SENIOR RUSSIAN SCHOLAR DISCOUNTS WAR IN ARTSAKH

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ArmInfo, 2010-05-26

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ArmInfo: ***Dr. Krylov, what is the priority goal of Moscow in the context of development of relations with Ankara?***

Dr. Aleksander Krylov: The development of the Russian-Turkish relations is, first of all, aimed at stabilizing the situation in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions.

Neither Turkey nor Russia is interested in militarization of the Black Sea. This is our main common interest. Turkey transits Russian energy sources to Europe. All these factors have nothing to do with the ties of Russia and Armenia, therefore our relations with Turkey are not developing in prejudice of Armenia. Armenia is the key ally of Russia in the Caucasus and Russia has maintained its presence in the region for 20 years and even in the hardest times of the Soviet chaos only thanks to Armenia's support to Russia's policy in the South Caucasus.
At the same time, Armenia has limited possibilities to prevent militarization of the Black Sea region. Turkey is the only country capable to do this, as in 2008 when it did not allow the US fleet to the coast of Georgia.

Moscow and Ankara have mutual understanding regarding global geopolitical interests, which do not hamper cooperation with our ally Armenia.

AI: ***Why is Russia so interested in Armenia today?***

AK: Armenia is the most important ally of Russia in the extremely important region adjacent to the Russian North Caucasus. Therefore, the South Caucasus is of vital importance for Russia. It is very important for us to retain our economic and political positions there to prevent

your region from turning into the rear of forces acting against Russia in the South and North Caucasus, and in our other regions. Therefore, it is insufficient to say that Armenia is just our strategic ally. Over 20 years of the post-Soviet period Armenia and Russia have demonstrated their close allied relations. For instance, our relations with Azerbaijan can develop successfully as long as they do not damage Armenia's interests, which are a priority to us. If we lose Armenia, we will lose much. Sometimes Armenian political experts say that Russia may "replace" Armenia by Azerbaijan or Georgia. But, in such case, it is clear that Moscow will lose the basis of its policy in the South Caucasus. That will not be an adequate exchange and the Kremlin is well aware of this. Hence, there are no prerequisites for refusing our alliance with Armenia.

AI: ***How big is the potential in the economic cooperation between our countries?***

AK: There is an essential unused economic potential in the relations between Russia and Armenia, which is first of all conditioned by the fact that Armenia has no reliable ties with the foreign world. In this context, Moscow is very much interested in the Iran-Armenia railway project, which will further connect the Armenia with the Persian Gulf, as well as with Russia via the Caspian Sea. This project, if implemented, would solve the problem of isolation and dependence of Armenia on the Georgian unreliable transit. In this case, the turnover will considerably grow, and the Russian-Armenian relations will be given a fresh impetus. It is very good that China will also join this project. As far as I know, this proposal by Armenia is already being considered in Beijing. I think that this issue, as a way to overcome Armenia's isolation, will be also discussed over the upcoming visit of Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev to Armenia.

AI: ***May the good Russian-Turkish relations be considered the pledge of the fact that sooner or later Armenia will start exporting energy resources to Turkey irrespective of the border unblocking, taking into consideration that all the energy capacities are chiefly managed by the Russian capital?***

AK:I think it is quite possible. Actually, everything is not so simple and the energy of Armenia is managed not only by the Russian capital. They are multi-component companies with participation of foreign capital. For this reason, Armenia will be able to deliver electric power not only to Turkey but elsewhere if it is beneficial to the Russian capital.

AI:***How successfully are Russian-Iranian ties currently developing, taking into account that Moscow has failed to implement the arrangements related to the delivery of o-300 complexes to Iran?***

AK: Unfortunately,at present relations between Russia and Iran are far from being the best. It is the price for relieving the tension and some improvement of relations between the USA and Russia. But Moscow has not at all refused the delivery of C-300 anti-missile systems to Iran. At the same time, it imposes certain pressure upon the Iranian nuclear programme. Nevertheless, I think that worsening of our relations will not reach the critical stage that will hamper development of the economical

relations, and especially the relations between Armenia and Iran in the context of the Iranian transit. Russia may considerably improve its relations with Iran if it takes part in the project on construction of Iran-Armenia railway. Some Russian analysts hope such decision will finally be taken.

AI: ***Can one think that Moscow depends on Iran to some extent, taking into account its influence on different streams in the North Caucasus, including Wahhabism?***

AK:I think the Iranian influence is not so big. Wahhabist-Arabian influence is more likely present in the North Caucasus, and the states of the Gulf, mainly Saudi Arabia, are very active in this region. It is just Wahhabist-Arabian influence but also Shiism that grows even in Azerbaijan, seemingly a Shiite country. And Shiism in Azerbaijan is gradually replaced by a more militant and radical direction of Islam.

Moreover, Iran has too many problems of its own to conduct an active policy in the North and South Caucasus. At present Tehran is interested in the South Caucasus only because it wants to prevent any strikes at Iran from the South Caucasus, and the Iranian diplomacy is now resolving this problem.

AI: ***Does it mean that Iranian Foreign Minister Manoucehr Mottaki's recent proposal to hold a trilateral meeting of the foreign ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Iran in Tehran aims to prevent deployment of peacemakers in Nagorny-Karabakh?***

AK:I think it does, taking into consideration that Turkey also has recently expressed a similar initiative. That is to say, this shows that the countries bordering South Caucasus are striving not to let turn the region into a military base against Iran. For their part, Russia and Turkey are extremely interested in the maintenance of stability in the region and, consequently, in preventing deployment of any foreign troops in the Karabakh zone. Deployment of peacemakers is a direct threat to the national security of Armenia, Azerbaijan and even Georgia because all these countries will actually lose sovereignty and turn into objects of policy of foreign superpowers. The repercussions of their policy are unpredictable.

AI:***Can we suppose according to this logic that no one is interested in new aggression by Azerbaijan, even Aliyev?***

AK: Certainly, we can. I fully agree with you. This may be just propaganda, a method of political pressure on Armenia. This may become a reason for Azerbaijan's illusions that Armenia will yield anything out of fear of a new war. Ilham Aliyev will not fight seriously. He is not Saakashvili and one should not expect such a stupid step from him because he is a smart man. The aftermath of a new aggression against Karabakh will be disastrous for Azerbaijan. Even the US Administration has repeatedly declared that in case Azerbaijan executes its threats, the US will immediately consider the issue of recognition of Nagorny-Karabakh's independence. I think Moscow may respond in a similar way and raise the issue of recognition of the NKR. This will become a catastrophe for

Azerbaijan. Therefore, Aliyev will surely not unleash war against Karabakh.