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# Analytical Report Highlights Azerbaijan's Energy Significance For West In 2007

Turan News Agency, Azerbaijan - 10/1/2008

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Azerbaijan's growing geopolitical role and significance in diversifying world energy markets became further visible in the year of 2007, a think tank group affiliated with independent Turan news agency has concluded. With fierce rivalry between the West and Russia, Azerbaijan managed to initiate and carry out several crucial energy projects to transport oil resources from the Caspian Sea basin to energy markets, the analytical piece said. The report also found out that the nuclear row between the USA and Iran bodes ill for Azerbaijan because of the latter's subtle geographical location and a conflict with Armenia over Karabakh. According to the piece, Russia's neo-imperial ambitions are on the rise as it tries to regain lost positions in the former Soviet backyard through energy sabotage and re-igniting protracted conflicts. The year of 2007 saw progress in the relations of the Turkic-speaking countries under the leadership of Turkey, the piece noted. The following is the text of Turan report on 10 January headlined "Foreign policy results of 2007"; subheadings have been inserted editorially:

## Rise in geopolitical significance

The year of 2007 was marked by sharp rise in significance of Azerbaijan in terms of geopolitics, energy and communications, and, in particular, its alternative (with regard to Russia) role for the West (the USA and Europe).

The events of last year showed that the oil factor has now acquired the highest priority across the world, and the attention of all leading countries and organizations has again shifted to the energy issue, at times, to the detriment of other important directions (environment, democracy, culture and so on).

Throughout last year, the feverish interest in the energy carriers and collisions of oil price policy were observed across the world, and the escalation in the US-Iran tension continued with growing confrontation in cooperation between the West and Russia.

All these, one way or another, were conducive to the reinforcement of geopolitical struggle over the possession of the Caspian Sea energy resources, rise in the strategic significance of this region and growing the alternative (oil and transit) mission of Azerbaijan.

With the realization of the strategic Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the completion of the work for the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, the struggle has entered a new intriguing phase by securing the start of the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, bringing strenuously the idea of the "Transcaspian gas pipeline" to the forefront, adding mighty impulse to various alternative projects (NABUCO, Baku-Odessa-Brody).

So the geopolitical, energy, transport and communications game of the West in the region, with blocking of the interests of Russia and, an "alternative role-playing" of Azerbaijan, shifted to a new and more global and active phase in 2007.

The implementation of these projects, no doubt, promises good opportunities for Azerbaijan: it is hard to overestimate their political significance for our country and the whole Caspian Sea region. Actually, the country's long-

standing pro-Western strategy has begun to bring real material benefits and acquire a certain geopolitical immunity.

>From the economical point of view, the implementation of all these energy projects give start to huge inflow of petrodollars and investment in the country which opens up opportunities to intensify development processes. But at the same time, all these also reinforce real risks for the country to become a hostage to "oil card" and a geopolitical duel between the West and Russia.

Dangers of 2007

Suffice it to list only several dangerous threats and tendencies which became distinctly apparent in 2007 and have not been fully removed from the agenda: a US threat of war against Iran. Both sides throughout the year of 2007 were actively engaged in war preparations and this factor kept the whole region in tension and exerted significant influence on the whole foreign policy issues of Azerbaijan.

In case of war, it would be difficult for Azerbaijan to completely secure itself against and remain its neutrality. Throughout the year, Azerbaijan manoeuvred successfully, trying to avoid dangerous extremes of real involvement in the anti-Iranian coalition and active counteraction of the military plans of the USA.

The clash of interests of Russia and the USA on the "Iranian issue" and the growth of the geo-strategic significance of Azerbaijan enabled official Baku to pursue a successful game along all the directions (northern, southern and western) without carrying it through the necessity of a confrontational choice. It is noteworthy from this point of view that the active diplomatic games around the US military bases or the Qabala radar station were let drop.

Russia's neo-imperial ambitions

- the rise in neo-imperial ambitions of Russia on the waves of sharp growth of its energy pressure and the re-emergence of its imperial policy across the world and the Caspian Sea. Throughout the year Russia undertook active steps to block all "alternative" energy projects and pro-Western integration tendencies in the countries of this region, including Azerbaijan.

It is clear that Russia has yet no reason to resort to direct pressure on Azerbaijan (as it is done with regard to Georgia). With permission of the authorities, the process of peaceful and creeping "re-occupation" of Azerbaijan's economic, cultural and, in part, political space by Russia is under way.

Supporting reactionary regimes actively, Moscow in response tries to again create a basis for cultural-economic and military-political presence in countries of the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia.

Backing the reaction, Moscow, in that way, shrouds its return in reactionary (imperial) tone, which, in its turn, creates a real threat for sovereignty, statehood and prospects of development of many "stray" post-Soviet countries.

- "the Karabakh card" again threatens to become an instrument of dangerous manipulation in the hands of competing superpowers with the situation in Azerbaijan and in the region. The re-launched active attempts of coercing Azerbaijan to defeatist peace or to the "Kosovo model" of settling the conflict may have very dangerous and unpredictable consequences.

In case official Baku agrees to a defeatist peace this may cause a wave of public protest and gradually lead to protracted destabilization of domestic

political situation at home. In case of principled refusal, it would lead to unavoidable paralysis and breakdown of the negotiating process and growth in a temptation to a military solution of the problem.

The resumption of the hostilities under the current indefinite and perilous geopolitical background in the region is fraught with unpredictable consequences.

The deepening vagueness and antipathy of the country's foreign policy course and the growth of negative tendencies and collusions in the domestic policy arouse serious concern about Azerbaijan's nearest prospect.

It is incomprehensible where the country heads for, whose example follows, how it is governed. The permanent hesitations and manœuvres between the West and East (in particular, between Washington and Moscow), democracy and totalitarianism, neo-Sovietism and liberalism, extreme and reforms, a sovereign and "banana role" have anyway already weakened the "immune system" to the highest degree and mobilizational capacities of the public and the state. The strengthening syndrome of haphazard governing of the state in the situation of the growth of the foreign policy threats forebode very dark prospects for the country.

#### Fruitful year in Azerbaijani-Turkish relations

The year 2007 turned out to be very intensive and productive in the Azerbaijani-Turkish relations and wider in the context of the overall integration of the Turkic states. The matter is even not in the number of summits and meetings at the highest level but in a qualitative breakthrough in cooperation of the Turkic states under active patronage of the renewed political leadership of Ankara.

By virtue of latest impetuous strengthening of geo-strategic, energy corridor and military-economic potential, Turkey has transferred into a mighty factor of influence in the region and started to carry out more independent and active policy in all directions, including in the issues of integration of the Turkic-speaking world.

The 11th congress of the Turkic states and societies is noteworthy in this regard. Although this imposing forum was held in Baku for the first time, it actually "proceeded" from dictation of Ankara to which testify not only bold integration "directives" of the congress but also Turkey's active role in the issue of quickest implementation of these decisions into life.

Turkey, which pretends realistically to the role of the main regional power, is fairly very keen on forming around itself a strong and solid bloc of the Turkic-speaking countries.

The implementation of Turkey's plans for the integration of the Turkic-speaking countries, possessing advantageous geographical, transit, communications and energy opportunities, are able to change the geopolitical balance of forces throughout the whole region of the Black and Caspian seas and have a significant influence on the course of the political and economic processes across the world.

This impartially is in the interest of the Turkic-speaking states.

Undoubtedly, Azerbaijan, which has both close historic, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic ties and also close geopolitical and energy partnership relations with Turkey, can play an important role in the implementation of those plans.

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