

## **SERBIA SPOKE OUT IN DEFENSE OF AZERBAIJAN<sup>2</sup>**

On 02.05.2024, members of the delegation of Serbia to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), consisting of 7 people, has sent an appeal to President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Theodoros Roussopoulos, objecting the resolution, regarding the Azerbaijani delegation credentials to PACE<sup>3</sup>. Serbian parliamentarians asked Rousopoulos to begin the reinstatement procedure of the Azerbaijani delegation to PACE, from which it was excluded due to failure to comply with the organization's instructions and neglect of its obligations to it. In particular, it concerned violations by the Azerbaijani authorities of respect for human rights and an independent judicial system in the country and the issue of political prisoners, as well as about preventing PACE observers from monitoring the extraordinary presidential elections in Azerbaijan and blocking the of the PACE delegation entry to Berdzor (Lachin) for assessments “on the ground” of the situation with the process of expulsion from their homeland of more than 100 thousand Karabakh Armenians.

In their letter, the Serbian parliamentarians levelled several reproaches against PACE, which, in their opinion, does not respect the fundamental values of democracy and violates its own principles as enshrined in the Statute of the Parliamentary Assembly. Appeals were made on the principle of “stating of the immutable fact”, without the slightest hint of argumentation, without talking about the authoritarianism of the Aliyev regime, about Baku's blatant disregard of its obligations, the willful and unilateral interpretation of international law and so on.

In practical terms, the message of the Serbian parliamentarians has no benefit, because President Roussopoulos is not able to overrule a decision taken by a general vote of the Assembly of the Council of Europe. Nor does he have the authority to personally initiate new discussions on this issue with a view to revote, and even if this may happen and a new vote will be held, then 7 pro-Azerbaijani Serbian votes are not able to change anything in the “for” and “against” votes ratio, because the Azerbaijani delegation was excluded by the decision of the overwhelming majority of PACE deputies. Consequently, there is only a symbolic, demonstrative act of solidarity between Belgrade and Baku, which is propagandistic and of value to Azerbaijan.

In Azerbaijan itself, the PACE decision provoked a stormy reaction, resulting in a large-scale campaign in the media and on political platforms to denigrate this European

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<sup>2</sup> The original article (in Russian) was submitted to the Editorial office on 11.02.2024.

<sup>3</sup> Telegram. “Full appeal of the Serbian delegation to PACE to the chairman of the organization Roussopoulos”, 05.02.2024, <https://t.me/MaidenTower/45887?comment=1156993> (download date: 11.02.2024).

organization and its “destructive” activities, aimed at allegedly interfering in the Azerbaijan’s internal affairs and trampling on its sovereign rights. Incidentally, this very organization, which until recently was considered one of the successful platforms of cooperation of AzR with representatives of the European political establishment ready to make deals with devil and Azerbaijan, as evidenced by numerous facts.

Nowadays, Baku’s behavior does not imply even a hint of readiness to constructively discuss and evaluate its shortcomings in the context of work in PACE, and the reasoned decision of this organization on the temporary suspension of Azerbaijani membership is qualified only as a hostile act towards AzR, forcing it to react with confrontational rhetoric and in an ultimatum tone. The highest political leadership of Azerbaijan is primarily engaged in inflating such a position. Personally, I. Aliyev has repeatedly demonstrated his irreconcilable position on this issue by openly resorting to blackmail and ultimatum demands. For example, on 01.02.2024, at a meeting with the Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Martin Chungong in Baku, the Azerbaijani leader directly threatened PACE with Azerbaijan’s withdrawal from this organization and not only from it. In his words: “*If the rights of the Azerbaijani delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) are not restored, Baku will reconsider its participation in the Council of Europe and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)*”<sup>4</sup>.

At the same time, the tone and rhetoric of Baku clearly indicate that official Azerbaijan is concerned about what happened, since the PACE decision does not reflect so much the mood within this organization, how many tendencies on change the individual approaches of European countries to the South Caucasus geopolitical issues in general and to the fact of Baku’s application on hegemony in the region, in particular. The synchronization of these processes with the steps of the Russian Federation to “exclude” the South Caucasus from integration programs and processes with the West in the eyes of the European community appears to be a serious threat to its vital interests. And it is possible that the PACE decision was only the “first swallow” in the plans to “land” Baku and its return to the geopolitical course required by the West. After all, the *demarche* announced to Azerbaijan in PACE by chain reaction may also “rebel” other European platforms, which can always find reasons for this. Such a course of affairs is not good for Aliyev, given the bulk of problems with the legitimacy of his personal power and the international legal lawfulness of Azerbaijan’s latest actions against Armenians of Karabakh.

Perhaps anticipation of the expected problems with European structures and individually with countries playing a decisive role in these structures compels Baku to seek allies to at least partially curb Europe’s political onslaught. Even if this support is of no practical use at this stage. The main thing now is clamor, *agiotage*, appearance of solidarity of “*healthy national forces*” against the “*bureaucratic dominance over them by supranational European structures*”.

It seems that the Serbs hardly, on their own initiative, wished to expose themselves to this Baku’s scam, or at least did it unselfishly. It must be assumed that there is a lot of

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<sup>4</sup>RBC: “Aliyev threatened PACE with Azerbaijan’s withdrawal from the Council of Europe”, 01.02.2024, (in Rus.), <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/01/02/2024/65bb87049a794783ef166344> (download date: 10.02.2024).

mutual interests and attachments of a completely material nature between Baku and Belgrade, which the Azerbaijanis reminded of and forced Serbian politicians to get involved in the process of defending Azerbaijan. In other words, there is a price for such protection. Obviously, Belgrade was explicitly asked from Baku to work out this price (discussed below), at least retroactively, since the Serbian delegation to PACE was not present at the hearings and voting on Azerbaijan, which they argued in letter to Roussopoulos with reference to the December elections to the Serbian Assembly, which prevented them from leaving Belgrade.

In any case, the appeal of the Serbian MPs was irrational and, moreover, was announced at absolutely the wrong time: it was in the days of its publication that criminal cases were widely discussed in Germany and throughout Europe in connection with the receipt by several German PACE deputies of substantial bribes from Baku<sup>5</sup>. And therefore, for many in Europe, the Belgrade letter hung with the “scent” of Azerbaijani caviar familiar in the West.

And now about the price promised before. However, this price does not include caviar, which for Baku is only an auxiliary product for encouraging its friends and associates, but Azerbaijani gas, which will be delivered by pipeline from Bulgaria to Serbia already in 2024, and, of course, weapons worth hundreds of millions of dollars, which Serbia in turn provides to Azerbaijan<sup>6</sup>. And finally, to this list we can add the support promised by Aliyev to his “close friend Vučić” in the Kosovo issue, which supposedly has the same roots with the Karabakh issue and, therefore, is as if to be solved in the same way.

The price of the issue, apparently, is not small, and Belgrade “had no reason” to refuse an appeal to Roussopoulos, saturated with reproaches to PACE, even if it causes indignation in this European structure.

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<sup>5</sup> See “Two German ex-deputies of PACE are accused of receiving bribes from Azerbaijan,” 30.01.2024 (in Rus.), <https://factor.am/ru/50419.html> (download date: 10.02.2024).

<sup>6</sup> See “Economicheskaya Pravda”: “Serbia will purchase gas from Azerbaijan, reducing dependence on the Russian Federation”, 15.11.2023 (in Rus.), <https://www.epravda.com.ua/rus/news/2023/11/15/706646/>, also “Military Review”: “Serbia plans to supply about 50 150-mm NORA self-propelled guns to an unnamed country”, 12.12.2023 (in Rus.), <https://topwar.ru/232091-serbija-planiruet-postavit-okolo-50-155-mm-sau-nora-nenazvannoj-strane.html> (download date: 10.02.2024).