
Russian Gifts To Armenia : Sea, Atom, And Olympic Games

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Backed By Russia, Prime Minister Serzh Sarkisjan Will Certainly Become The Next President Of Armenia

Victor Zubkov flew to Yerevan on the eve of the presidential election in Armenia slated for February 19. The visit began with a meeting with Serzh Sarkisjan, Zubkov's opposite number and candidate for president. The Russian delegation is stone-cold confident that Sarkisjan will win the election. "Continuity of the current trends in the Russian-Armenian relations should be assured," a Russian official was quoted as saying.

Armenian diaspora in Russia numbers nearly 2 million. Private transactions from Russia to Armenia annually amount to \$1 billion - equalling sum total of Russian investments in Armenian economy throughout years of cooperation. Russian capitals control nearly all major economic objects in Armenia and objects of the financial infrastructure, transportation, and communications. Inter RAO EES for example runs the Sevan-Razdan Hydropower Project and Razdan Thermal Power Plant, Gazprom manages ArmGazprom, and Russian Railroads took over their Armenian analog barely a year ago.

Zubkov did his bit for the Russian expansion into Armenia, yesterday.

Sergei Kirienko of Rosatom accompanying Zubkov said the negotiations were mostly centered around construction of a new nuclear power plant in Armenia in 2010-2011 (the one Armenia has these days is old, to be shut down in 2011). According to Kirienko, Russia's chances of winning the forthcoming international contest are fine. In any event, the future nuclear power plant in Armenia will never find itself short of fuel. A memorandum was signed on the Russian-Armenian joint venture for geologic exploration and uranium mining in Armenia.

Russia and Armenia will have equal shares (50%) in the new outfit.

Kirienko recalled the first Russian expeditions to Armenia in 2007 that estimated uranium resources there at about 30,000 tons.

Transportation Minister Igor Levitin came up with a new idea of including Armenia, a country without access to the sea, in the would-be Black Sea Ring route. The project promoted by Russia stipulates regular ferry runs after 2010-2011 between Varna in Bulgaria, Kavkaz in Russia, Ilyichevsk in Ukraine, Poti in Georgia, and Istanbul in Turkey. Armenia was advised to organize cargo traffic via Poti (something the Georgians will have to be talked into yet).

Levitin in the meantime did not think that problematic relations between Russia and Georgia would spell trouble for Armenia's participation in the project.

Along with everything else, Zubkov praised Armenian-made cement and said it would probably be used in construction in Sochi where objects for the future Olympic Games were already being built.

Sarkisjan kept saying in the meantime that no matter how important solution to transport and other problems was, cordial relations with Russia took precedence over everything else. "Being friends with Russia benefits Armenia, and Russian capitals feel comfortable here in Armenia," he said.
