
What Are Armenia's Prospects In The Eurasian Union?

Hayots Ashkharh, Armenia - 18/10/2013

Armine Simonan's report on interview with political analyst Khachik Galstyan

"Had Russia not initiated the Eurasian Union, it would have been a defeat for her in the ongoing global competition between the world's several major economic blocs. Therefore, it decided to gather around it countries connected to it with strong economic ties and these are of course the former Soviet republics," political analyst Khachik Galstyan told Hayots Ashkharh in the interview.

Analyzing the meaning of Armenia's decision to join the Eurasian economic area, he came to some interesting conclusions.

Economic benefits

First of all, looking at the economic side of the issue, the political analyst observed that the idea of setting up a Eurasian economic union was itself a certain challenge aimed at globalization trends in the world economy. It makes sense as it is necessary to defend the internal markets of the member countries of the Eurasian economic area on the one hand, and on the other, to boost the competitiveness of the Eurasian Union.

Viewing the problem of transport communications as a most serious challenge, Galstyan expressed confidence that at least two major problems of Armenia had been resolved at the 3 September talks between [Armenian President Serzh] Sargsyan and [Russian President Vladimir] Putin.

First of them [was] the problem of the lack of common border with the Customs Union member states, as well as the problem of transport communications. "What was an obstacle until now for Armenia to become a full participant in the process [of Eurasian integration]? Of course, the lack of reliable transport communications. If you remember even Prime Minister [Tigran Sargsyan], as well as Deputy Foreign Minister [Shavarsh Kocharyan], had an evasive attitude towards joining the Customs Union in view of the lack of common border".

Currently, it is absolutely evident for the political analyst that Armenia's sharp turn to the Eurasian Union took place only after some solution to the communication problem was offered by Russia. "I am sure that at the talks on 3 September, Russia has offered such a model of transport communications, which would permit us to become a full member of that economic project without having a common border."

It is known that a solution is the re-launch of the Abkhaz railroad [via Georgia]. Galstyan believes it is no accident that in the aftermath of the Sargsyan-Putin meeting, reports on re-launching the railway were circulated. Even though Georgia was quick to deny the reports, he nevertheless said that there was a detailed conversation held or, [as he put it,] "talks are still going on, as there is no other option and without a secure transport channel the idea of the Eurasian Union will not be viable".

A second most important matter negotiated at the talks was the issue of new investments into the Armenian economy, Khachik Galstyan opined.

"Each integration scheme has to be beneficial to all parties and the question was what could motivate Armenia to become part of that union.

And of course, these are steps that would invigorate our economy, also implying financial inflows. It is no accident that the financial topic was among the top ones at the talks of presidents Sargsyan and Putin," [he said].

As the political analyst noted, Russia integrates around it countries transiting energy resources and if the idea of the project of the Eurasian economic union is implemented, it would be a major player in the field of energy resources. Meanwhile, Armenia that lacks energy resources will ensure itself with these resources in the long run by joining that great network together with its re-launched Nuclear Power Plant.

Geopolitical relevance

The decisions made at the negotiations in Moscow carried, apart from economic, very important geopolitical relevance and, analyzing the political component of the decisions taken, Galstyan said the following: It is already a long time that other geopolitical players are rather active in the post-Soviet area and having the aim of pushing out Russia from its traditional zone of influence.

Galstyan also opined that if in the aforementioned circumstances, Armenia refused to join the projects of the Customs Union and the Eurasian economic union, it would have put at stake the viability of those projects, would damage Russia's image, which in turn would have brought about the weakening of Russia's geopolitical positions in the region. "After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the idea of the Eurasian Union is the most global one that Russia is implementing. Had its strategic partner Armenia refused to join that geopolitical area that would have served as a trump card in the hands of the opponents of that idea. They would have said: 'Russians, your idea is so non-viable that it does not inspire even your traditional ally'".

Therefore, Khachik Galstyan does not consider incidental the arguments brought by international experts saying that Russia has gained the upper hand over Europe in the current geopolitical confrontation.

"A second factor of geopolitical success was connected to the settlement of the Karabakh issue, where Armenia has succeeded in at least conserving the current status quo and got some guarantees from the Russian partners that the Eurasian integration scheme has some space for Nagorny Karabakh, too," [Galstyan said].

To our request to "open the brackets" Galstyan answered that it was among the matters that were not normally openly talked about, but which were an integral part of politics.

[Translated from Armenian]

.../...

Armenia And Customs Union: Expert On Country's Prospects

Tert.am - 23/10/2013

On the eve of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council's summit to open in Minsk, Belarus, on Thursday, Chairman of the Political Scientists' Union of Armenia Hmayak Hovhannisyan answered Tert.am's questions.

- President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko has stated that Armenia can by no means join the Customs Union during the next two years. Is it Russia's "message" to Armenia?

- First, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko has stated that, to become a full member of the Customs Union, Armenia has to accede to all the normative documents and agreements that have been adopted by the Customs Union member-states. So it will require time, but the Belarusian president did not elaborate on the matter. You must admit that Alexander Lukashenko cannot say how much time it may take Armenia's parliament to discuss and ratify about fifty agreements.

Even Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan cannot guarantee efficiency on the part of our National Assembly, to say nothing of the Belarusian president.

As regards the Belarusian president's opinion voiced during his meeting with journalists and it being perceived as Russia's "message," I should say that it is a false perception. It would be naïve to think that Russia needs to talk to Armenia by means of "messages." Armenia is not Georgia for Russia, and it is not talking to Armenia through a third state leader's mediation.

- Armenia's minister of economy has expressed hope that a document on Armenia-EU cooperation will be signed in Vilnius, but more specific information on the document is not available. What's your opinion?

- Four-year-long cooperation with the European Union (EU) must not be viewed as an adventure. Huge sums were spent on the officials that carried out the relevant work, including officials of Armenia's Ministry of Economy. They must justify the expenses, which cannot be done by wishing a Happy New Year. They must think of providing citizens with food, and it is the function of the Ministry of Economy.

Unfortunately, we are not making progress.

- What are the potential consequences of the two sides' positions for Armenia? Is it not pressure?

- First of all, I cannot understand what you mean by "pressure."

Everything depends on the country's official position. But it is the president of an authoritarian state that determines this official position. So I am not surprised at the officials who, before September 3, stated they would never yield to pressure have since September 3 been stating that the long discussions convinced them of the benefits of Armenia's accession to the Customs Union.

Armenia's Accession To Customs Union Means Further Restriction On Its Sovereignty - Mikael Hayrapetyan

Tert.am - 24/10/2013

In an interview with Tert.am Chairman of the Conservative Party of Mikael Hayrapetyan spoke of Armenia's foreign policy and domestic political developments, Armenia's accession to the Customs Union and cooperation with the European Union.

- Mr Harutyunyan, what is your stance on Armenia's accession to the Customs Union. Do you think it means loss of sovereignty? What economic prospects for Armenia do you see?

- Armenia's accession to the Customs Union will place further restrictions on Armenia's limited sovereignty. No economic or other positive prospects should be expected either.

- On the other hand, Belarus and Kazakhstan advise Armenia against hurrying. Do you allow for a possibility of Armenia's not joining any structure as our country is of no interest to other nations?

- A whole generation of people living in Kazakhstan and Belarus has not seen presidents except for Nursultan Nazarbayev and Alexander Lukashenko respectively. What is the value of "such out-of-date" states' advice for civilized nations? Yes, the possibility of Armenia not joining any structure is not ruled out - not because our country is "of no interest to other nations." A country which has incompetent leaders, but has been destroyed during the recent 22 years and has worthy citizens, cannot be ignored.

- Foreign Minister of Sweden Carl Bildt told RFE/Radio Liberty that the European Union would discuss further development of its relations with Armenia after the European Partnership Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania. He noted that other forms of cooperation will be discussed.

What is your opinion of the level of possible cooperation?

- You should not take his words too seriously. There are better-informed people, with greater powers and strategic way of thinking, in the West. We only need to realize that it is not only Armenia's strategic task to move toward Europe, but also Europe's strategic task to enter the South Caucasus, especially Armenia. And this process and the responsibility for it cannot be unilateral.

Current and further cooperation with Europe and membership in pan-European structures - irrespective of Armenia's ruling regime - will hopefully be adequate, with our comprehensive security as the starting point. Speaking in sports terms, the ball is now in the court of a group of European officials. Their priority task must be to restrain Russia's influence in Armenia, without avoiding their responsibility for a political cost of this process.

- At present, what are Armenia's major external and internal challenges?

- The major internal challenge implies the right to free, fair and transparent nationwide elections. The second challenge is that Armenia's

elite should develop free thinking and keep pace with the rest of the world.

Armenia's Membership In Customs Union To Reduce Turnover With EU: German Ambassador

ARKA - 24/10/2013

YEREVAN - Armenia's membership in the Customs Union will lead to reduction in turnover with the EU countries, Germany's ambassador to Armenia Reiner Morell said Thursday at a conference on responsible finance in Armenia.

He said the EU-member countries will accept Armenia's decision as a sovereign one, not clarifying though what consequences it may have.

"We regret Armenia is moving towards membership in the customs union not for increasing trade volumes. Apart from that, the country will have no opportunity to take the advantage of tariffs and preferences that the EU can provide", the ambassador said.

Morel stressed the importance of carrying through the cooperation planned, despite the fact many provisions will have to be revised. At the same time, according to the ambassador, the document will not be materialized at the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius.

According to Morel, of six Eastern partnership countries only Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia will sign the agreement.

Armenia said it intends to cooperate with the Customs Union and, at the same time, keep its contacts with other partners, and the EU will continue the cooperation if potential fields are pointed to, Morel said.

The diplomat also stressed the need for reviewing compatibility of interests and understanding the legal basis of relations.

The EU is willing to continue cooperation with Armenia, especially when Armenia have already started implementing reforms, Morel said.

According to ArmStat, Armenia's foreign trade turnover with the EU countries amounted to a total of \$1,059.18 million in January-August 2013, an increase of 1.6% compared to the same period of the year before.

http://arka.am/en/news/economy/armenia_s_membership_in_c%D0%BAustoms_union_to_reduce_turnover_with_eu_german_ambassador/#sthash.XmRDIE4S.dpuf
