
Between Russia & the West : Armenia in the wake of the August events

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Russia's chief ally in the Caucasus region, Armenia, has found itself cut off from Russia since the Russian-Georgian war. Meanwhile, some progress has been observed in Armenia's relations with Turkey. The state of the Armenian economy has deteriorated to the point where President Serge Sargsian even had to visit Georgia. President Dmitri Medvedev made an official visit to Yerevan yesterday, attempting to persuade Armenia that Moscow will come up with a solution. A number of non-binding bilateral cooperation agreements were signed in the course of Medvedev's visit.

The war in the Caucasus has left Russian diplomacy facing many problems. To date, not even Belarus - Russia's closest ally - has recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Armenia's position on the issue was best expressed by its president, who made an official visit to Tbilisi in September. Afterwards, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili declared that Sargsian had expressed support for Georgia's territorial integrity. Last weekend, Yerevan was visited by US State Department official Daniel Fried and Robert Simmons, NATO's special envoy for the South Caucasus. Afterwards, Sargsian stated that Yerevan regards NATO "as a component of our national security" - despite Armenia's military alliance with Russia. Moscow has a military base at Gyumri and a group of border guards; Armenia is a member of the CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization, which is often compared to NATO.

Yerevan's actions have largely been prompted by Russia's actions. Essentially, Armenia now has only one ground corridor for access to the outside world: Iran. But this corridor is not fully available, since a number of leading Western nations are attempting to isolate Iran itself. And Armenia's other neighbors are Georgia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan.

Alexei Makarkin, deputy general director of the Political Techniques Center: "No matter how much it wants to, Russia cannot build a pipeline directly to Armenia or offer an alternative option for energy deliveries. This is politics, and Serge Sargsian has to seek ways of solving his country's problems in the current circumstances."

RISI analyst Azhdar Kurtov says that Armenia is interested in unblocking the current situation - not only for Nagorno-Karabakh, but also with regard to Armenia's geographical isolation: "But Russia still isn't providing answers to all of Armenia's questions, so I think the geopolitical game will continue: Armenia will attempt to obtain advantages from both Russia and the West simultaneously."

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