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# Presidential Election In Azerbaijan

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Eurasian Home Analytical Resource - 20/10/2008

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The presidential election in Azerbaijan is of little interest in terms of influence on the political situation in the country and in the South Caucasus as a whole. The election returns are quite predictable, incumbent President Ilham Aliyev has no serious rivals and his easy victory was assured.

In this sense there were no surprises in the election. Aliyev took over 89 % of the vote. His getting, for example, 53% would come as a surprise to me. But the Azerbaijani regime does not allow this election to change the political situation drastically. The election is nothing but confirmation of Aliyev's legitimacy as President, which is necessary for both foreign and domestic political 'markets'.

It is another matter that the so-called five-day war in Georgia and the syndrome of 'football' diplomacy between Turkey and Armenia have really changed Azerbaijan's place in the region. We are the South Caucasus and all the three countries are directly connected with each other. The old South Caucasus ceased to exist and the new one has not appeared yet.

It is clear that Georgia is weaker than it used to be, whatever is said. Europe does not look on Tbilisi as the lamp of democracy in the Caucasus any longer. The same is most likely to hold true for the USA after the presidential election.

Of course, in the future Georgia may regain its authority. What is more, if Georgia controls Abkhazia and South Ossetia again, the country will overcome the collapse. But it will take years and Azerbaijan understands that.

The second factor is recognition by Russia of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. They cannot be called full-fledged states. But now they implement the processes in the Caucasus. Georgia will unlikely use force in order to regain control over them. Therefore, Abkhazia and South Ossetia will continue to seek statehood, which Azerbaijan also understands.

This happens against a background of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict because of which Armenian-Azerbaijani relations are so complicated. So, it comes natural that Russia strengthens its role in the South Caucasus. The Azerbaijani authorities are concerned about it. I repeat that this situation is not everlasting - Russia strengthened and weakened its role in the region at different times. Baku came to realize that the Nagorno-Karabakh issue cannot be solved by using force.

Apart from that, Turkey is trying to spread its influence in the South Caucasus. Evidently, the country has come to agreement with Russia about that. For the time being, there is no telling what will come of it. Still another important factor is the Russo-American rivalry over the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. All of those factors are active, they are not counterbalanced, so the situation is developing dynamically.

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