
Turkey's Vision For The Caucasus

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Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan explained in an article for the International Herald Tribune what he and his fellow members of the Erdogan administration want to do about the situation in the caucous. The plan is bold, innovative, and on the main positive, but there are some serious 'buts' Turkey should keep in mind before putting its plan into action.

The basics of the plan are as follows: Turkey will become an important regional player. It will establish a good relationship with all countries in the region. This includes Armenia and Russia.

In its role as 'friend of all,' Turkey will encourage trust and understanding among the other countries in the region. This includes between Georgia and Russia and between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Lastly, an organization will be created whose goal it is to bring stability to the region and solve conflicts before they can run out of hand. This organization will be called the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP).

Babacan explains that President Gul visited Armenia and Azerbaijan recently for the purposes described above. "President Abdullah Gul visited Yerevan on Sept. 6 to watch the World Cup qualifier match between the Turkish and Armenian soccer teams. This was an historic first step to break the barriers that have prevented our two nations from getting closer to each other," he wrote.

Adding: "During the visit to Yerevan, the Armenian and Turkish presidents extensively discussed the security situation in the Caucasus, the prospects for the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations and the ways and means to achieve such normalization in the nearest future."

"Third, as the process of normalizing Turkish-Armenian relations moves ahead, we must not spare our efforts to find a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. These two processes have a mutually reinforcing character - any positive development on one would significantly have a stimulating effect on the other," he went on to write.

"Gul, after his visit to Yerevan, traveled to Baku on Sept. 10 to inquire whether Turkey could facilitate the resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh problem. We observe the commitment in Baku, as well as in Yerevan, to bring a lasting solution to the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In this context, it is necessary once more to underline the importance of a constructive and comprehensive approach to resolving the problems in the Caucasus region."

And this is where the problems set in:

1. Armenia has waged an anti-Turkey campaign for years. The country's leadership itself and the Diaspora have nearly destroyed Turkey's image. Restoring relations with this country, then, may actually reward them for their hatred towards all things Turkey

2. Such a move may be interpreted by some as an admission that Turkey has historically been wrong, and Armenia right. They will then demand that Turkey will give in even more

3. The conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia is, most likely, unresolvable. At least for the time being. The propaganda in both countries about Ngoro-Karabagh is of such nature that it's difficult if not impossible to imagine that they'll come to a compromise, or even a mild understanding. If Turkey, then, tries to broker a deal, and does so publicly, between the two nations, it may very well lose credibility

4. Turkey will not be considered an objective broker by most Armenians. It's much like the U.S. trying to broker a deal between Israelis and Palestinians. To the latter, the U.S. is either a puppet or a master of the former. As such, it is very conceivable that every suggestion Turkey makes will be dismissed out of hand

5. As for the situation between Russia and Georgia and other countries in the region: In the end, Russia will do what it considers in its own interest. Whether Turkey and the other countries in the region agree is of little to no concern to Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev. If one agrees with this reasoning, one cannot but wonder what the use of an organization, as proposed by Turkey, is

6. Won't this organization collide with other organizations?

As said, I tend to support any initiative that would result in Turkey playing a bigger role in the region, but the Turkish government should keep in mind that its plan is not without weaknesses. These issues should be talked about.
