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UNDERSTANDING NAGORNO-KARABAKH DESPITE THE BIASED MANNER OF THE WESTERN MEDIA

Tutku DİLAVER

Analyst

The 45-day-long operation carried out by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh is one of the most important developments in 2020. While a clean page is turning after the 30-year-long occupation, the western media showed interest to this breaking news. However, the news aired in some media organizations, especially the ones based in Europe and the U.S., did not reflect the Nagorno-Karabakh issue objectively and ignored the valid ground of Azerbaijan.

One of the most striking examples among the organizations with this perspective is Euronews, which covers world news from a European perspective. It can be easily seen that Euronews, a French-based broadcaster, emphasizes the Armenian perspective in most of the reports in English and Turkish on the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict.[1] When the contents of the news reports are examined, it is understood that some statements of the Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders are used to redirect the public opinion and to strengthen the victim image of Armenia.[2]

A very remarkable report was published in Euronews recently which evaluated the year 2020. When the content of this news report is examined closely, the extent of the biased news reporting can be seen more clearly. At the beginning of this report, it is stated that the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 reshaped the map of the region.[3] However, this information is very incomplete. Because the lands liberated from occupation by the operations conducted by Azerbaijan in 2020 are Azerbaijani territory as it can be determined in the UN Resolutions. According to the ceasefire agreement, no land belonging to Armenia was given to Azerbaijan. From this viewpoint, the perception that the map has changed shows a quite biased attitude.

In addition to this, in the report, the question of what triggered the clashes in Karabakh on September 27th was asked, and the answer was that clashes have always taken place in the region, but they have never been experienced together on such a large scale.[4] However, in 2016, Azerbaijan, in response to the fire opened by Armenia, embarked on an operation and saved some strategic hills from the Armenian occupation. On the other hand, on July 2020, Armenia attacked Tovuz and martyred Major General Polat Hashimov, who took part in the 2016 war. Lastly, as it can be remembered, another reason that

triggered the conflicts in September is the statement of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan Karabakh is Armenia. Period. In this respect, it is quite remarkable that Euronews does not include any of this information in its news report and does not answer the question it poses. It is seen that instead of this information, Prime Minister Pashinyan's statements such as "We did not attack anyone, we are just defending" are included in the report.

The fact that statements about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict such as the oldest conflict in the world[5] are included in the news report gives the impression that the issue is not followed very well. The problems related to the changing of the demographic structure in the Caucasus turned into conflict after two important developments such as the collapse of Tsarist Russia and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and its surrounding 7 regions occurred after the 1992-1994 Nagorno-Karabakh War. It does not seem right to consider the 30-year-long occupation as the oldest conflict in the world.

The allegations raised against Turkey concerning the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and propaganda activities carried out regarding Syrian militants being sent to the region further fueled opposition towards Turkey, which was already present in the Western media. In this framework, it is observed that the close relationship between Azerbaijan and Turkey, which has disputes with the West on numerous subjects in relation to the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean, is also attempted to be reframed in an anti-Western framework. It is seen that after the ceasefire on November 9th which took place under the leadership of Russia, the involvement of Turkey in this process also disturbed Euronews just as it disturbed many other Western media organizations. In this evaluation news report, statements such as Turkey and Russia increased their sphere of influence and excluded France out of this process were mentioned.[6] Through drawing attention to the ties between France and Armenia, it is understood that a perception such as Turkey and Russia tried to cut off the ties between France and Armenia. However, as a member of the Minsk Group, Turkey has continuously declared its support to the negotiation process carried out by the co-chairs until today. The fact that especially France started to act in a way that would overshadow the neutrality of the Minsk Group created a situation in which France in particular harmed the process. The two co-chairs of the Minsk Group, the US and France, were late to react to the situation; in fact, France went too far to the point of announcing that it will support Armenia due to its anti-Turkey stance. When viewed from this framework, saying that Turkey or Russia excluded France from the process will not go beyond a superficial interpretation.

The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh news featured in Euronews is not the first and only news. This and similar news reports can be seen especially in places where the Armenian diaspora is densely populated. The use of false, incomplete and one-sided sources is one of the reasons for the making of such news. However, the inclusion of such news by an organization that is expected to broadcast within the framework of certain standards in the European Union causes the understanding of impartial journalism to be questioned.

[1] For instance, in this news report by Euronews, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is being conveyed through the viewpoint of Valya Yegiazaryan, who is a resident in Lachin: Nagorno-Karabakh Truce: Residents Face an Uncertain Future, *Euronews*, November 18, 2020, https://www.euronews.com/2020/11/18/nagorno-karabakh-truce-residents-face-an-uncertain-future.

[2] In the aforementioned news report, it is included that İlham Aliyev rejected the claims of Turkeys involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and of Syrian militants. However, despite this statement of Aliyev, it is understood that right after Aliyevs statement, an attempt is made on creating a perception like Azerbaijan confessing the acquiring of armed drones from Turkey. Türkiye'nin Yoğun 2020 Diplomasisi: Doğu Akdeniz, Suriye, Dağlık Karabağ, Fransa, Libya Dosyaları, *Euronews*, 27 Aralık 2020, https://tr.euronews.com/2020/12/27/turkiye-nin-yogun-2020-diplomasisi-dogu-akdeniz-suriye-dagl-k-karabag-fransa-libya-dosyala.

[3] Review of the Year: Azerbaijan takes the upper hand in Nagorno-Karabakh, *Euronews*, December 23, 2020, https://www.euronews.com/2020/12/23/review-of-the-year-azerbaijan-takes-the-upper-hand-in-nagorno-karabakh.

[4] Review of the Year: Azerbaijan takes the upper hand in Nagorno-Karabakh, *Euronews*.

[5] Review of the Year: Azerbaijan takes the upper hand in Nagorno-Karabakh, *Euronews*.

[6] Review of the Year: Azerbaijan takes the upper hand in Nagorno-Karabakh, *Euronews*.

About the Author :

Tutku Dilaver graduated from the Department of International Relations of Ankara University Faculty of Political Sciences in 2015. In 2020, Dilaver completed her Master degree in the Caucasus Studies Program under the Department of International Relations at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University Institute of Social Sciences. She has been pursuing her doctoral studies at Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University.

After her completion of a six-month trainee program in the Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM) in August 2017, she joined AVİM as a Scholar in Residence. She worked as an Analyst at AVİM between 2019-2023.

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Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

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