool for Russia to continue its hegemony in the South Caucasus Region because Azerbaijan has a balanced foreign policy which make her friendly with west as well as with east, Georgia after the Rose revolution is already on the democratic track and Russian interference is discouraged there. Armenia is the only country who considers Russia to be it security partner, as Armenia is also a security state having territorial issues with its neighbors. The authoritarian regime of Armenia is the best source for Russia to manipulate its role in the region, in order to keep the support continued, Russia needs the authoritarian government to prevail in Armenia. After the rise of democracy, it is difficult to live with hostility, as economy is deeply associated with peace.<sup>[16]</sup>

*Nagorno-Karabakh dispute.* The conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia is not new; its roots can be traced back to the end of World War I. During this time this territorial disagreement remained active despite the legality of Nagorno-Karabakh as the part of Azerbaijan, even when both of the countries came into Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union both of the countries strived to get Nagorno-Karabakh annexed with their countries respectively, the immature democracies led to a full scale war instead of reaching to a peaceful agreement through dialogue.<sup>[17]</sup> The issue is still unresolved between Azerbaijan and Armenia though there is ceasefire, as a repercussion Turkey also closed its borders to Armenia in support of Azerbaijan in 1993. Azerbaijan lost 17% of its total area, lives lost at both sides, and the ethnic Azerbaijanis were forced to leave the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh making it one of the largest

displaced populations in the world.<sup>[18]</sup> This conflict has engaged both of the countries in unending arm race, and hostilities have increased day by day, because both of the countries are ruled by the authoritarian governments who want to prolong their rule, the Nagorno Karabakh issue is played as a card to get mass support. The process of democracy resolve conflicts and bring sustainability in the countries, it is said that the democracies do not afford wars, in both of the countries the democracies have been ceased to nurture by using more or less the same methods. Russia has supported Armenia in this issue, although its apparent stance is that the issue should be resolved, for this resolution Russia has suggested to deploy its forces in the affected area, but this is also not unknown that Russia's interests are served if this issue remains unresolved.<sup>[19]</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The strategies which were used by the authoritarian regimes of Armenia and Georgia were almost identical, as a preemptive measure to stop aggravating the ideas of the colored revolutions in their respective countries. It was made sure that the civil society should be as suppressed as possible, alternatives were introduced such as government owned or aligned civil society, who could rarely resist and spread the ideas of freedom and democracy among the people. Legislations were done to complicate the registration, operation and fund raising activities of the civil society. The dictators learnt that a free media can change the destiny of the country, so they remained no stone unturned to keep media restricted and controlled through legislation and unlawful use of power. Media personnel were bribed to write and report in favor of the government, those who could not be purchased were treated harshly through violence, many journalists lost their lives. In a democracy, the opposition plays the most vital role by criticizing the government and educating the people through media and civil society about the usurpation of their rights. In Armenia and Azerbaijan the opposition's role has been quite limited, either they have been too weak to criticize the governments or they acted as friendly opposition in exchange of benefits. Free and fair elections guarantee the sustainability of a true democracy, it was seen that though the elections were conducted in regular intervals but as they were not transparent so the results were always same. The autocratic regimes always make sure that the people remain underdeveloped, dependent, unaware, insecure and naive; such condition of the citizens is most suitable for these regimes to linger on their power play as long as they want. The citizens are the most powerful and resilient force to bring change in a country, all the preemptive measures mentioned in the paper at last affects the freedom of thought and expression of the people. Media, civil society, opposition, external support etc are the tools to mobilize the masses, once it is done, it is nearly impossible to stop them, the same happened in Georgia, Ukraine and in Kyrgyzstan in the form of colored revolutions.

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