
Turkey Aims To Turn Black Sea Region Into Free Trade Zone

ArmInfo - 28/6/2007

Turkish State Minister Kursad Tuzmen said on Wednesday that Turkey was determined to turn the Black Sea region into a free trade zone in the next five years. In an interview with the semi-official Anatolia news agency, Tuzmen said that within this framework, Turkey was about to sign a free trade agreement with Georgia and had launched initiatives to sign another one with Russia.

All member states of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) support the idea of making the Black Sea region a free trade zone, and this would make a positive contribution to economies of these countries, he said.

"Turkish and Ukrainian technical delegations will launch initial negotiations on Friday regarding an agreement. And we have also agreed with Azerbaijan and Moldova to open talks on a preferential trade agreement," Tuzmen said.

Turkey's current trade volume with the BSEC countries stood at 38 billion U.S. dollars, said Tuzmen, adding that it could climb to 60 billion U.S. dollars in three years.

In addition, Turkish contractors have won projects worth at 28 billion U.S. dollars among BSEC countries so far, and Turkish investments in these countries have exceeded seven billion dollars, Tuzmen added. "We also want to turn the Caspian Sea into a free trade zone. We will realize our 'three seas' project when we fulfill all these initiatives. The Mediterranean Sea has already become a free trade zone," said the minister. The BSEC is comprised of Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Moldova and Serbia.

As RA FM's spokesman Vladimir Karapetyan told ArmInfo, "this initiative was not discussed at BSEC summit in Istanbul". Having doubted existence of the initiative in the version, by which it is represented by Turkey's State Minister, he added that the matter possibly concerns signing of bilateral agreement on cooperation among the countries of BSEC region.

To note, no progress was achieved in normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations during negotiations between the Armenian and Turkish Foreign Ministers within the frames of BSEC which have been recently completed in Istanbul. In particular, in response to RA FM Vardan Oskanyan's appeal to open Armenia-Turkey border, A. Gul again spoke of the Karabakh conflict settlement necessity.
