
Nikolai Oganesyan : NATO Is Actively Courting Armenia.

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NIKOLAI OGANESJAN, PRESIDENT OF THE ARMENIAN ATLANTIC ASSOCIATION: TIME TO START THINKING ABOUT THE ADVANCEMENT OF OUR RELATIONS WITH NATO;

An interview with Nikolai Oganesjan, President of the Armenian Atlantic Association.

NATO Week in Armenia is over. What Armenia means for NATO and vice versa is the question with which Novoye Vremya approached Nikolai Oganesjan, an outstanding scientist and President of the Armenian Atlantic Association. Oganesjan met with NATO leaders on many occasions in this capacity and that makes him an authority on the finer points of the not exactly simple Armenian-NATO relations.

Question: The NATO Week in Armenia should probably be regarded as an expansion of cooperation. Why is the Alliance so interested in our country?

Nikolai Oganesjan: The NATO Week was a planned action or representatives of the upper echelons of the Alliance would not have come. I mean NATO Deputy General Secretary Jean Fournet and George Katsirdakis of the NATO Defense Policy and Planning Division.

Acknowledging that Armenia is not going to join the Alliance in the near future, NATO is determined to do whatever it takes to bring Armenia as close as possible so as to use it to its own benefit.

Armenia is an integral part of the geopolitical region comprising the Middle East and the Caucasus which is currently in the focus of interests of the Alliance and its leader, the United States. The southern part of the Caucasus interests NATO and the United States as an integral region, and not by parts. That is why they are courting Armenia so actively now.

However, there is more to it. Armenia is Russia's strategic partner.

It interests the Alliance in this capacity as well. NATO may use its cordial relations with Armenia to advance its own relations with Russia. Should its relations with Russia plummet, the Alliance may use Armenia to mend them and avoid a collision. Hence the recently unthinkable claims on the part of spokesmen for NATO that the advancement of Armenia's relations with the bloc must not jeopardize its friendly relations with its old friends and partners. Katsirdakis emphasized this when NATO Week in Armenia was ending. "NATO does not demand that Armenia abandon its old friends and allies. Close relations with Russia and membership in the CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization are not supposed to interfere with the close cooperation between Armenia and NATO," he said.

And here is another point. Relations between NATO and the CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization are not clear at this point, but that is going to change sooner or later. The two blocs will have to define themselves sooner or later. It is safe to assume, therefore, that NATO leaders hope to use their relations with Armenia to span the gap between the Alliance and the CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization. In other words, Armenia may become an important link in the chain of development of relation between NATO on the one hand and Russia and the CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization on the other.

Contacts between Armenia and NATO are varying. NATO specialists assist the Armenians in mastering new military hardware and new standards. NATO provides equipment and teaches our military. Contacts in the fields of education and science were established as well.

Fournet and Katsirdakis never missed a chance to emphasize how pleased NATO was with the degree and intensiveness of its relations with Armenia.

Armenia is a member of the CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization, a structure which is pretty much amorphous at this point. No effort is spared to make it a serious organization but who can guarantee that it won't end up the way the Warsaw Pact did?

Moreover, the Organization includes certain states (say, Kazakhstan) that promote the interests of Azerbaijan in the Karabakh conflict.

Since there are no guarantees that the Organization will back Armenia and not Muslim states, it will be prudent for Yerevan to at least start thinking about the advancement of relations with NATO.

Question: Can we say NATO has been involved in the Karabakh conflict resolution?

Nikolai Oganessian: Not as an organization, it hasn't. On the other hand, France and the United States are leading NATO countries, and their stand on the Karabakh issue should be regarded as the position of the Alliance itself. Neither the United States nor France have ever put pressure on us. Neither has ever demanded that we turn these territories over to Azerbaijan.

Question: What do you think of Georgia's chances of becoming a NATO country in the near future?

Nikolai Oganessian: According to Katsirdakis, this particular issue is still in the initial phase of discussion now. I do not think that Georgia's entry into NATO will set up a new dividing line because the United States and NATO are interested in an integral framework of relations spanning all the entire southern part of the Caucasus. The fact that Armenia does not aspire to NATO membership and that the Alliance does not insist that it do so may actually ease tension in the relations between Russia and NATO should it escalate over the matter. Nothing prevents cooperation between Russia and the Alliance in this part of the world. Why is there the notion that someone must drive the other out? If Moscow and Washington promote a well-balanced and farsighted policy in the region, a more flexible policy, then both will be able to remain here and serve the interests of the countries of the region. We should find out exactly what Russia and the United States want here and do whatever it takes to make sure that their own interests do not take precedence over ours. The southern part of the Caucasus will then cease being a battlefield and become a bridge between East and West, North and South.

Question: If Georgia is accepted into NATO, despite the unresolved conflicts, does it mean that Abkhazia and South Ossetia will be eventually returned to Tbilisi's jurisdiction with help from the Alliance?

Nikolai Oganessian: It depends on exactly what NATO wants to accomplish. If it wants to defend Georgia from Russia, then the runaway provinces may be reacquired even before Georgia formally joins NATO. On the other hand, Georgia may be pursuing false hope concerning its ability to secure NATO's help in conflict resolution once it is a NATO member. Article Five of the North Atlantic Treaty states that an aggression against a NATO member is regarded as an aggression against all and that other NATO countries must come to its help only if the member in question was not the one to provoke the

aggression. I do not really expect that NATO will want to be drawn into the hostilities over an age-old conflict.
