
From The Balkan Pact To The Caucasus Stability Pact

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Zerkalo Azerbaijan - 27/9/2008

On 11 August 2008, at the height of the military-political crisis in Georgia, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan put forward an initiative to form the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform on the basis of the OSCE principles. The Turkish prime minister made shuttle trips to Moscow, Tbilisi and Baku. He also familiarized Iranian President Ahmadinezhad with the initiative, while Turkish President Abdullah Gul familiarized his Armenian counterpart Serzh Sargsyan with the initiative during a "football trip" to Yerevan.

There were different, mainly critical, comments on Erdogan's initiative. Washington even voiced its surprise at Ankara's initiative to form the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform. "We thought that Turkey and the USA follow a coordinated policy in the South Caucasus. However, Ankara did not inform Washington about the issue and we were really surprised with the actions of our partner," Matthew Bryza, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, said archly.

However, it is unlikely that Americans, who are "forefathers" of this project, were unaware of the planned initiative. First time the idea of creating a regional security system in the South Caucasus was put forward at the NATO anniversary summit in Washington in 1999. US representatives suggested establishing peace in the Caucasus through economic cooperation and put forward an initiative to create a Caucasus cooperation forum involving the three South Caucasus countries, naturally under the aegis of the USA and without Russia's and Iran's involvement.

[Passage omitted: details of similar proposals put forward in the recent years]

After a failed attempt to stop the Western invasion into the region through its incursion to Georgia, Moscow has eased destructive levers of influence a bit that has created advantageous prerequisites for the implementation of the idea of the Caucasus house which is being viewed as a "construction" where peace, stability and progress reign. These prerequisites are the consolidation of international democratic community with regard to policy in the Caucasus, a threat of isolation of Russia and the provoked crisis in Russia's economy, the arrival of NATO's navy in the Black Sea and of EU peacekeeping forces in Georgia, the handover of a settlement format of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflict under international control, and the start of Turkish-Armenian and Turkish-Azerbaijani peace dialogues.

Another main prerequisite is that the peaceful settlement of conflicts (e.g. the Karabakh conflict) within the stability pact dovetails with the proposals of the OSCE Minsk Group (that involves Russia) that provide for a stage-by-stage settlement of the problem: liberation of the occupied territories, return of refugees, establishment of all types of cooperation in the region and discussion on the issue of status in the future, in new and favourable conditions. The latter mean the formation of democratic governments elected through free and fair elections; NATO's, the EU's membership for countries of the region etc. In other words, that means the transfer of negotiations from distrust and offence to confidence and mutual respect.

The pact creates unique possibility for all countries in the region to get out of a difficult and dangerous situation that developed after the Georgian crisis. First of all, it applies to Russia, the key player in the region that

has temporary fallen out from the process of Euro-Atlantic cooperation, which has caused grave consequences for the country. At the same time, Russia's involvement in the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform jointly with the USA and the EU, which is inevitable, would give an impetus to conciliation not only in the South Caucasus but also in the disturbed North Caucasus.

Unfortunately, Iran, another influential regional player, will be outside the South Caucasus peace process despite its striving to be involved in it. That is mostly because of the nuclear aspirations of clerical authorities in Tehran and their open enmity to the US global leadership. Taking into account a unified position of the UN Security Council member states on Iran's nuclear claims, Russia and other possible participants in the stability project in the Caucasus will not insist on involving the Islamic Iran in the Caucasus peace process within Erdogan's plan. However, Iran's involvement in the stability project will become inevitable in the future, after democratic reforms are carried out in that country.
