
Russia Hurries To Strengthen Its Position In The South Caucasus, Trying To Shift The Regional Center From Tbilisi To Yerevan

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PanARMENIAN.Net - 20/11/2008

Armenia presently needs not promises of friendship and allied relations, but a more balanced policy in relations with the Russian Federation, which, however, should not presuppose secondary relations with the EU or the USA.

While the US Government is being formed, Russia hurries to strengthen its position in the South Caucasus, trying to shift the regional center from Tbilisi to Yerevan. Yet, it is still difficult to say what success Russia will achieve in the foreseeable future. But the growing statements on the principle of the right of a nation to self-determination, which Russian politicians of different ranks have been mentioning oftener and oftener in their statements, give grounds to believe that with Georgia retiring and Baku probably going "free sailing" Russia takes the risk of being left face to face with a very unreliable ally in the person of Turkey.

/PanARMENIAN.Net/ The foreign policy of Ankara directed to gaining more independence, was only adopted last year, but it is already taking on more clear-cut outlines. In the light of these changes, agreeing on purchase of the Iranian gas for part of it to be transited to Eastern Europe, Turkey actually takes steps, disregarding the USA, which, by the way, is not a novelty.

That is why the role of Armenia in the region has somewhat grown, which could not be observed rather a long time ago. Everybody has somehow got used to the ungrounded statements on "outpost", "strategic allies" and the like. As we have already mentioned before, Mikhail Saakashvili made such a present to the RF, of which Russia could not even dream. Provoking the "five-day war" and not even waiting for assistance from "friends", the Georgian President actually released the hands of Russia that had long been looking for a second base (besides Armenia) for strengthening its position in the South Caucasus. And it was done.

There is absolutely no doubt that statements on the right of a nation to self-determination and the fake silence on the principle of territorial integrity of a country are done merely for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. But since this principle is universal, it can also be relevant for Nagorno Karabakh, not to mention Transnistria. In the latter's case the conflict can be considered to be almost settled, especially when the President of Moldova Vladimir Voronin is determined to leave the GUAM that was originally founded to regulate conflicts, but, in fact, guaranteed the transit of hydrocarbon from the Caspian region to Europe, bypassing Russia. Today no one is interested in the existence of the GUAM except for Azerbaijan and Georgia. However, the future of this organization much depends on the policy to be adopted by the new US Administration.

Nevertheless, it should be admitted that for the first time in the past 20 years Russian diplomacy worked rather effectively. Signing of the Maindorf Declaration just before the Presidential Elections of the USA, President Medvedev's message, where he clearly implied to the USA that he was not going to sit like a stone image and wait till anti-missile defence is launched in Eastern Europe, and, lastly, frequent statements on the

necessity to speedily and peacefully settle the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict drove the USA into a secondary position, where it has to fall behind Russia. It is difficult to foretell how long this position will last, especially with the global crisis going on. Old Europe has already declared that it is going to cooperate with Moscow. And the problems of Poland, the Czech Republic and the Baltic states of the EU are almost forgotten about.

There is another minute point too. Baku will encounter more difficulties in relations with Russia, than Tbilisi did. Constant parade of the "inestimable oil supplies" and "military power" might one day annoy the "sleeping dog", and it is still a question what Russia's reaction will be.

Meanwhile, in the Caspian post-Soviet territory Azerbaijan disposes of the biggest naval forces after Russia. At the same time it has the largest commercial fleet in the Caspian region. This means more than fifty vessels of great displacement, capable of transporting troops and military equipment. The USA and other NATO members lend a hand to the formation of the Azerbaijani naval forces, which carry out regular maneuvers inviting officers from Turkey and the USA. Total military support offered to Baku is calculated to be several hundred million dollars annually.

All this can't but put us on our guard. It is clear that the naval fleet of Azerbaijan can hardly back the army in case of the most unfavourable solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but we should consider this potential too. Presently Armenia needs not promises of friendship and allied relations, but a more balanced policy in relations with the RF, which, however, should not presuppose secondary relations with the EU or the USA.
