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Ressort: Politik

Schools, religion and the state

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In recent days, protests related to dress regulations have reportedly taken place among some students and teachers at several schools in Azerbaijan, particularly in the capital, Baku. Unfortunately, these protests have not always remained peaceful. Some individuals have reportedly engaged in provocative actions, breaking school windows, damaging public property and, most importantly, disrupting the educational process. It has even been reported that a school principal's car was set on fire at one of the schools.

Let us briefly examine the legal background of this issue.

On 22 July 2026, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev signed a decree amending several presidential decrees in connection with amendments to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On General Education." As part of this process, corresponding amendments were also made to the presidential decree implementing the Law "On General Education," originally dated 29 March 2019 and numbered 1532-VQ.

Subsequently, the Cabinet of Ministers approved dress requirements for teaching staff working in state general education institutions. The purpose of the relevant document is to establish a professional dress culture and ensure a consistent approach to dress standards in state schools. In other words, the issue concerns the application of certain dress requirements to teachers in educational institutions. The legal meaning and scope of these requirements should be assessed in accordance with the relevant regulatory documents.

Although the amendments and the relevant decree do not explicitly mention the hijab or any specific item of religious clothing, many people interpret these decisions as measures directed against the hijab. However, a uniform school dress code for students has already been in place in Azerbaijani general education schools for several years.

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Some individuals and commentators in Azerbaijan allege that foreign influence, including possible involvement by neighbouring Iran, the Islamic Republic of Iran, may be behind these protests.

Whether there is any officially confirmed information supporting these allegations requires separate investigation. Nevertheless, discussions in the media and on social networks about Iran's possible influence on these events can be found both openly and indirectly.

Those who raise these concerns point to past allegations of interference in Azerbaijan's domestic affairs, periods of tension in Azerbaijani-Iranian relations, and critical statements by Iranian officials regarding Azerbaijan's cooperation with Israel. Reports alleging that slogans aligned with Iran's political position have been voiced during the protests have also intensified these discussions.

Furthermore, the extensive coverage of these protests by Iranian media, as well as expressions of open support for the protesters in some cases, have attracted attention. However, extensive media coverage or expressions of political support do not, in themselves, prove that the protests were organised from abroad. Reliable and verifiable evidence would be required to substantiate such a conclusion.

One point deserves particular emphasis: under the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan is a secular state. This principle is enshrined in the country's constitutional framework. State governance is based on the Constitution and legislation rather than religious rules.

Azerbaijan also has a historical tradition of secular governance. Established in 1918, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic went down in history as the first parliamentary democratic republic in the Muslim East.

Article 18 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan stipulates that religion is separate from the state and that all religious beliefs are equal before the law.

In discussing all these issues, it is essential to respect both the rule of law and the normal functioning of the educational process, as well as people's constitutional rights and freedoms. Public debate should be based not on emotions and speculation, but on legal principles, verifiable facts and sound reasoning.

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