

Azerbaijani 'eco-protest' ends after checkpoint installed on Lachin Corridor

Robin Fabbro · OC Media · 2023-04-28

The Azerbaijani 'eco-activists' blocking the Lachin Corridor near Shusha (Shushi) have suspended their action following the installation of an Azerbaijani border checkpoint on the corridor.

According to identical articles published across Azerbaijani state and pro-government news websites on Friday afternoon, the eco-activists said they were 'very happy with the establishment of a border control mechanism', which they reportedly said would 'ensur[e] transparency, rule of law and safety of traffic on the road'.

The protest had been ongoing since 12 December, blocking all traffic in and out of Nagorno-Karabakh except for vehicles from the Red Cross and the Russian peacekeeping mission.

Despite claiming to be protesting environmental damage from mining in Nagorno-Karabakh, the protesters were widely seen as an instrument of the Azerbaijani government, who rarely allow protests to go ahead unhindered and control all access to Shusha.

The activists reportedly said they reserved the right to restart the blockade if their demands were not met for the Russian peacekeepers to 'stop the illegal exploitation of mineral deposits' and to 'ensure the monitoring of environmental and other consequences remain in force'.

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The move follows the installation of an Azerbaijani border checkpoint at the entrance of the Lachin corridor near the Armenian border on 23 April.

The checkpoint was erected on the Hakari Bridge, next to a base of the Russian peacekeepers, triggering criticism in Armenia of Russia and its peacekeeping forces.

According to the ceasefire agreement that brought an end to the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, the Russian peacekeepers were to control the Lachin Corridor, the only way in and out of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Yerevan criticised Baku's actions, stating that 'no one but Russia' should exercise control over the Lachin Corridor.

Baku, in the meantime, denied blocking the corridor. Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov stated on Thursday that Azerbaijan installed the checkpoint after warning Armenia of the 'illegal use' of the road to transport weapons to the region.

'The Lachin road is open and will remain open', Bayramov stated during a meeting with his French counterpart in Baku.

The Foreign Ministry had previously promised to create the 'necessary conditions' for the 'transparent and orderly passage of Armenian residents living in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan'.

Western officials also expressed concern over Azerbaijan's actions.

The checkpoint has led to renewed fears in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia over the future of the region's ethnic Armenian population.

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