



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Azerbaijan is not worried about pressure from European institutions



Azerbaijan is about to leave the Council of Europe, an organisation established to protect and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law across the continent.

Faced with pressure for non-cooperation with Council missions and numerous reports of the abuse of democracy, Azerbaijan announced this week that it will suspend its participation in the organisation until further notice.

The split on the horizon is not an issue for Azerbaijan, which they communicated indirectly. But on the other hand, it creates a problem for various European mechanisms in terms of the effectiveness of their influence.

Almost all countries on the continent are members of the Council of Europe, established in 1949 as a watchdog of democracy and human rights. Due to the aggression against Ukraine, Russia withdrew on its own at the beginning of 2022, faced with a decision on expulsion.

The quarrels turned into conflict

The situation with Azerbaijan, however, has no connection with the Russian case of a colossal violation of fundamental agreed European principles and, as such, has become a new challenge for the European practice of democracy.

At the initiative of the representative of Germany, Frank Schwabe, an MP from Chancellor Olaf Scholz's SPD at the beginning of this week, the delegation of Azerbaijan was denied credentials to participate in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe during January.

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This decision was a response to Azerbaijan's

refusal to receive the Council of Europe's observation mission during the presidential elections scheduled for February 7.

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The reprimand of the parliamentarians in the Council of Europe was supposed to be a punishment. However, it has become a conflict with Azerbaijan, which could easily result in the country's withdrawal from the European organisation.

Why are there no sanctions against Azerbaijan?

Azerbaijan has a negative record in European institutions regarding the state of democratic institutions and the rule of law. Because of this, it has often been the subject of initiatives regarding sanctions.

One of the most severe ones was **launched** last October by a majority in the European Parliament in protest at Azerbaijan's military action in the disputed area of Nagorno-Karabakh, after which more than 100,000 Armenians left the region.

However, the absence of any EU sanctions against Azerbaijan exposed the rift between European forums concerned with the state of democracy and the real levers of continental power.

The pressure on Azerbaijan in the Council of Europe was supposed to be another in a series of reminders sent to Baku that many European countries are dissatisfied with the state of democracy in Azerbaijan.

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However, the harsh response from Baku showed that it understands well that it should

not expect any real pressure from that area or any threat to its interests.

“For Azerbaijan, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is of no importance, to say nothing of the silencing of its voice there”, the Azerbaijani Report agency wrote in a comment, reflecting the mood of the government and the president.

Baku adheres to the logic according to which EU leaders ignored the recommendations of the European Parliament last autumn and did not resort to impose any sanctions against Azerbaijan, and will apply the same principle in the case of a far less influential organisation such as the Council of Europe.

Business remains untouched

A possible withdrawal from this organisation would not be a problem for Azerbaijan. The circle of its partners, including European ones, would not be reduced by this, nor would the quality of their partnership suffer because of it.

Deficits of democracy, the rule of law, and political freedoms in the country are more than evident. However, they will not influence Europe to reduce, let alone terminate, its developed energy arrangements with Azerbaijan.

Its leader, Aliyev, confirmed last December that Europe had expressed interest in doubling gas imports from Azerbaijan by 2027 and promised Baku would meet the request.

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Azerbaijan has become a **significant source** for European markets in diversifying gas sources after separating from Russian supplies following its aggression against Ukraine.

During that period, Azerbaijan increased gas exports to Europe from 8 billion cubic metres before the Russian attack on Ukraine to around 12 billion cubic metres last year.

The projected growth of this arrangement with the EU should reach 20 billion cubic metres by 2027, which would account for half of Azerbaijan's total exports.

Existing sparks in the Council of Europe will not disrupt the significant and long-term trade relations between Europe and Azerbaijan, even at the cost of expulsion or voluntary withdrawal of Azerbaijan from this organisation.

Due to long-term inertia, the mechanism of European pressure to strengthen democracy and the rule of law will no longer be as effective as it has been until now.

