
“We Should Regain Not Only Abkhazia And South Ossetia But Also Abkhaz And Ossetian People”

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SITUATION IN THE CONFLICT ZONES IN ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA FROM THE STANDPOINT OF STATE MINISTER OF GEORGIA FOR REINTEGRATION TEMURI YAKOBASHVILI; Interview of State Minister of Georgia for Reintegrati on Temuri Yakobashvili

State Minister of Georgia for Reintegration, Temuri Yakobashvili, told the observer of Vremya Novostey about his vision of the situation in the conflict zones in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Question: The Georgian party proposed a number of initiatives for resolving the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. A fantastic version already appeared in Russia due to the reservations of official comments. This version said that there were separate negotiations between Georgia and Abkhazia first and afterwards President of Abkhazia Sergei Bagapsh flew to Moscow to approve the results in the Russian Foreign Minister. Bagapsh confirmed the fact of negotiations but said that the agreement was not achieved. Can you unveil the fog around this topic?

Yakobashvili: The Abkhaz party does not do anything which the Russians are unaware of. Second, regretfully, agreements with the Abkhaz party have not been achieved yet. Third, I am not longer surprised by what the Russian press writes. I can use my own example: when I flew from here they invented the idea that I planned to organize an international conference on Abkhazia in Moscow.

Question: What are the results of your visit to Moscow?

Yakobashvili: Well, I did not expect any results from this visit except for getting acquainted with the people who worked on Abkhazian issues and to tell them about our vision of the situation and our solution for the problem.

Question: Do you place some hopes on the new Russian President?

Yakobashvili: So far, we do not know if we can lay any hopes. We hope that the Russian authorities in general - the new President or new Prime Minister - will change their approaches to Georgia.

Question: What do you think Russia tries to bargain from Georgia by its current pressure in the Abkhaz aspect?

Yakobashvili: Russia wants to tear off Abkhazia. Question: Is this possible?

Yakobashvili: People in Moscow think that it is. People in Moscow believe that if America "takes" Georgia and Ukraine they need to take Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Crimea.

Question: Is this the standpoint of officials of the Russian Foreign Ministry?

Yakobashvili: I do not think that the Foreign Ministry thinks in way but they have to formulate and justify all this. I pity officials of the Russian Foreign Ministry who have to speak about the white saying that it is black.

Question: Do you think that Russian authorities have received a conviction that the annexation of Abkhazia from Georgia is possible at all? The official standpoint has repeated the correct formulation of the Foreign Ministry that Russia recognizes the territorial integrity of Georgia for a long time.

Yakobashvili: You see, there is a trait of slyness in these conversations because people in Moscow have assured me and I am more than assured myself that Russia will never recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia does not need this and it will never do this. In my opinion, nothing will come of this. But when all this is in the hands of the people here, who wish to earn money there and to dismiss everyone, this is not a state policy.

Question: What is your vision of the ideal way out for the Abkhaz and South Ossetian situations? What is the goal of the regulation?

Yakobashvili: The goal should look as follows: the Abkhaz and Ossetian people should have three most important components of any regulation plan. First, this is physical security. Second, these are guarantees that their ethnos will be preserved and will develop. Third, these are guarantees of economic development. These are three main things: physical, ethnical cultural and economic security.

Question: People in Abkhazia and South Ossetia offer a simple counter-argument: they have all these three things already. Which of the things that they do not have does Georgia offer them?

Yakobashvili: First, they do not have this. They do not feel secure. Otherwise they would not speak about a need to sign an agreement on non-restarting of hostilities. Second, it seems to me that the 45,000 population of ethnic Abkhaz people in Abkhazia actually does not have enough resources to preserve their ethnos. This is an ethnos that is becoming extinct and has serious healthcare problems from drug addiction to serious infectious diseases. Only 30% of Abkhaz people speak the Abkhaz language. Look at Abkhaz newspapers and you will see that this is rather a stage of survival of the ethnos and not its development.

I do not think that the Olympics in Sochi will become the decisive breakthrough moment for the development of the economy of Abkhazia about which people are talking all the time. These are fairytales. We see only one thing now: crushed stone, sand and other materials that are exported or will be exported from Abkhazia for Olympic construction projects incur irreparable damage on the environment. The Soviet Union was reinforcing the coast in Sochi and in Abkhazia because everything was washed away. There is the same problem in Sochi too. It is not quite clear how they are going to build anything there at all. For Abkhazia the projects connected with Sochi result in an environmental disaster of the entire coast.

Question: Which institutional base is Georgia prepared to offer for implementation of the principles of regulation that you have outlined?

Yakobashvili: We speak about the creation of a post of vice president, about the right of Abkhaz veto for any issues dealing with this territory and about a free economic zone. For a part of South Ossetia we also have

plans that we are prepared to discuss with the South Ossetians including those living in the part that is not controlled by Tbilisi, this is about 45% of the territory of the unrecognized republic. Incidentally, there are 45,000 ethnic Abkhaz people in Abkhazia and there are 55,000 Georgians (he probably means the Megrel population of the Galsky District) and 65,000 Armenians. We cannot and will not settle all details for the Abkhaz people, this is dishonest and incorrect.

Question: Georgia left the mixed controlling commission (SKK) for resolving the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict. What is offered in exchange?

Yakobashvili: 2+2+2. Our formula is simple: two communities live in South Ossetia. One is governed by Eduard Kokoity and the other one is governed by Dmitry Sanakoev. All Georgian villages, several Ossetian ones and mixed are under rule of Sanakoev. We do not say who is more and who is less numerous. However, we cannot speak about the future of this region without taking into account of opinion of all parties. Kokoity and Sanakoev - these are two. Georgia and Russia are the parties concerned - these are two. The OSCE is already present there in the form of observers and other projects. The European Union is the biggest donor of post-conflict restoration. These are two. We propose working in this format and not in the format of SKK where there are three against one: Russia by itself, Russia in the form of South Ossetia and Russia in the form of North Ossetia.

Question: Aide to the Deputy US Secretary of State, Mathew Braiza, visited Sukhumi after a long pause in negotiations on Abkhazia. After that advisor to the Georgian President, Irakly Alasania, went there. Afterwards you visited Moscow. There is an impression that the negotiations are resumed.

Yakobashvili: There are attempts. I think that this is inevitable. There are rational people in Moscow, Tbilisi and Sukhumi who understand how it is necessary to negotiate very well. We wish to have an open dialogue.