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# Russian Management Of Armenian Railway To Alleviate 'Blockade'

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Hayots Ashkharh - 18/2/2008

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Russia takes up impressive obligations in the economic and trade field as a result of the handover of the Armenian railways to the Russian Railways for concessionary management. The prospects which open up before the sides due to this economic transaction go beyond the framework of serial investments projects and acquire important political significance.

The reason is that the complex system called "railways" is a branched network which goes beyond the borders of a country into the territory of neighbouring states, and it is beyond our powers to reopen it.

However, the situation can change by involvement of the Russian side - presenting us with political dividends along with a succeeded economic transaction. Armenia's railway continues to be the property of our state, however the Russian Railways company will make large-scale investments to modernize it, which can become even more large-scale if the railway blockade of our country is eliminated.

However, operation of possible routes depends on overcoming certain political obstacles, and here the issue of establishing Armenia-Iran railway communication directly enters into the portfolio of obligations, acquired by the Russian side.

Vladimir Yanukin, the chairman of the Russian Railways company has already said: "Our project includes as an investment development of the North-South transportation corridor, and active negotiations are being held with the Iranian side - both from the point of view of operation of this transportation corridor and of establishing and developing an infrastructure in Iran".

It remains to hope that along with the obligations of concessionary management, which of course will contribute to modernization of the whole system of the Armenian railway, the Russian railway company will have its important input also in construction of Armenia-Iran railway. This will provide our countries with an opportunity to implement foreign transportation to Enzeli [a port in Iran], Middle East and Arabic countries

However, we consider that the solution of the issue of "opening a railway window" to Iran, cannot fully win over the sly project of putting Armenia under a total railway blockade, which was developed by Turkey and Azerbaijan, and with the first shelter of its implementation being the construction of Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi railway.

[Passage omitted: description of the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi railway route]

The Russian side- represented by the chairman of the Russian Railways company, Vladimir Yanukin, so far seemingly refrains form commenting on the ambitious projects of our neighbours, however stating that "we will do everything that depends on us to stop the blockade of the Armenian railways".

Starting from now, the blockade of the Armenian railways and its isolation will be equivalent to the blockade of the businesses of its concessionary - the Russian Railways company. Meanwhile it will be impossible to implement the Azerbaijani-Turkish project of establishing a "railway copy" of the Silk Road from Kars to the borders of China, without using the Russian railways.

Finally, the mentioned railway system has to use Baku-Makhachkala-Astrakhan section and the section leading to Kazakhstan from there, which are controlled by the Russian Railways company.

Even more- this Azerbaijani-Turkish project of "shifting" southwards the major Eurasian transportation vein and of depriving big scales of foreign transportation from the Russian railway operators is not at all favoured by the Russian side. In the long run, the same cargoes could be transported to Europe without entering the South Caucasus - via Belarus or Ukraine or via Baltic harbours.

Thus, when the Russian Railways company enters solidly Armenia and from there tries to establish connection with Iran's and Middle East networks, the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Baku-Russia-Kazakhstan-Azerbaijan-Turkey railway project starts to be called to doubt not only from the economic point of view but also from the point of view of geopolitical expediency.

We believe that after the transfer of the Armenian railway system to concessionary management by the Russian Railways company, counterbalances, based on mutual dependence, are created, which can abruptly decrease the profitability of the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi railway, and in the future - make the restoration of the Armenia-Russia railway communication inevitable.

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