

Azerbaijan and Turkey Want to Seize Georgian Ports.

PanARMENIAN.Net

14.02.2006 GMT+04:00

This can bring to the strengthening of Armenia's transport blockade even more.

Georgian government has announced a tender for the right of concessive management of Batumi port. This proposal has interested not only Georgian but also foreign, particularly Turkish and Azeri companies. This cannot but alarm Armenia since today one of the most reliable transport arteries connecting Yerevan with the outer world passes through Ajaria.

/PanARMENIAN.Net/ The Ministry of Economic Development of Georgia has already announced the competition terms. Georgian government proposes to take up the management of state-controlled Batumi port for 49 years. The winner company will have to pay at least 35 million dollars to the state budget of Georgia and ensure cargo turnover of no less than 6 million tons per year. Of course priority will be given to the company which will guarantee higher payment to the budget and more cargo turnover. Despite the fact that Batumi port is of strategic importance for Georgian Republic, official Tbilisi is ready to pass it to foreigners.

This is the legal right of Georgia. However, considering applications and making decisions, Georgian leaders should also take into account geopolitical consequences of their decision for the countries of the region.

Using Georgian transit resources, Armenia brings considerable funds to the state budget of Georgia. Therefore, it is supposed that Georgian authorities should be interested in the transport security of Armenia and pay special attention to possible applications from Turkish and Azeri companies. Ankara and Baku are doing their best to strengthen Armenia's transport blockade.

If the tender is won by a Turkish or an Azeri company, it will possibly be pressed by Turkish or Azeri special services which are aimed at complete isolation of Armenia. Control over Baku port by Turkey or Azerbaijan can have undesirable consequences for Yerevan and Armenian leaders have the right to share their worry concerning this with Georgian colleagues.

Georgians on their turn have to treat such an appeal with understanding.

Ankara and Baku have been showing deep interest in Batumi port for already a long time. Yet in late 1990s Turkey proposed joint management of the port.

Last time this proposal was made two years ago by the Turkish consul in Batumi Mutvelioghlu. Official Baku offered Georgians to pass Baku port to the ownership of Azerbaijan for repayment of the state debt

of 16 million dollars. This was really a strange proposal if we take into account that the real cost of the port is much higher than the debt of Georgia to Azerbaijan.

By the way Georgia owes more to Armenia than to Azerbaijan and we are in need of the port much more than our Eastern neighbor. However, Armenian leaders have never thought of taking such an initiative.

Meanwhile, Yerevan has expressed interest in the participation of Baku port management for several times, offering various ways of participation in its modernization, including variants of short term and long term rental. Though the conditions offered by Yerevan were quite attractive, Tbilisi replied with a polite refusal. As a result of a competition held last year, Georgian government leased terminals of another Georgian port, located in the city of Poti. Most of freight flow to and from Armenia is realized through this port. All the terminals of Poti port were given to Georgian companies which was not a threat to the national security of Armenia. As for Batumi, here we are dealing not with separate terminals but with control over the whole port. This is why the announced competition interests not only local but also foreign companies. In Armenia there are transport companies which would also like to participate in the tender. If such companies really exist, they should hurry. Applications are accepted until 12th of May.

"PanARMENIAN.Net" analytical department
