





New Peace Agenda in The South Caucasus

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On August 27, 2022 in the cultural capital of Azerbaijan – city of Shusha, at the forum of foreign ambassadors, accredited in Azerbaijan, Hikmet Hajiyev, assistant to the President on foreign policy has said that both Azerbaijan and Turkey offer Armenia a new peace agenda in the region. “Azerbaijan and Turkey want sustainable peace in the region, that is why they have extended hand to Armenia and are working hard for the normalization of relations. Azerbaijan and Turkey can become good partners for Armenia.”

It is not the first time that Azerbaijani and Turkish officials declare such vision in public speeches. Turkey has even appointed a special envoy to discuss the normalization of the bilateral relations with Armenia. Azerbaijan, meanwhile, has been actively participating in the trilateral working group with Armenia and Russia at the level of deputy prime ministers to delimitate borders, open communication lines and create favorable conditions for the regional cooperation and integration. Regular contacts happen at the level of foreign ministers, presidential advisors and even leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Despite the fact that two years have passed since the 44 days Patriotic war and the liberation of the former occupied Azerbaijani lands, Armenia still refuses to sign the peace agreement which Azerbaijan has offered and recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Closure of the communication lines (roads and railways), lack of tangible progress on the demarcation and delimitation of the international border and restoration of the diplomatic relations prevent the full-scale economic cooperation in the region and create risks for the resumption of military hostilities. Azerbaijan has also noted that the refusal by Armenia to recognize Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity will lead to mutual security risks to the territorial integrity of Armenia itself.

One of the most important benefits for the region and broader Eurasia from the peace agreement would be the operation of the Zangezur corridor, which would link Turkey

with Azerbaijan via Armenia and connect European markets with the Central Asian/Chinese/East Asian markets via port of Baku and Turkmenbashi on the Turkmen side of the Caspian Sea. This so-called middle corridor will be the shortest and cheapest way to connect two mega parts of the continents and pose a very reliable, stable, secure and strategic option for the transport and connectivity. The existing Baku-Kars railway is slightly longer route and passes through difficult mountainous area. In light of the ongoing war in Ukraine and difficulties to use the Russian territory for the transport due to the western sanctions, the norther route is also becoming less attractive. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan authorities have long been working with Azerbaijani officials to strengthen this middle transport corridor. Middle corridor will also be the integral part of the Chinese “One Belt, One Road” priority policy and deepen economic and trade cooperation with China.

Zangezur transport corridor will not only strengthen the economic ties between Azerbaijan and Turkey, but will also link Turkish railway systems with the Russian and Iranian systems, further boosting regional trade and integration. Armenia will also greatly benefit from this corridor, thus having, for the first time in 30 years, railway connection to Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Iran. Zangezur corridor is a win-win option for all and create favorable opportunities not only for the East-West trade and transport routes, but also for the South-North routes, linking Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia with India, Pakistan and North European markets.

Finally, Zangezur coordiytor will further deepen integration and cooperation within Turkic states, linking directly growing Turkish economy with large potential of the Central Asian markets of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. These Turkic states also have growing interest for political and economic integration. Via Azerbaijan, they can strengthen their brotherly ties and



create a new wider Eurasian economic platform. Energy products can be also transported from Central Asian markets to Europe via Zangezur corridor.

Zangezur corridor will also create stability in the liberated lands of Azerbaijan, providing business, economic and employment opportunities in the transport and logistics sectors for the local population, including returning Azerbaijani IDPs and refugees. Local Armenians can also work in such sectors and this economic improvement will lay foundations for inter-ethnic harmony and peace in the region.

So far, Armenia, due to its harsh nationalistic agenda and territorial ambitions, refuses to understand the economic benefits of Zangezur corridor. This prevents the regional peace and cooperation. Opposition parties in Armenia as well as ultra-radical, anti-peace Armenian diaspora in the USA and France oppose the normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey. They still prefer to live in historical animosity and hatred.

Nevertheless, Azerbaijan and Turkey are keen to push the peace agenda in the region and sooner or later, Armenia, as a state, will have to recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, refuse from territorial claims on Turkey and Azerbaijan and sign the peace agreement, which will open the new era of cooperation and prosperity in the region. This is the only way forward for the South Caucasus region. And this vision will strengthen Armenia itself in terms of security and stability.