

Does Tehran Blackmail Moscow With Iran-Armenia Gas Pipeline
ArmenianPress Digest.

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Gas and Armenian-Russian cooperation.

Armenia and Russia are negotiating about ways to compensate for the rise in the Russian gas tariff for Armenia, Lragir daily reports Armenian President Robert Kocharyan as saying in Sweden Feb 8. He says that these ways will allow to cushion the impact of the rise and may be applied for 2-3 years. Kocharyan does not yet know what will be the Russian gas tariff after Apr 1. He says that Armenia attaches great importance to the laying of the gas pipeline from Iran, a project that will allow it to enhance its energy security.

The Trade and Economic Development Ministry of Armenia has estimated the impacts the rising gas tariff may have on the cost value of the industrial production if it grows to \$110, \$130 and \$150 per 1,000 c m, Noyan Tapan news agency reports the chief advisor of the trade and economic development minister Meruzhan Hakopyan as saying during a press-conference Feb 10.

He says that the rise to \$130 may lead to 20%-22% growth in the cost value in the manufacturing and a bit less in the chemistry. Speaking particularly of Nairit plant Hakopyan says that the rise will not have any significant effect on the competitiveness of the company's price. He notes that now the price of gas on the Armenian-Georgian border is \$54. The daily import into Armenia is 1.7 mln c m, of which 30% is consumed by the population and the rest - equally by the energy sector and industry.

Speaking of the gas problem to journalists, Speaker of the Armenian Parliament Artur Bagdassaryan says that being an advocate of developing Armenian-Russian strategic cooperation, he still thinks it necessary to specify the framework of this strategic cooperation. Azg daily reports him as saying that when searching for solutions to the gas problem, the Armenian and Russian presidents should keep in mind that over 2.5 mln Armenians live in Russia today. Bagdassaryan promises to give a comprehensive political assessment as soon as the situation gets clear.

Armenian MP from Justice opposition bloc Viktor Dallakyan says that one must not fan anti-Russian hysteria over the rise in the gas tariff. "I consider inadmissible the artificial anti-Russian feelings the authorities are fueling through their media," says Dallakyan. The gas problem should be viewed from a different point. "The authorities who rig elections and a referendum get weaker and more vulnerable to external challenges and can be addressed in any language," says Dallakyan. He notes that the authorities must in no way shift the burden of the rise on the people. He says that the energy situation in Armenia may get even worse following the present geo-political

developments, particularly, the possible application of international sanctions against Iran, a country Armenia links its energy security with, and the aggravation of Russian-Georgian relations over the South Ossetian problem. (ARKA)

Haykakan Zhamanak daily reports French Figaro as saying that paying double for gas now will also be the three South Caucasian republics - Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Figaro is surprised to see Russia raising the tariff for Armenia too. Armenia was the last "pawn" for Russia in the South Caucasus: "Perhaps, Moscow has got angry at the last Armenian-Iranian gas deal." Still Figaro notes that Armenia has been given a respite till Apr 1. Reminding its readers that there has been no democratic revolution in Armenia, unlike Georgia and Ukraine, Figaro says: "For its democratic orientation Georgia has to pay \$110/1,000 c m, while Armenia is paying \$54."

"The relations between the Armenians and Russians have never been dependent on gas. They have been, are and will be friends. Such 'bluffs' cannot shatter the centuries-old friendship of the two nations," says the leader of the United Communist Party of Armenia Yuri Manoukyan. He says that everything is the way they supposed it to be - now too Armenia is receiving gas at the former price and will be until the end of the talks. "And the talks will end in Apr, that is, when nobody will give a 'brass farthing' for this hysteria - for in summer the Armenian people will not need as much gas as they need today," says Manoukyan. He must have forgotten that summer is generally followed by autumn and winter, says 168 Zham daily. It reports Manoukyan as saying that "the foot of the Russian soldier" must stay in Armenia and "the number of these feet must grow."

Haykakan Zhamanak daily reports that Jan 31 the World Bank published a report "From Disintegration to Reintegration: Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union in International Trade" on 27 pro-European and pro-Russian countries of Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet area.

The PR executive of the WB Office in Armenia Vigen Sargsyan says that the report qualifies the South Caucasus as a pro-Russian region -- because Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia still keep up their Soviet-time economic ties with Russia. Sargsyan says that for blockaded Armenia the pro-Russian position is objective. In general, the report wants to say that one part of the post-Soviet and Eastern European countries is integrating into the world economy, while the other into the Russian economy. But Russia too is moving towards the world economy. And so, Armenia's integration into the world economy is mediated -- "and, as always, by Russia," concludes Haykakan Zhamanak.

Turkey

While speaking in the Institute of Foreign Policy in Sweden Feb 8 Armenian President Robert Kocharyan said that "it is not normal" when an EU-membership seeking country, Turkey, is blockading Armenia, a country involved in the European neighborhood policy. This notwithstanding, Armenia is not against Turkey's potential membership to the EU as "the membership will make that country more predictable," reports Yerkir daily.

Regional security and stability are a key priority of the cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey, and energy projects are crucial for it, says Turkish MP Bulent Arinc. The press service of the Turkish parliament reports Arinc as saying that "the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, to be launched in the coming months, is a project of strategic importance. After that we will pool efforts under the project to lay a gas pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum," says Arinc. He notes that the importance of BTE has become even more obvious after the last events concerning the gas export to Europe. Arinc also says that Ankara gives high importance to the project to build a railroad Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars. "This road will not only make Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan closer but will also be invaluable for the increase in the transport operations from Europe to Central Asia," says Arinc. He hopes that "the project will urge the other regional countries to take the steps of cooperation we expect them to take." (Noyan Tapan)

The parliamentary faction of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaksutiun (ARFD) is worried to know that Turkish companies have been let into the Armenian state register committee's project to prospect and map the gold fields of Sotq. The decision to allow the Spectra-Geotech company from Turkey to prospect the Sotq fields was made in 2005. Hayots Ashkharh daily reports the secretary of the ARFD parliamentary faction Hrayr Karapetyan to say in the parliament that the provision of such an opportunity in a territory having high economic and strategic importance for the country is an issue of national security and the Ecology Ministry should give it a special attention.

People in Turkey "regret" the decision by the municipal council of Lyons to erect in that city a monument to the victims of the Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Turkey. As one more proof that "this truly enormous tragedy has claimed the lives of not only Armenians but also Turks and Kurds, they give the openness of the 1915-1920 archives for scientists from all over the world," reports AzTV, noting that "on the other hand, for many years they in France have been ignoring the calls by Turkish Ambassador Uluc Uzulker for mounting in Paris a monument to the founder of the Turkish Republic Ataturk - even though there are as many as 450,000 Turks in France." (PanARMENIAN.Net)

Iran

Irna reports Armenian Ambassador to Iran Karen Nazaryan to convey Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki the Armenian FM's written invitation to visit Armenia. Mottaki thanked Nazaryan for the invitation and said that Iran and Armenia should further develop their cooperation. "Presently we have good conditions for developing cooperation in various spheres," he said, noting that the existing potential should be actively employed. Nazaryan gave a positive assessment of the Iranian-Armenian cooperation in various spheres and said that Armenia is interested in the use of Iran's energy resources. "Iran's positivism in the issue paves new ways for cooperation," says Nazaryan. He notes that energy diversification is one of the priorities of Armenia's policy. And so, Yerevan is ready for multilateral cooperation in gas transportation from Iran. (PanARMENIAN.Net)

In a meeting Feb 8 Speaker of the Armenian Parliament Artur Bagdasaryan discussed with Iranian MP of Armenian nationality Gevorg Vardan and Iranian Ambassador to Armenia Alireza Haqiqian the prospects of Armenian-Iranian inter-parliamentary relations. The sides said that active inter-parliamentary ties will deepen inter-state relations. They noted the importance of the parliaments' role in the search for political and legislative solutions. On behalf of the speaker of the Iranian parliament, Vardan invited Bagdasaryan to visit Iran. The sides also discussed the possibility of holding bilateral parliamentary discussions on fuel and other topics of mutual concern, as well as the participation of an Armenian parliamentary delegation in the international forum on religious problems in Iran. (Noyan Tapan)

ARCA news agency reports that Armenian political scientists, politicians and representatives of the Iranian and US embassies met in Yerevan Feb 10 to discuss "Armenian-Iranian Relations on the Threshold of Political-Geographic Changes."

"Like before the Iraqi war there had been doubts if the war would start, now too there are doubts over Iran, but I am sure that the US will do this," political scientist Stepan Safaryan said during discussions on Armenia-Iran relations. Ayb-Fe daily reports Safaryan as saying that Armenia cannot influence the current international processes. In case of war in Iran Armenia will become a "springboard," and "Iran will blame us too when it starts to look for who is to blame." The chairman of the Constitutional Right Union Hrant Khachatryan believes that XXI is "a century of religious wars smelling of oil and nucleus." "US-Iran relations are getting increasingly tensed as today the president of Iran is similar in style to the president of the United States."

Armenia should carry out a well-balanced policy in the context of Iranian-US relations, says the director of the central headquarters of Hay Dat, ARF Dashnaktsoutyun Kiro Manoyan. Lragir daily reports him as saying that the nuclear program situation has made possible sanctions against Iran. Manoyan believes that in case of an attack on Iran, Armenia should pursue its own interests. "If Iran's territorial integrity is violated, Armenia will find itself completely surrounded by Turkish troops," says Manoyan. He notes that unlike Iraq, the nuclear program situation in Iran is lawful, and this problem is "politicized." At the same time, Armenia should be more decisive in the issue of Iranian gas transit to Europe. The Iran-Europe transit gas pipeline can make Armenia much stronger in the region: "In this issue we must be more rigid to Russia's pressure."

The recent statement by the Iranian Finance and Economy Minister that Tehran supports the project to lay a new branch of the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline has become a topic for close attention and active debate in Yerevan, reports Golos Armenii. There are two major positions. One camp believes that as long as Iran has spoken up again -and so loudly and specifically -- about the project, this means that the long-standing idea has got much closer to practice. The other camp says that this

statement was just a diplomatic move by both Iran and Armenia at the current complex stage of relations with Russia.

As a matter of principle, the second hypothesis is more likely to be true. The point is that this pipeline idea envisions gas transit via Armenian and Georgia to Ukraine and then possibly to Europe. The very idea of such a route is a real nuisance for Russia.

The talk about Ukraine's and Georgia's possible energy independence from Russia is actually making Russia nervous and is thereby playing into Ukraine's and Georgia's hands -- while Iran is obviously looking for new arguments to gain more support from Russia in the international situation over its nuclear program. Like "Russians, just you dare not support us and we will start the project and will take from you one of your most effective pressures on Ukraine and Georgia."

Experts from NATO and most western strategic research centers believe that NATO's IPAP with Armenia is realistic and practicable, says the chairman of the parliamentary commission on defense, internal affairs and security Mher Shahgeldyan. Lagir daily reports him as saying that despite their tough position on Iran, the western structures and super powers show a positive attitude to Armenian-Iranian relations -- while as a small country, Armenia is interested in stability in the region as essential for its development.

Any "long-term gas and gas pipeline agreements between Georgia and Iran will be a source of concern for the United States," Noyan Tapan reports ITAR-TASS as citing a US state department official. "We hope that this agreement is of temporary nature and will expire shortly," says the official. He notes that as far as Washington knows Georgia's deal with Iran to buy its gas should end as soon as the Russian gas supplies are restarted over the whole territory of Georgia. But even though the Russian gas import was restarted Jan 30, the heating and electricity supply was not restored all over Georgia. The US official says that the Bush administration understands in what a hard situation Georgia is in the face of possible future gas import problems and takes into account that the local population continues suffering from severe winter colds.
