

Perspectives of Regional Development
(A view from Armenia)

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Although lacking an outlet to the Mediterranean, Black and Caspian Seas, through which and around which are being currently realized all practical and theoretical communication schemes and projects aiming to link the carbon-rich regions of Eurasia with the EU member states, Armenia is located in the center of the sub-region, which despite suffering from ethnic conflicts and all possible consequences of the former “communal flat” is an important link within the system of transnational infrastructures and therefore becomes more and more attractive for both the regional powers and those, which do not border it.

At present, all existing communications pass over Armenia with the exception of Russian and Iranian gas pipelines, which provide my country with needed gas volume. It is obvious, however, that the central location in the sub-region gives odds to Armenia at least for the reason that the shortest communications linking Armenia’s neighbours with each other pass or could pass through its territory. Meanwhile we have diplomatic relations with only two out of four neighbouring countries and this fact to a great extent determines the policy of regional and non-regional actors towards Armenia.

At the same time, Armenia strives to carry out a balanced foreign policy. Being a CIS and ODKB member Armenia cooperates with NATO since 2004 on the basis of Individual Partnership Action Plan. The country is engaged in the new Neighbourhood and Eastern Partnership programs as well.

Armenia is basically monoethnic and monoconfessional country and this makes it possible to somehow balance the internal situation, which however remains highly explosive given the existing contradiction between the quite open society having various connections with the outer world and inclined to competitive cooperation, and the authorities experiencing difficulties resulting from low legitimacy and increasing impact of external actors over the internal situation.

The Russian-Georgian war and its consequences have emphasized the vulnerability of our region and the need to undertake well thought-out and responsible measures to establish and maintain the regional security system.

The globalization processes assume that a network of most significant global infrastructures be created. The existence of conflicts fraught with the danger of wars impedes the creation of new units within the system of global infrastructures and intimidates the unrestricted operation of those already existing. In addition to all internal problems, the ineffectual regional development is caused by ongoing tension between Russia and Georgia, and Armenia and Turkey.

Possible opening of the Armenian-Turkish border and establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries will bring about fundamental changes in the structure of relationship between all countries represented in the Black Sea/Caspian region, as well as between the great powers for which the region is an area of vital importance. It would be fallacious and deceptive to expect rapid and smooth changes. At the same time, it seems to be obvious that a new configuration of fields of force will take shape in the region, which will significantly modify our notion of the existing balance of power and influences. For this very reason interested powers will go up against the opening of the border, and their resistance will increase along with the growing possibility of border opening. The way the Government of Azerbaijan reacted to this likely event has proved the latter's significance (even if we take into consideration the preventive nature of such reaction). Despite the tendency towards strengthening the Russian-Turkish cooperation, it is most likely that Russia's reaction be even more severe.

The first and most apparent consequences of opening the Armenian-Turkish border include the following:

1. Armenia will have direct land connection to a NATO member state for which the membership in the mentioned military and political alliance remains of great importance and highest priority in terms of national security and foreign policy issues.
2. The USA and NATO will acquire more favorable conditions to realize their interests in Georgia, Iran and Azerbaijan thus increasing their impact on the entire region.
3. The European Union will gain a chance to adopt a regional approach and move to region-wide planning, which requires less resources than country specific planning.

4. The Russia's control over and influence upon the political processes that take place both in the entire region and each regional country will gradually decrease.
5. Armenia will get access to regional projects (naturally in case it succeeds in overcoming the resistance of Azerbaijan), and this will make it possible for the EU to develop alternative approaches or in other words, to enjoy freedom of maneuvers. For instance, communications (both those anticipated and those under construction), which are expected to go from Kazakhstan through Turkmenistan and Iran to the Mediterranean Sea, could cross Armenia, and this would restrain Azerbaijan from using its transit position for political purposes.
6. Opening of Armenian-Turkish border, establishment of diplomatic relations, signing of the package of documents concerning mutual security purposes will make it possible for the region to get rid of the presence of foreign military forces in the course of time.
7. Increasing influence of NATO, the United States and EU in Armenia will speed up, promote and improve the processes of Euro-Atlantic and European integration. At the same time, since the mentioned processes work against the foreign policy of Russian Federation and are likely to weaken Russia's influence in the region, their development will be decisively repulsed by Russia as well as by regional countries sharing with Russia common interests.
8. The latter circumstance may lead to the escalation of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and even provoke a new war between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
9. At the same time, it is obvious that the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations will have a positive impact on the entire region in terms of regional stability and security and consequently, on negotiations over Nagorno Karabakh. The confidence building process must take into account that trust is easier to achieve on the political level. Today, the confidence level of the Armenian society towards the Turkish policy is extremely low.
10. It is most probable that in Russia's opinion, the price that Turkey should pay to get involved in the processes, which take place in South Caucasus and particularly, in the processes concerning Nagorno Karabakh conflict solution; and the United States and the European Union should pay for the opening of border is the presence of Russian military forces (or the ODKB peace forces) in those 5, 6 or 7 regions, which the NKR will have to give to Azerbaijan based on the predictable agreement on conflict resolution.

The above list may be continued, however, it is noteworthy to consider the opportunities and internal resources of the Armenian foreign policy in new conditions. It is most likely that the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations will create conditions for a more balanced foreign

policy. Armenia should adopt proactive foreign policy and develop relations with the European Union within the Eastern Partnership framework. At the same time, new regional conditions will make it possible for Armenia to intensify its efforts within the NATO Individual Partnership Plan.

Along with the abovementioned strategic directions Armenia should develop relations with Central Asian countries and make every possible effort to create an atmosphere of constructive cooperation in political, economic, transportation and communication fields.

Armenia should look forward to deepening neighborly relations with Iran, which may become highly productive if cooperation between Iran and the EU is achieved, especially taking into account that Iran could provide the European countries with hydrocarbon and that military and political significance of Iran in the region could hardly be overestimated. In particular, Armenia could assume a significant intermediary role between the United States and Iran.

Establishment of regular relations with Turkey will enable Armenia and Georgia to achieve an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence and to lay the basis for regional cooperation and collaboration.

Opening of the Armenian-Turkish border and establishment of diplomatic relations will obviously generate a need to create relevant conditions for further development of relations with Turkey. It should be mentioned that in Armenia recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Turkey is considered to be the first and foremost way to guarantee trust building between the two countries. At the same time, there is a set of important procedures to be prepared in advance (an agreement concerning the border, deployment of forces along the borders, movement control, information exchange, equipment of admission points etc.).

It is obvious that to achieve its goals the Armenian diplomacy should operate carefully and unhurriedly analyzing and assessing all consequences of its possible steps, since the situation in the Black Sea/Caspian region is still extremely unstable and highly explosive.

Another significant factor increasingly affecting the situation in the region is the problem of Iranian nuclear program. The mere likelihood of military conflict between the United States and Iran with its unpredictable consequences keep in suspense all countries of South Caucasus,

whereas the normalization of American-Iranian relations may completely change the situation in the region and create opportunity for collaboration within the Black Sea/Caspian region.

One more unpredictable process concerns the militarization of regional countries. While the parties to the conflicts keep assuring the international community of their efforts to solve the conflicts by peaceful means, they continue accumulating arms and this may generate dangerous illusions and new violence.

Nevertheless, the most serious problems that put obstacles in the way of successful regional development and peaceful solution of conflicts are those concerning the imitation of democracy and corruption.

In the above description of the regional situation one significant component is missing. I mean the common regional interests, which are being increasingly realized by regional societies. And this makes it possible to think about the possibility of overcoming the conflicts within the sub-regional security system.

The main core of the great “Shuman –Monet plan”, which helped the Western Europe avoid a new war, was the following: all countries involved in the processes developing in Western Europe and closely interrelated on the level of infrastructures were supposed to willingly relinquish certain parts of their state sovereignty for the benefit of a European body, which would be above the states and would have all the necessary power. It is obvious that the regional countries, which only recently gained their independence, are extremely vulnerable in statehood issues. However, I am convinced that the integration processes which would reflect the sub-regional interests and serve them could help overcome the regional conflicts and contradictions. From this point of view the European Neighbourhood and the Eastern Partnership Program aimed to adopt the regional countries to the European system of values become of great importance.

The possibility of creating a united and identified South Caucasian space, as it seems, depends on how fully the peoples of the South Caucasus will manage to correlate themselves to European civilization, at the same time identifying themselves as a unique cultural community. In this regard, the urgent measures to be taken should include preclusion of imitative democracy in the region and encouragement of real democratic processes.