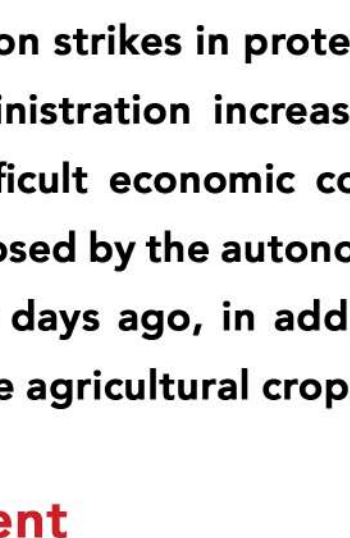


Decision 119 raises discontent among people

Study - Position Assessing



Decision 119 raises discontent among people

Study - Position Assessing

On May 19, 2021, the Autonomous administration issued decision 119 to increase fuel prices in its areas of control. It increased the prices by more than 300 percent. The decision was met by widespread popular discontent on social media platforms, as well as on the ground. People staged sit-ins and demonstrations in several areas, and closed the markets. Bus drivers and shop owners in some markets went on strikes in protest against the increase of fuel prices. The Autonomous administration increased the fuel prices at a time people are suffering from difficult economic conditions, especially with the lockdowns that have been imposed by the autonomous administration from the beginning of April until a few days ago, in addition to the drought that has almost completely affected the agricultural crops of the year

Weak Crises Management

The autonomous administration faced other crises earlier this year, most recently the bread crisis. It raised the price of bread from 100 to 250 Syrian pounds, and agreed to the private bakeries' request to raise the price of bread from 500 to 800 SYP per bag

In the 2020 harvest, the administration announced low prices for wheat and barley, and was forced to change its decision later under popular pressure on social media. At the end, it set the prices in U.S. cent

The same applies to raising fuel prices in previous times, decisions related to adopting educational curricula, forced conscription and other things. We can notice several things through these crises, both from the side of the autonomous administration (how it dealt with them) and also from the side of people and society

{ 1 }

Decision 119 raises discontent among people

- There is general popular dissatisfaction, that can clearly be seen on social media, media reports and people's comments on these decisions
- There is popular movement on the ground, including protests and blocking roads, as happened many times in Deir Ezzor countryside
- Sit-ins and demonstrations are held in Deir Ezzor more than in other areas, but the protests held in Hasaka and Raqqqa are more broadcasted on social media and media
- Since the establishment of the autonomous administration in 2014, this is the first time that peaceful demonstrations and protests have been held in Hasaka with no political backgrounds
- The protests witnessed violence between the security forces and demonstrators in Hasaka and Shadadi, that resulted in civilian deaths and injuries
- Activists and workers in public affairs accuse the Autonomous Administration of taking arbitrary decisions in many cases, or at least it does not study them enough from various aspects
- The autonomous administration responded to the will of people in some crises (as happened when it issued a decision to manage and protect the absentee property). It cancelled it after seven days of issuing it after a wave of public discontent on social media and media. The same thing also repeated when it adopted new curricula in Deir Ezzor
- It went on with other decisions despite popular protest on social media, such as the decisions related to raising bread prices and fuel prices in earlier times
- The way the Autonomous administration deals with the popular reaction shows that it deal with the popular reaction on social media after it occurs, without being able to predict it while studying the decisions, which shows poor knowledge of the people's concerns
- It is clear through the Autonomous Administration's dealing with the popular reaction that it takes it into consideration as it fears popular movement in its areas
- The autonomous administration does not prepare the public opinion whether through its media or other awareness-raising methods before taking decisions, except for using simple old ways to know the people's reaction, such as spreading rumours before taking a decision

{ 2 }

Decision 119 raises discontent among people

- The bread crisis and the private bakeries owners struggle to raise the prices shows that it does not have a balanced logic to reconcile the public good and the interest of the bakeries workers who got what they wanted at the end, which proves that there is no real knowledge of the practical economic reality. It failed to provide logical and radical solutions to the crisis that will continue as it is linked to the rise of fuel prices and the collapse of the Syrian pound
- Many of its decisions contained legal loopholes, which pushed it many times to provide clarifications through media, as happened when it took the decision of managing and protecting the absentee property
- It doesn't have reliable platforms and protected websites to post its decisions on. It posts its decisions on Facebook pages that are not verified with blue tick, which makes decisions susceptible to forgery, as happened to recruitment decisions several times
- The Autonomous administration officials make conflicting statements during crises, especially after waves of popular discontent. Sometimes, they evade appearing on media to provide logical views

Resolution 119 and people's bet

The decision to raise fuel prices carries the number 119. Activists and social media users linked it with Covid 19, as both of them contain the number 19, and both of them leave similar impact on the helpless people

The decision issued by the autonomous administration increased fuel prices by more than 300% and 100% in its areas of control, where its prices - before the decision - were the lowest in all of Syria, as it controls most of Syria's oil and gas wells in Deir Ezzor and Hasaka, where the most important oil and gas fields are located such as Conoco and Al-Omar fields in Deir Ezzor, and Al-Jabsah and Ramilan fields in Hasaka

{ 3 }

Decision 119 raises discontent among people

Prices increased as the following

- The price of super gasoline rose from 210 to 410 Syrian pounds per litre
- The price of imported premium gasoline rose from 45 to 65.5 US cents per litre
- The price of diesel fuel used for heating rose from 75 to 250 SYP per litre
- The price of top diesel rose from 150 to 400 SYP per litre
- The price of domestic gas rose from 2500 to 8000 SYP per cylinder, and the price of the gas used in industrial and commercial facilities rose from 5000 to 15,000 SYP per cylinder
- The price of diesel used in mills and bakeries rose from 75 to 100 SYP per liter
- The price of diesel used in agriculture rose from 124 to 250 SYP per litre

The decision triggered a wave of discontent among people in several areas, especially in Qamishli and Hasaka, first on social media, then people went on strike in markets in several cities, and then they held peaceful demonstrations, but these demonstrations were violent in Hasaka, as civilian deaths and injuries were recorded after demonstrators attacked a military headquarters of the SDF, wounding an SDF member, but the Internal Security Forces denied killing the demonstrators, and released this statement: (Some spoilers, who seek to disturb the public security and have foreign connections and agendas aimed at creating a state of chaos and discord between people and the military and security forces (by attacking military and civilian centers, posts and institutions

Some parties of the autonomous administration also released a statement, calling on the administration to reconsider and cancel its decision, in addition to other statements made outside the autonomous administration like the one released by the Kurdish National Council

The autonomous administration officials merely provided justifications to the media, which included

{ 4 }

Decision 119 raises discontent among people

- The previous prices were very low and did not cover production costs
- The decision to increase fuel prices was issued after a thorough study by financial and economic experts
- The decision is linked to the process of financial and economic reform
- Gas will be imported from the Iraqi Kurdistan Region to cover the shortfall in the region, because the gas production of northeastern Syria does not cover its needs

Sit-ins, demonstrations, and market strikes made it clear that the Autonomous Administration had neither expected such a significant reaction, nor did it take it into consideration. Given that, officials of the Autonomous Administration and the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) delivered statements to attract people and control the situation. The Autonomous Administration joint presidency stated that they plan to hold an urgent meeting to discuss reconsidering the decision of increasing prices of fuel, but the SDC that is the political wing of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) stated that they will reconsider the decision and that it is important to reconsider the mechanism of taking such wild decisions

The Autonomous Administration's statements reflect the administration's regretting such a decision without taking the pulse of the people. The SDC' statements reflect that the council considers the mechanism of taking such decisions unconsidered and wild, referring to the fact that the decisions may be unconsidered

{ 5 }

Decision 119 raises discontent among people

Suggestions and Recommendations

Increasing prices of fuel is not the first of its kind and will not be the last; however, its consequences have been larger, especially as the decision covered different areas. This time, demonstrations took place in al-Hasakah after they were limited to Deir Ezzor. This decision and its consequences reflect a set of matters that must be taken into consideration and better handled. Here we mention suggestions and recommendations for the authorities such as the Autonomous Administration, civil society, and media, and international sides

- The Autonomous Administration should not take decisions that lack full consideration in different fields, especially increasing the prices of an essential material by 300 percent, in such an irresponsible way
- The Autonomous Administration should seriously deal with the people's demands on social media that is one of the available spaces for the people to express themselves and disapproval amidst weak media outlets in the area
- The Autonomous Administration's seriously dealing with people's demands
- Officials not dealing with justifications and attempting to take decisions that satisfy the people
- Media should produce deep journalistic reports to follow up with the economic situation of the area and activate follow up-journalism so that it becomes a fourth authority
- Civil society institutions should play a positive role, support the people's demands, and try to pressure the Autonomous Administration in decisions related to people's lives
- The Autonomous Administration has to retract this decision and not manipulate it by decreasing the announced prices
- Economic conditions are so poor due to curfew and lockdown over a year, as well as drought that calls the Autonomous Administration to stand with the people
- Local currency deterioration, power and water cuts, and the absence of major services increase people's burdens

{ 6 }

Decision 119 raises discontent among people

- If the Autonomous Administration does not take the people's demands seriously, it could regret and lose people's confidence if the street movement was not directed to other sides
- The Autonomous Administration says that it bears significant financial burdens, At this point, the international community, especially the coalition should support the administration to develop infrastructure
- In recent weeks, the Autonomous Administration increased salaries by 30 percent and announced its annual budget and big job opportunities; however, this decision made previous decisions nonsense
- The Autonomous Administration needs to be transparent with the people and reveal the economic situation clearly

{ 7 }