
Why Is Russia Willing To Reopen Lars Checkpoint ?

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Against the background of tense relations between Georgia and Russia the positive information appeared that Russia is considering opening the Lars check-point at the Georgian-Russian border, which is the only land connection left between the two neighboring countries not in separatist-controlled territory.

Georgian experts, while welcoming any positive step towards normalizing the situation, still look for a Trojan Horse under any Russian proposal of a similar type.

When the Lars checkpoint was closed some two years ago Russians said repair works needed to be carried out. In reality Russia wanted to punish disobedient Georgia for its independent orientation and NATO claims.

This anti-Georgian act was the first step against Georgian economy later followed by banning of Georgian products from Georgian market: alcohol, mineral waters, fruits, etc.; cutting air and postal communications; the brutal deportation of Georgians from Russia; and other human rights abuses. All this damaged Georgia's economic condition but did not change its political course.

Together with Georgia, Russia's strategic partner Armenia also received a serious economic blow because the Lars checkpoint was its only land connection with Russia, while the Roki Tunnel and Psou River checkpoints remain under the control of the separatists. Even here Russia tried a trick, attempting to send transport for Armenia through Roki Tunnel but Georgian side refused to allow the precedent.

Armenia appeared in a deadlock. The Kavkaz-Poti ferry boat did not substitute the lack of land connection.

Today Russia offers a very strange timetable for Lars checkpoint operations: one day it should pass cars from Russia and the next day from Georgia. The economic sanctions against Georgia are not lifted as of yet, the visa regime is still in effect for Georgian citizens. Under the circumstances only Armenia directly benefits from the opening of the checkpoint.

So the question arises, is it beneficial at all for Georgia to open Lars? There should be Georgian preconditions: lifting economic sanctions and full-range functioning of the checkpoint. Unfortunately, so far rules of game are set by Russia.
