



THE NORKET DISTRICT

Background

Norket and Darbek are neighboring countries that find themselves in an historic period of transition. Darbek is a newly independent state. Prior to gaining its independence, Darbek was part of the Empire, a large, multi-ethnic country historically organized along authoritarian socialist lines. Norket is a newly emerging democracy that has been slowly making a transition from 45 years of totalitarian rule. Until the recent dissolution of the Empire, Norket had been in the Empire's "sphere of influence". Both Norket and Darbek are members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN).

The Norket District

The state of Darbek is divided into districts. One of these districts, the Norket District, had been a source of ethnic tensions for many years before the rise of the Empire. With the dissolution of the Empire and the decrease in its control over the region, the Norket District is re-emerging as a potential flashpoint.

Located along the Norket-Darbek border, the Norket District is relatively small in comparison to other Darbek districts. It was originally settled mostly by ethnic Norkets, and Norkets continue to claim that Norket control of the territory of the modern Norket District traces back more than 1500 years. The Norkets claim that the Darbeks' control over the land, which lasted for at least a millennium, was the result of illegitimate aggression by the ancestors of the modern Darbek nation. Darbeks claim that they were a majority in the District until Darbek was incorporated into the Empire. Darbeks argue that the Norkets struck a deal with the Empire which allowed the Norkets to deport ethnic Darbeks from the Norket District. As part of the same negotiated arrangement, according to the Darbeks, the Empire granted the Norket District considerable autonomy in running its affairs.

Currently, the ethnic makeup of the Norket District is approximately 65 % Norket and 30 % Darbek, with about 5 % other ethnic minorities. As recently as eighty years ago, the Darbek population in the Norket District was no more than 5 %. Migration, urbanization, economic opportunities, and the much higher birth rates among ethnic Darbeks provide at least partial explanation for the shift in demographics. This shift has caused grave concern among Norkets, who fear that if the trend continues, they will not be able to preserve themselves as a national people in the future.

The standard of living in Norket is 1.5 to 2 times higher than in Darbek, and although the standard of living in the Norket District has been significantly higher than the average in Darbek, it does not meet the standard of living in Norket. Infrastructure in the District is poor,

and there is no real industry or urban area in the area. There are few opportunities for educated Norkets from the District because none of Darbek's large industries were located in the District and because Darbek law severely limits opportunities for Norkets to find government employment in Darbek. Norket politicians recently cited these economic conditions as evidence of Darbek's "intentional anti-Norketian policies". By contrast, Darbeks in the District are generally better educated than Darbeks from other regions, and they enjoy many opportunities in Darbek's well-developed industrial sector as well as in the arts and sciences. Indeed, many of Darbek's leading politicians, scientists, artists and actors come from the Norket District.

The political structures in the Norket District are based on a collection of systems which were inherited from the Empire. As an autonomous region, the District has a governor and a parliament. However, the Governor is appointed by the Darbek national government, and the parliament traditionally served only as a rubber stamp for measures adopted by the Governor or by the Darbek government.

Recent Darbek Legislation

Many Norkets claim that the Darbek government has been adopting anti-Norket measures with the intention of forcing Norkets out of the Norket District and "Darbekizing" the District. Consequently, from the time the modern Norket District was created by the Empire, the Norkets of the Norket District, particularly the Norket intellectuals, have campaigned to have the District transferred to the jurisdiction of Norket. In their campaigns, these activists frequently spoke of the transfer as being vital to the economic, political, and cultural well-being of the Norket people. Some have gone so far as to claim that this is an issue of the survival of the Norket people. They saw the Norket government as the only hope that Norkets in the Norket District could shed themselves of the burdens of minority status in Darbek. The legislation which Norkets have found most offensive are a series of restrictive language measures adopted by Darbek following its independence from the Empire.

The Darbek language legislation, proposed and supported by extreme Nationalists in the Darbek Parliament, made Darbek the state language and prohibited the use of any language other than Darbek on commercial and road signs. Under the law, Norket language schools are permitted, but they receive no financing from the state. Furthermore, Norkets educated in the Norket language are required to pass a Darbek language and history exam in order to obtain employment in the public sector. The heavy subsidies that the Empire had been providing to the District for hospitals, public assistance for the unemployed, and pensioners, were also cut back or eliminated entirely.

The passage of the language laws led to a barrage of highly charged rhetoric from both Darbek and Norket. The Darbek government defended the moves, saying that "it is time we put Darbeks back in charge of their own affairs", and that "we must end the economically unrealistic, and ethnically biased policies used by the Empire to buy the favor of minority groups". The language and education laws, it claims, do not discriminate against anyone who is willing to be a loyal citizen of Darbek. One leader of the Norket community in Darbek said "we have seen what ethnic cleansing and apartheid are like, we must act swiftly to restore the District to its historical status". The latter remark is a reference to past campaigns by Norkets in Darbek to reunite the Norket District with Norket.

Recent development

Shortly after the passage of the Darbek language laws, Norkets in the Norket District formed a group called the Norket District National Movement (“NDNM”). The NDNM recently presented to the governments of Norket and Darbek a petition signed by approximately 90% of the Norkets living in the District. The petition called on the government of Darbek to permit the District to join Norket. Under the Darbek constitution, a change in the status of the Norket District requires the approval of the Darbek government and Parliament. The Prime Minister of Darbek angrily rejected the petition, and claimed that it was the result of an effort by the Norket government to “steal” land from Darbek.

In response to the efforts of the NDNM, Darbek formed the Darbek People’s Movement (“DPM”). The DPM has been actively demonstrating in the District, and the two groups have clashed on several occasions. Immediately after the DPM was formed, hundreds of Darbeks marched in the District capital to show their strength and support for the District Darbeks. The NDNM quickly formed a counter-demonstration, and there were several serious clashes between the groups in the center of the capital. A second series of deadly clashes was sparked only a week later, when a Darbek motorist hit and killed a Norketian child in the District. Outraged Norkets who witnessed the accident tried to organize their own trial on the spot, but other Darbeks and the District Police arrived to stop it. There were a series of skirmishes over the next several hours, with each group claiming that it was seeking “justice” or “revenge” for the earlier incidents. Rumors about murders and repression of Norkets by Darbeks were spread by refugees in Norket, and attacks on Darbeks in the Norket District became more frequent and cruel.

In response to these events, the Norket government made statements of support for the plight of their “brethren across the border” at a recent meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna. The Norket government asked the OSCE to take action to force Darbek to repeal its restrictive language and education laws and allow a referendum on independence for residents of the District. Norket pointed to prior violations of the autonomy of the Norket District, and has angrily insisted that Darbek do more than merely promise to protect rights in the District. The Norket government was careful not to insist on the immediate incorporation of the Norket District within its borders. Darbek rejected the idea of a referendum saying that “all the citizens of the District are Darbeks, whether they are from Norketian or Darbekian descent”.

Groups of armed Norketian civilians have now moved into areas near the Norket-Darbek border and have voiced their willingness to support Norkets in the District against “further oppression and violence” by Darbeks. Although it had remained relatively silent during the unfolding of the current crisis, Emperia, the successor state to the Empire, has said it “views the situation with grave concern for the peoples involved and for the negative effect of the conflict on regional stability”. In light of these concerns, Emperia has offered to send its forces into the area as peacekeepers.

In the District, tensions have heightened after a recent incident when members of the Norkets National Movement modified a Norket flag and called it the flag of an independent Norket District. Last night, they planted the flag in the middle of a small park in a neighborhood that is predominantly Norketian. The flag is visible from one of the busiest highways in the District and thus could be seen by hundreds of people on their way to work

this morning. There are already rumors that members of the Darbek People's Movement plan a counter demonstration this evening. It is rumored that they plan to lead a march into the neighborhood, burn the Norket District flag and plant a Darbek flag. Other Darbek leaders in the District have called on the District's governor to have the flag removed.

The flag incident sparked heightened concern in the OSCE, prompting the Chairman-in-Office to contact both the Darbek President and the Chairman of the Norket District Parliament. In his conversations with the two leaders, the Chairman-in-Office made it clear that while the OSCE is anxious to see this issue resolved and the tensions lowered, the likelihood of OSCE action in the near future is questionable. The Chairman-in-Office encouraged the leaders to try to resolve their differences through dialogue before he prepares a report to the Permanent Council, and he offered to provide facilities at a neutral site for an initial, informal, unofficial, exploratory meeting between representatives from the Darbek President's office and the Norket Parliament. He also proposed that a representative from the European Union participates in that meeting as a mediator. That meeting will take place later today.

REGIONAL MAP

