

---

## Russia's support for Azerbaijan due to energy policy

Editorial by Endre Aczel : "Gem"

Nepszabadsag Daily Newspaper, Hungary - 8/7/2008

---

Anyone paying attention could have found a gem last weekend. During his visit to Azerbaijan, Russian President Medvedev held out the prospect to his host Ilham Aliyev that Moscow would support the Azeri, rather than Armenian demands in the issue of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh province.

Karabakh is an enclave inhabited mainly by Armenians in the territory of Azerbaijan, and these two Caucasian countries fought a savage and bloody war in the early 1990s for this territory. Its status is still disputed. The Armenians would like a legalized independence for their people, and Azerbaijan insists on its territory which it does not possess. Until yesterday Moscow quietly favoured the Armenians, namely Christians against Muslims. Therefore, it must have had a formidable reason that the Russian sympathy suddenly changed from one side to the other. The reason is serious but simple. It is called Russian energy policy. Armenia has nothing, but it is of key importance where the enormous Azeri gas reserves will be pumped in four years' time: into the pipeline called Nabucco, which bypasses Russia, or into the Turkmen-Kazakh-Russian pipeline, which will (would) give a monopoly role to the Russians in the transport and delivery of gas coming from the basin of the Caspian sea. Therefore, in the imaginary dialogue that took place between former Gazprom chairman and current Russian President Medvedev and Aliyev in Baku, the former may have said the following about the Russian stance in the Armenian-Azeri territorial dispute: I will not give it free; and the latter: I am not asking for it free. The price is simple. Russia is willing to buy up - on world market prices - the whole Azeri natural gas production, providing that Baku will sell it. It is on this that they are now starting negotiations.

The Turkmen could even be removed from the equation. Which - namely the fact that Russia is the biggest buyer of Turkmen (and Kazakh) natural gas - is to be understood in such a way that if there is no gas from Turkmenistan and not even from Azerbaijan, there is no point in spending any money on Nabucco, the European Union's pet project which is meant to reduce the "dependence on Russian energy." Simply out of decency, neither Medvedev's side nor their partners utter the word Nabucco, but it is clear that Gazprom, also as the Russian state's outstretched arm, is in a much better position than the rivals fighting for the Central Asian energy resources. Partly because, if we look at the Kazakh, Turkmen, and Azeri regimes, we can see that they are all authoritarian, although to a different extent, therefore, they feel Putin's (or his successor's) Russia closer to themselves than the westerners who are buttering them up. They also fear it. They can see the Russians' unparalleled and monopolist determination and like some kind of fresh Machiavellian students, they obviously start from the premise that a wise prince likes to keep his friends close to him and his enemies as far as possible. And Russia is close both geographically and in spirit (they were all Soviets once).

As far as I can see, Medvedev's tour of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan has been successful and at the same time symbolic. From here he set off for Japan, to the G8 summit, where members of this totally useless club can again keep chattering for a while, as it does not matter, what they say. He has done his job; he can lie back while he is pretending to pay attention.

---