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# **CU And Karabakh: Armenia's Integration With Russia-Led Bloc Signifies New Stage In Conflict Settlement**

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The subject of Nagorno-Karabakh has become more topical in the light of the consent of the president of Armenia to join the Russia-led Customs Union (CU). The decision announced on September 3 gave rise to assertions that a new stage will come in the settlement and that competition between the West and Russia around this issue will become stiffer.

The new U.S. co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, James Warlick, who visited the region last week, said that a new 'realistic path' should be found to solve the conflict. He suggests advancing confidence-building measures and contacts that, apparently, will not so much help resolve as 'freeze' the conflict and preserve the status quo.

Neither Armenian nor Russian officials have said a word about how Karabakh will be related to the Customs Union. Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian only noted that Karabakh will not suffer.

Many officials, however, argue that there are no clear agreements on this point.

But at the expert level, there are opinions that depending on the wishes of Armenia and Azerbaijan to integrate into the Eurasian community, Russia may take active steps on Karabakh. This may be even the recognition of Karabakh as revenge on Azerbaijan, or a 'little war' with the division of Karabakh - if Armenia behaves badly.

Azerbaijani expert Rauf Mirkadyrov generally believes that Russia could simply recognize Karabakh as its integral part. Moreover, in a few weeks the 200th anniversary of the Treaty of Gulistan will be marked and under that treaty the Karabakh part of Armenia from Persian control passed to Russian one.

But Europe is likely to have decided to establish closer ties and direct relationship with Karabakh. In the past several days Stepanakert was visited by members of the Danish and German parliaments, as well as representatives of well-known European brands, who announced plans for establishing garment factories in Karabakh.

In addition, in the light of Armenia's accession to the Customs Union European officials said that it is time Europe strengthened its role in the negotiations on the Karabakh settlement.

On October 2, when Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan is to speak at the PACE session in Strasbourg in connection with the completion of Armenia's chairmanship of the Council of Europe, issues connected with the Karabakh settlement are likely to be in the focus as well.

In Karabakh itself officials seem to be a little indifferent to these processes. Press secretary of Karabakh's president David Babayan, for example, 'diplomatically' said that Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh should have good relations with all countries where there is Armenian Diaspora.

And Karabakh Prime Minister Ara Harutyunyan, talking to media, said that

Karabakh should not be mixed in the Armenian-Russian relations.

He warned: if we talk a lot about Karabakh, we could spoil what we have there by default.

What could Armenia's accession to the Customs Union give to Karabakh?

In an interview with Deutsche Welle political scientist and former adviser to the U.S. president on national security affairs Zbigniew Brzezinski, answering the question about how much politics there is hidden behind the creation of the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, said that in fact there is even nothing hidden there.

According to him, it is quite obvious that the essence of the union is to try to subdue one independent post-Soviet country after another.

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