

Perception of the South Caucasus by the West and Prospects of Conflict Resolution



The Western researchers assert that the South Caucasus have always been on the Western policy priority list. Nonetheless, the world is always faced with problems, other conflicts and threats that leave no opportunity for Western policy to be entirely focused on the South Caucasus. The reality is that our region stays off of the West's priority list.

An impression is that the West fails to plainly conceive the importance of the South Caucasus for itself – is it a contributing factor of the Azerbaijani oil; security matters, to oppose Russia; or the assumed attitude should be conditioned with other factors? In all probability, the aforementioned is to prove the absence of a clear-cut Western policy in respect to this region.

On the other hand, the recent developments demonstrate that the step-by-step entrance of the US military into the South Caucasus countries is inevitable. It's only a matter of time.

A situation has developed that everyone in the West wishes to see the South Caucasus countries as a single actor. Today the Western politicians do not hide their desire to see the recent changes in Georgia take place in its two neighboring countries, in terms of undertaken steps rather than revolution.

At present, the US and Europe are closely following the developments in Georgia. The Abkhaz and Ossetian issues are expected to undergo a peaceful solution, possibly in the short term. Some US analysts believe that permanent personal contacts of the Georgian and Russian presidents would support solving those pending issues. Conversely, an opinion exists that world attention would be kept on the Caucasus only if Georgia manages to provide the above stated developments. In fact, the further role of the South Caucasus on the platform of the Western civilization turns out to be interconnected with current advancements in Georgia.

The peaceful solution of the Karabakh issue remains on the agenda. There's an opinion in the West that both sides were decidedly close to the solution in Key West, although the president of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, failed to express readiness to provide the proposed solutions to his people. Nevertheless, Key West left certain expectations in the West for an eventual solution.

It's not a secret that the South Caucasus' three republics, although adhering to different ways, aspire to the same goal - towards Europe. However, the possible Europeization of the South Caucasus, the Ukraine and other countries striving to stay close to Europe, in reality are perceived as a new headache. In this context, Turkey is considered to be the number one headache for Europe.

Today, the policy adopted by the new government of Turkey differs from classical Turkish policy. Turkey has constantly observed threats posed by nearly all its neighbors (Arabic countries, Armenia, Iran, Balkan countries, Greece, etc.). This tendency seems to have recently undergone changes. In some ways, such an opinion persists in the West.

After 2000, Turkey clearly realized the irrevocable loss of Central Asia as a possible sphere of influence. Consequently, Turkey had no choice but to focus its efforts on the Caucasus. Along

with Turkey-Azerbaijan cooperation, there has been a relative increase in Turkey-Georgia collaboration in the military sphere. Subsequently, it is noteworthy that the US does not need Turkey as a vehicle for maintaining and developing its influence in the South Caucasus.

Immutable dynamics have been formed and concentered on the platform of Turkey-Armenia-Azerbaijan relations requiring huge efforts to break out. All sides maintain a firm position and a clear announcement is essential here to change the established dynamics.

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion on "Perception of the South Caucasus by the West and Prospects of Conflict Resolution" held in June 29, 2004, in the International Center for Human Development. The participants of the round-table were freelance analysts, government officials, members of the media and representatives of international institutions.