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# Georgian-Azerbaijani Hazardous Tricks

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September 17, Tbilisi: Georgia and Azerbaijan signed a bilateral agreement on military cooperation. This is a new phenomenon in the whole history of cooperation between our neighbors.

The discussions held previously with the purpose of extending the military cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia began to take a more practical form as far back as in July 2006, when David Kazerashvili, Defense Minister of Georgia was in Baku. The clear-cut Armenian origins of his family name appeared to be no obstacle to his visiting Baku and conducting negotiations on military cooperation between the two countries.

And this September the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Safar Abiev was on a two-day visit in Tbilisi. He first had a closed meeting with David Kazerashvili; thereafter the negotiations continued with an extended format.

The agenda included the Georgian-Azerbaijani bilateral military cooperation program, envisaged for 2008. After the meeting the Georgian Defense Minister D. Kazerashvili announced that "during the tête-à-tête between the two Ministers the problems of military cooperation and regional security were discussed."

This kind of general formulation which is still uninformative does not certainly reveal the contents of the Georgian-Azerbaijani agreement signed on September 17. However, the fact that the tête-à-tête between the two countries' Defense Ministers was confidential and that Safar Abiev visited Georgia's new military fulcrum situated in the town of Senaki immediately following the meeting with President M. Sahakashvili, provides some clues to the political trend of the agreement signed. The military fulcrum built recently in Senaki, Megrelia in accordance with the NATO standards is considered one of the two principal fulcra of Georgia's potential operations against Abkhazia.

We believe that after familiarizing himself with Georgia's rich experience in the fight against the "Abkhazian separatist policy" the Azeri Defense Minister may also desire to have a similar fulcrum built for instance in Yevlakh or Mirbashir in accordance with the NATO standards. It only rests with us to assume that David Kazerashvili may also pay a visit here in the near future with the purpose of exchanging this kind of "advanced experience". If the Azerbaijani Defense Minister prefers to visit a military fulcrum targeted at Abkhazia, he may, in the nearest future, invite his Georgian counterpart to one of the Azerbaijani fulcra situated on the approaches of Nagorno Karabakh.

Thus, it is possible to assume that one of the pivotal clauses of the Georgian-Azerbaijani agreement signed in Tbilisi on September 17 is the idea of the so-called "armed separatism".

The following question comes up: does this mean that the mutual sympathy between the two collapsed post-Soviet "empires" is currently changing into a specific "agreement on mutual assistance". And if it is true, how will Armenia pursue its policy aimed at close economic-communicative integration with Georgia, the last evidence of such policy being the Kocharyan-Sahakashvili meeting that was held in Batumi literally a few days ago?

It is also very easy to notice that the specific political prospect emanating from the Georgian-Azerbaijani agreement on military cooperation are not inside the triangle of the Georgian-Azerbaijani-Armenian relations; they are within the context of NATO's prospects of extending to the East. They also tackle the interests of the regional role-players, i.e. Russia and Turkey. For the former this is one of the signals of NATO's nearest extension to the Caucasus, while for the latter this is a new opportunity of strengthening its positions in the region.

We believe that together with the attempts aimed at transferring the former political and economic cooperation to the military sphere, our two neighbors, are shouldering an equally heavy burden, having armed themselves so intensively during the recent period. This kind of heavy burden is first of all harmful to Georgia which, instead of solving its problems with Abkhazia and South Ossia, is becoming faced with the danger of creating new ones.

For us, the official Tbilisi's choice has certainly been and will continue to remain the sovereign right of our neighboring country.

Provided, however, Georgia maintains its neutral attitude towards the Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation.

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