

DISCUSSIONS

ՔՆՆԱՐԿՈՒՄՆԵՐ

VAHRAM TER-MATEVOSYAN

*Պատմական գիտությունների թեկնածու
ՀՀ ԳԱԱ Արևելագիտության ինստիտուտ
ermatevosyan@aua.am*

TURKISH-GEORGIAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND ARMENIA (KARS-AKHALKALAKI RAILWAY PROJECT)

Introduction

Turkish-Georgian relations are widely interpreted as rather successful case of regional cooperation. After Mikheil Saakashvili's departure, however, some circles in the Georgian society started to be more vocal and voiced concerns about, what is widely referred to, as 'the Turkish economic and cultural infiltration into Georgia'. Armenia also viewed the Turkish increasing presence in Georgia with some suspicion considering it as a potential avenue for further marginalization from regional projects. Based on the case study of the Kars-Akhalkalaki railway project, the paper examines not only geopolitical and economic implications of the Turkish engagement with Georgia, but also indicates possible avenues for cooperation through that particular project. The paper discusses these questions based on the findings of semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted by the author in the spring of 2014 in Tbilisi.

Political priorities of Turkey in Georgia

The research on post-Soviet Turkish foreign policy in the South Caucasus ¹ can be divided into several groups. According to some experts, Turkey has

¹ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin uluslararası konumu*, Küre Yayınları, İstanbul, 2001; Bülent Aras and Pınar Akpınar, *The Relations between Turkey and the*

elaborated and does run a clear-cut and comprehensive regional policy in the South Caucasus, thanks to which it has managed to become a regional actor, thereby bypassing even Russia in many instances. Another group of researchers claim that Turkey pursues different interests vis-à-vis each entity of the South Caucasian region. Hence, there is no unified and integrated foreign policy of Turkey in the South Caucasus. Three UN member states, two partially recognized states and one non-recognized de-facto state have different rankings in the list of policy priorities for Turkey. Next group of analysts posits that Turkey still lacks a long-term policy towards the states in the South Caucasus and only local processes define Turkish political objectives. Some even argue that the major obstacle for Turkey's all-embracing policy in the region is the absence of diplomatic relations with Armenia, the establishment of which will lead to Turkey's full and complete political presence in the region.

In particular, Michael Cecire argues that Turkey «is visibly ascendant as a Caucasus power» and «Turkey's Caucasus system» already functions in the Caucasus, where Turkey is perceived as a «merchant hegemon». Moreover, in his opinion, Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia trilateral cooperation has been a challenge to the common perception of the region being under the Russian dominance². As Mitat Çelikpala, AsbedKotchikian and BayramBalci ascertain, Georgia, first and foremost, provides the most direct and stable land route from Turkey to Azerbaijan and Central Asia, therefore, its role is indispensable and profound. Moreover, Georgia's engagement in Caspian energy projects as a transit country and Turkey's investments in Georgian economy have made the two countries irreversibly

Caucasus, *Perceptions*, 2011, v. 16, n. 3, pp. 53-68; Bülent Aras, Turkey's Policy in the Former Soviet South: Assets and Options, *Turkish Studies*, 2000, v. 1, n. 1, pp. 36-58; Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey's New Foreign Policy Vision, *Insight Turkey*, 2008, v. 10, n. 1, pp. 77-96; Kemal Kirişçi, The Transformations of Turkish Foreign Policy: The rise of the trading state, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 2009, vol. 40, no. 36, pp. 29-57; HakanYavuz, The Turkish Identity and foreign policy in flux: The rise of Neo-Ottomanism, *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 1998, v. 7, n. 12; Mitat Çelikpala, Turkey as a Regional Power and the Caucasus, *Insight Turkey*, 2007, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 25-30; BayramBalci, Strengths and Constraints of Turkish Policy in the South Caucasus, *Insight Turkey*, v. 16, n. 2, 2014, pp. 43-52; AsbedKotchikian, The Perceived Roles of Russia and Turkey in Georgian Foreign Policy, *Insight Turkey*, v. 6, n. 2, pp. 33-44

²MickaelHikariCecire, The Merchant Hegemon: Georgia's Role in Turkey's Caucasus System in Georgian Foreign Policy: The quest for Sustainable Security, eds. K. Kakachia and M. Cecire, Tbilisi, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.V, 2013, p. 111

interdependent³. In addition to the energy security factor, Bülent Aras and Pınar Akpınar, in discussing Turkey's policy in Georgia, pinpoint also significant implications for regional stability and border security⁴. Thus, most analysts are of the common opinion that the Turkish policy in Georgia is dominated by the key role the latter plays in exporting Caspian and Central Asian energy resources to Europe. In other words, the successful implementation of Turkey's and Azerbaijan's geopolitical projects is directly proportional to Georgia being a foreseeable and stable state.

In discussing Turkish interests pursued in Georgia, one can also see accentuation on economic aspects. Therefore, Turkey's policy in Georgia should be determined by the latter's open and comprehensive economic policy. That logic claims that Russia's adversarial policy towards Georgia has left it without alternatives, but to build even closer relations with Turkey, which was seen as the nearest and most suitable bridge to Europe. Reiterating Georgia's former president Mikheil Saakashvili's statement⁵, Balci argues that for Georgia Turkey is a window toward Europe, thanks to which Tbilisi's aspirations to go beyond its Caucasus enclave may become possible⁶. Cecire is not mistaken in mentioning that in order to grasp the essence of Turkish-Georgian relations, one should consider them within the context of Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan trilateral format, which will enable to acknowledge that the Turkish-Georgian relations have stemmed for the most part from those of the Turkish-Azerbaijani relations.⁷ In any case, it is important to note, that many experts, in analyzing Turkish policy in Georgia, do not pay much attention to the social and cultural implications, which in fact, influence the relations between Turkey and Georgia to a significant degree. Those factors are discussed in the next sections of this article.

A number of complex and systemic factors determine the perceptions that the Georgian political elite has developed towards Turkey. In elaborating policy approaches towards Turkey both former and present Georgian leaderships' attitudes seem determined by a number of geopolitical, economic, infrastructural and simply pragmatic factors. For instance, the former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili

³Çelikpala, *Turkey as a Regional Power...*, pp. 27-28; Bayrarm Balci, *Strengths and Constraints*, p. 49; Kotchikian, *The Perceived Roles...*, p. 43.

⁴Bülent Aras and Pınar Akpınar, *The Relations between Turkey and the Caucasus, Perceptions*, 2011, v. 16, n. 3, p. 63

⁵«Saakaşvili Gürcistan'ın Yeni Elçilik Binasını Açtı», Chveneburi, at <http://www.chveneburi.net/tr/default.asp?bpgpid=1370&pg=1>

⁶Balci, *Strengths and Constraints*, p. 50

⁷Cecire, *The Merchant Hegemon*, pp. 119, 123

has referred to the Turkish-Georgian relations during his presidential term as a «golden age»⁸. His administration, indeed, was an outspoken supporter and a protagonist of even deeper Turkish presence both in the Georgian economy and in the whole region. During his presidency, Saakashvili authored a few statements glorifying Turkey and its culture and political system⁹. He also famously named Mustafa Kemal, the founder of modern Turkey, as one of his main political models¹⁰. He was also known for opening the doors of the Georgian economy to the Turkish investors who brought capital and opportunities to Georgia. When speaking of Turkey's interests in Georgia and in the region, he notes: «for Turkey specifically it is important to create a zone of stability with peaceful and friendly nations around it. Georgia was, maybe, the best case of the famous policy of «zero problems with neighbors»¹¹. More than once this thought was voiced during his term and, perhaps, in this regard reiterated similar remarks by the Turkish political elite. For instance, on January 2, 2008, Ahmet Davutoğlu, advisor to the Prime-Minister at the time, in his interview to CNN Türk noted: «Turkey's «zero problem policy towards its neighbors» has been successfully implemented for the past four years. The most striking examples of Turkey's success in the region are its relations with Georgia (the other being Syria - VTM)¹². Nigyar Göksel also holds the opinion that «Turkey and Georgia appear to present a model of integration in Europe's East»¹³. Cecire enhances his arguments of the Georgian direction being successful by noting that, unlike many countries where Davutoğlu's much-quoted «Strategic Depth» doctrine was judged exceedingly negative or unequivocally, the Caucasus became the top beneficiary of that policy and was the only success story¹⁴.

Both Turkey and the Turkish-Georgian cooperation were given a key importance in the National Security Concept of Georgia of 2005, and in its revised

⁸ Interview with Mikheil Saakashvili: Georgia's Westward March, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 2013, v. 12. no. 1. , p. 21

⁹ Saakashvili Speaks of Importance of Close Ties with Turkey, *Civil Georgia*, 14 March 2006, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12061>

¹⁰ «Géorgie: l'homme du renouveau», interview de Mikhaïl Saakashvili conduite par Galia Ackerman, *Politique internationale*, no. 104, summer 2004

¹¹ Interview with Saakashvili, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, p. 19

¹² This argument was made by Davutoglu as an advisor to PM. The script of the interview was published as an article; see Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An assessment of 2007, *Insight Turkey*, 2008, v. 10, n. 1, p. 80

¹³ Diba Nigar Göksel, Turkey and Georgia: Zero-Problems?, On Wider Europe, Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, GMF, June 2013, p. 2

¹⁴ Cecire, *The Merchant Hegemon*, pp. 113-115

version of 2011 (both documents were adopted during Saakashvili's presidency). In the meantime, a few differences were observed. For instance, in the 2005 version of the document Turkey was distinguished as a «strategic partner», «a leading regional partner», «an important trade partner» and «a valuable strategic partner»¹⁵. Meanwhile, in the revised version of 2011, Turkey is characterized as «Georgia's leading partner in the region», «Georgia's largest and economic partner», «a regional leader» and «an important military partner»¹⁶. Thus, in the revised version, «a strategic partner» formulation is gone, in turn the government at the time did not elaborate on the changes.

It seemed as if after the change of power in 2012-2013 Georgia's new leadership, the «Georgian Dream» coalition, would give in to the concerns in some public circles and would review the political orientation towards Turkey most vividly defended by the previous administration. And indeed, in the period preceding the 2012 parliamentary elections, in the pre-election campaign, as well as in the first months of PM Ivanishvili's administration some statements were made, which caused certain anxiety both to the former administration and inside the Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance. The statements made after the elections questioned the financial and economic expediency of some of the regional projects; most vividly the ongoing Kars-Akhalkalaki railway project, which was initiated in 2007 to connect Turkey and Azerbaijan through Georgia. Turkish entrepreneurs followed the suit and voiced their fears about different bureaucratic obstacles that they started to face in Georgia. However, after visiting Baku, then Ankara, the new Prime Minister of Georgia Bidzina Ivanishvili made a few remarks, which eased the tensed atmosphere.

During the interviews conducted by the author, a question was asked whether the present Georgian leadership's policy towards Turkey differed from that of the former ones. In the answers, a tendency seemed to dominate, that even though there was some continuity, nevertheless, the new leadership showed more circumspection and less enthusiasm towards some Turkish projects. Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, professor at the Caucasus University, Sergi Kapanadze notes that after the change of power anti-Turkish moods began to increasingly evolve in Ajaria, a semi-autonomous region where a large portion of population profess Islam, and some other territories of the state¹⁷. Especially in the 2012

¹⁵ National Security Concept of Georgia, 2005,

http://www.parliament.ge/files/292_880_927746_concept_en.pdf

¹⁶ National Security Concept of Georgia, 2011,

http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=12

¹⁷ Interview with Sergi Kpanadze, 7 May, 2014, Tbilisi

Parliamentary elections, a candidate in Ajaria from the «Georgian Dream» coalition (then in the opposition) built his political campaign on anti-Turkish sentiments and slogans, which played a decisive role in the election results.

Later processes revealed that in spite of the election promises to challenge the Turkish penetration in Georgia, the new administration kept on running a policy towards Turkey which didn't differ much from that of the previous administration. The following statement by the former Georgian Minister of Defense Irakli Alasania reflects Tbilisi's current position towards Turkey: *«At the meeting point of powerful countries and resource-rich regions, an adaptive and reality-oriented Georgian foreign policy is not only desirable but a strategic necessity. We embrace and cherish our European identity, but neither can we ignore the realities of geography and geopolitics»*¹⁸. In the same vein, Alasania marks Georgia's relations with Turkey as *«exemplary and accelerating as our interests increasingly intertwine»*¹⁹.

Kars-Akhalkalaki railway project

On November 21, 2007, the presidents of Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan, gathered in Marabda, Georgia, to inaugurate the construction of the Kars-Akhalkalaki railway. The new railway project was aimed to be a game-changer in the region and beyond it. It aimed to connect the East with the West and serve as an alternative to the Russian railroads. During the groundbreaking ceremony, the presidents spared no words to underline the importance of the project. For instance, the Georgian president named the project as a «geo-political revolution», «a transport window to Europe» and three of them coined it as «historically important» project²⁰. Understandably, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey were the primary stakeholders in this ambitious project. After several postponements (between 2011 and 2013) the Kars-Akhalkalaki railway will most probably become operational (perhaps, partially at the initial stage) by the end of the 2015, hence, what are the geopolitical and economic implications of this project for the region and particularly for Armenia? What will be the economic implications of keeping the Turkish-Armenian border closed if Armenia gets access to the Kars-

¹⁸Irakli Alasania, Forward in *Georgian Foreign Policy: The quest for Sustainable Security*, eds. K. Kakachia and M. Cecire, Tbilisi, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, V, 2013, p. 7

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰Azeri, Georgian, Turkish Leaders Speak of 'Historic' Rail Link, 21 Nov. 2007, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=16386>

Akhalkalaki railway? In the same vein, what will be policy implications if Armenia is excluded from using that railway?

The overall project has several components, hence, the finishing the construction works of one segment of the railway will not be sufficient to claim the entire project is complete. There are at least four of them: a) 29-km segment of the railway aims to connect Akhalkalaki city of Georgia with the Turkish-Georgian border; b) 76-km segment of the railway starts from that border and reaches Kars and thereby the Turkish railway network; c) building a terminal in Akhalkalaki which will allow to transit the trains from Georgian wider track gauges to the narrow Turkish ones; d) reconstruction of the 160-km segment of the Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi railway.

When this project was initially discussed and later brought to the implementation phase, Armenia vehemently opposed it. It was understandable approach, as the railroad was largely seen as yet another leverage in isolating Armenia from regional projects. Some even foresaw another challenge for Armenia as the project was not only bypassing it, but was also undermining its «ethno-political leverages» in Georgia²¹. In 2007, the pipelines exporting Caspian energy resources to Turkey became operational and Armenia's resistance to this project became more rigid. Armenia was also arguing that having the Kars-Gyumri-Tbilisi railway ready to be used there was no logic in construction of a new railway. Supporting Armenia's stance, both the EU and USA refrained from financing the construction of the railway. For instance, in June 2006, the Financial Services Committee of the House of Representatives unanimously approved H.R. resolution no. 5068, the Section 18th of which made clear that no credits would be extended through the Export-Import Bank to promote «any rail connections or railway-related connections that do not traverse or connect with Armenia»²². However, neither Azerbaijan nor Turkey were discouraged by that decision and moved on with the implementation of the project.

With the passage of the time, it became obvious that sooner or later the construction of this 100 km long railway is going to be finished. Especially during the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement process between 2008 and 2010, Armenian government was hopeful that Turkey will lose interest in that project and will backtrack. However, that project slowly moved on and now it could be stated that even if the Kars-Gyumri railway reopens it can no way be competitive with the

²¹ **Samuel Lussac**, The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railroad and its Geopolitical Implications for the South Caucasus, *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, 2008, v. 2/4, p. 34

²² H.R.5068 - Export-Import Bank Reauthorization Act of 2006, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/house-bill/5068>

Kars-Akhalkalaki railway unless large investments are made to modernize the former. The Kars-Akhalkalaki railway is constructed using the advanced technological solutions whereas the Kars-Gyumri line is worn-out and outdated, like the rest of the railway network in Armenia.

Thus, what are the policy choices for Armenia having in the view that the Turkish-Armenian border remains sealed and the Kars-Gyumri railway will not operate at any time soon. Firstly, the Armenian government should seek opportunity rather than challenge in this project. The big question that stands in front of the Armenian government is how to take advantage of this project, how to benefit from something that it resisted for many years. Therefore, a few factors and perspectives need to be considered.

The Akhalkalaki terminal, which will serve as a major hub in the region and for the transportation of goods and passengers through the Akhalkalaki-Kars railway, is only 30 km far from the Armenia's border. It is also 90 km away from Armenia's second largest city, Gyumri, and around 210 km from Yerevan. Two years ago, the Armenian government has started the construction of the advanced North-South highway project, which will connect southernmost city of Armenia, Meghri, with the northernmost city of Bavra. With that highway it will take around 2 hours to get to Akhalkalaki from Yerevan. If Armenia gets access to the Akhalkalaki terminal, Armenia's economy will largely benefit as the road to two major ports of Georgia, Batumi (650 km from Yerevan) and Poti (610 km from Yerevan), will significantly decrease.

If Armenia manages to get access to the Akhalkalaki terminal, the negative economic implications of the closed Turkish-Armenian border will decrease also. The 25-years old Turkish blockade of Armenia has seriously damaged Armenian economy and, according to different calculations, Armenia's GDP could have been at least doubled if the Turkish-Armenia border was never closed. For Armenia getting access to the new railway is important because one of the primary motivations for the Armenian government to normalize the relations with Turkey was economic. Of course, for the Armenian economy, the Kars-Akhalkalaki cannot replace the Kars-Gyumri railway but it can significantly reduce the burden of the transportation costs.

Leaving aside all positive estimations that the railway will bring to the Armenian economy now it is pertinent to approach the question from the perspectives of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia. Azerbaijan stands out in this list as it could be the outmost opponent of Armenia's possible participation in that project. Azerbaijan's possible arguments would be the unresolved Nagorno-Karabagh conflict and the fact that Azerbaijan provided low-interest loans to Georgia for the

construction of the railway in the Akhalkalaki-Turkish border part. Therefore, following that logic, Azerbaijan's government will, in all likelihood, take decisive measures to prevent Armenia's participation. However, two counterarguments can be brought into the discussion. It could be safely stated that Azerbaijan was interested in this project not because it primarily wanted to isolate Armenia, rather, it is built to serve as an additional and shorter transportation route to boost Azerbaijan's economy. Secondly, Georgia's position is going to be critical.

Undoubtedly, Georgia is set to benefit from this project too as it was the case of other pipeline projects. Georgian economy significantly benefits from transit fees. Now, the Kars-Akhalkalaki railway and Armenia's participation in that project can be yet another possible chance to increase Georgian revenues from transit fees. As regards the political dimension, there is no doubt, that the Georgian government will be put under pressure mainly from Azerbaijan not to concede to the Armenian demands. There could also be instances of political and diplomatic demarches hoping to distance the Georgian government from any concessions to Armenia. However, the majority of the Georgian government and the analytical community is confident that, there is nothing, that can prevent Armenia's participation in that project²³. Furthermore, they underline that Georgia is a sovereign country and is in a position to decide whom to allow to use its transportation infrastructure. The 70-75 percent of Armenia's foreign trade goes via Georgia and transit fees that Armenia pays are quite high. Armenia's participation in that project could be yet another opportunity for Georgia to secure tangible income. Moreover, using that revenues Georgia can pay back the 775 million USD loan that it received from Azerbaijan for the construction of the railway. Georgian government is also aware that Akhalkalaki terminal is built in the region which is mostly populated by ethnic Armenians. Therefore, Armenians in the Javakhk region can also benefit from this project, in turn, this project will increase Tbilisi's leverages there. There are other drivers too which indicate that Georgia needs to be interested in Armenia's participation in the Kars-Akhalkalaki railway.

The other country in this equilibrium is Turkey. Turkish government's position towards Armenia's participation is also going to be an important one. Simply because if Armenia gets access to the Kars-Akhalkalaki railway then the whole logic of the blockade will transform. In April 1993, the Turkish government enforced the blockade on Armenia to push the latter to seek easy solutions in the Karabagh conflict, however, so far, that policy has not produced any tangible

²³ Interview with Giorgi Kandelaki, Member of Georgian parliament, 10.05.2014, Tbilisi.

results. Armenia still has a vibrant economy accustomed to the fact that it is one of the rare countries in the world with 80 % of borders sealed. The Kars-Akhalkalaki railway is also a chance for Turkey to be aware of the fact that Armenia will be less motivated to be flexible in future endeavors of rapprochement. Having that in mind, opening the Turkish-Armenian border gets an additional momentum.

On the other hand, having in the view Turkish and Azerbaijani visible presence in the Georgian economy and their possession of influential weight in Georgian social and cultural spheres, it would be interesting to observe how the Georgian government will be able to create conditions for Armenia's participation. Understandably, there could be other counterarguments claiming at least three points. Firstly, it could be argued that Armenia was initially against this project, because of that the EU and USA were also against this project, having that in mind, how can Armenia be part of this project? Secondly, it can be stated, that in the initial stage the technical and physical constraints of the railway would not allow Armenia's partial or full-fledged participation, but it can be considered in the future, when the opportunities would allow. Thirdly, the transit fees for Armenia could possibly be set higher than for others, which would make businessmen to refrain from using that route. These and other issues and predicaments could be discussed and negotiated between the governments, having in the view, that the WTO regulations prohibit member countries to impose restrictions on travel of goods and services.

ՎԱՀՐԱՄ ՏԵՐ-ՄԱԹԵԻՈՍՅԱՆ

Պատմական գիտությունների թեկնածու
ՀՀ ԳԱԱ Արևելագիտության ինստիտուտ
ermatevosyan@aua.am

ԹՈՒՐՔ-ՎՐԱՅԱԿԱՆ ՌԱԶՄԱՎԱՐԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՄԱԳՈՐԾԱԿՑՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ԵՎ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԸ (ԿԱՐՍ-ԱԽԱԼՔԱԼԱԿ ԵՐԿԱԹՈՒՂՈՒ ՆԱԽԱԳԻԾԸ)

Հարավային Կովկասում Թուրքիայի հետապնդած քաղաքական ու տնտեսական շահերի իրագործման համար Վրաստանին հատկացված է առանցքային դերակատարում: Վրաստանի աշխարհաքաղաքական կողմնորոշումը և աշխարհագրական դիրքը էլ ավելի կարևորվեց Ադրբեյջանի հետ Թուրքիայի իրականացրած մի շարք ծրագրերի գործարկումից հետո: Հատկապես Վարդերի հեղափոխությունից հետո Թուրքիան Վրաստանում նկատելի հետևողականությամբ սկսեց իրագործել մի շարք ծրագրեր, որոնք նպատակ ունեին օգտագործել Վրաստանի նոր իշխանությունների ընդգծված արևմտամետությունը և տնտեսական զարգացման պահանջարկը: Սույն հոդվածի նպատակն է վերլուծել թուրք-վրացական հարաբերությունների առանձնահատկությունները և դրանց ազդեցությունը Հայաստանի վրա: Հոդվածում հատկապես քննարկում են այդ գործընթացի վերաբերյալ հասարակական-քաղաքական ընկալումները 2012-2013 թթ. իշխանափոխությունից հետո: Հոդվածում քննարկվում է Կարս-Ախալքալակ երկաթգծի կարևորությունը Թուրքիա-Վրաստան-Ադրբեյջան համագործակցության ծրագրերում և այդ հարցում Հայաստանի դիրքորոշման փոփոխության կարևորությունը:

Երկաթգծի կառուցման գաղափարը սկսեց քննարկվել 1990-ական թվականներին: Սակայն այդ տարիներին ծրագրի մասնակից երեք երկրներն էլ՝ Թուրքիան, Վրաստանը եւ Ադրբեյջանը, քաղաքական անկայունության փուլում էին գտնվում: Սակայն Կասպյան ավազանի հետ կապված եւ էներգետիկ նախագծերի գործարկման հետ մեկտեղ անհրաժեշտություն առաջացավ եւս մեկ տրանսպորտային հաղորդակցության ուղի ստեղծելու: Ադրբեյջանի եւ Թուրքիայի միջեւ: Երկաթգծի կառուցման եւ շինարարական աշխատանքների մեկնարկն արագ տրվեց, սակայն նախագծի ավարտի վերջնաժամկետը մի քանի անգամ հետաձգվեց, ինչը վկայում է այն մասին, որ դեռ առկա են խոչընդոտող խնդիրներ: Դատելով ընթացող քննարկումներից

եւ տեղեկատվական արտահոսքերից՝ առկա խնդիրներն ունեն թե՛ տեխնիկական, թե՛ քաղաքական պատճառներ:

Նախագծի իրականացման հիմնական նպատակն է ապահովել Արեւելք-Արեւմուտք տրանսպորտային այլընտրանքային կապը, ինչպես նաեւ թուլացնել այս հարցում Ռուսաստանի դերակատարությունը: Սակայն ծրագիրն ավելի ուշադիր ուսումնասիրելիս հասկանում ենք, որ թե՛ Թուրքիան, թե՛ Ադրբեջանը եւ թե՛ Վրաստանը առանձին-առանձին իրենց շահերն են հետապնդում: Թուրքիայի համար Բաքու-Թբիլիսի-Կարս երկաթգծի շահագործումն ունի աշխարհաքաղաքական նշանակություն: Այն առավել կընդգծի Թուրքիայի տարածաշրջանային դերը եւ կամրապնդի այդ երկրի՝ որպես էներգետիկ հանգույց դառնալու հիմքերը: Վրաստանի համար ավելի շոշափելի կդառնան տարածաշրջանում տարանցիկ, տրանզիտային երկրի լինելու առավելությունները: Ադրբեջանի համար երկաթգիծը կարելու է այն առումով, որ այն հավելյալ տրանսպորտային ուղի է դեպի Թուրքիա եւ Եվրոպա:

Հայաստանն ի սկզբանե դեմ է արտահայտվել այս ծրագրին եւ առաջարկել է շահագործել արդեն իսկ գոյություն ունեցող Կարս-Գյումրի երկաթգիծը: Հայաստանի հորդորով, ԱՄՆ եւ Եվրամիությունն անգամ գերծ մնացին աջակցել Բաքու-Թբիլիսի-Կարս երկաթգծի կառուցմանը: Այն ժամանակ Հայաստանը նախագիծը դիտարկում էր որպես Հայաստանի մեկուսացումը եւս մեկ անգամ ընդգծող նախաձեռնություն: Սակայն այն ժամանակ իրավիճակն այլ էր՝ Հայաստանը այս նախագիծը չէր ընկալում որպես հնարավորություն տնտեսության զարգացման ու շրջափակման հաղթահարման համար: Ավելին, Կասպյան էներգակիրների արտահանման երկու մեծ նախագծերը նոր էին սկսել ամբողջական ծավալով գործել եւ երկաթգծի պատճառով մեկուսացման խորացման հնարավոր հեռանկարը թվում էր անխուսափելի: Հետագա մի քանի տարիների ընթացքում եւս Հայաստանը յուրաքանչյուր պատեհ առիթն օգտագործում էր այս նախագիծը քննադատելու համար:

Բայց իրական քաղաքականությունն այսօր այլ բան է հուշում: Սա մարտահրավեր է, որի մեջ Հայաստանը պետք է հնարավորություններ փնտրի: Դժվար է պնդել, որ Հայաստանի մեկուսացումը եղել այս նախագծի առաջնային նպատակը: Ծրագրի գլխավոր նպատակն է նախ եւ առաջ ամրապնդել Ադրբեջանի եւ Թուրքիայի միջեւ տնտեսական կապերը, նպաստել առեւտրաշրջանառության եւ ուղեւորափոխադրումների ծավալի աճին, իսկ հետագայում ծառայել որպես հավելյալ հնարավորություն Միջին Ասիայի եւ Կասպյան ավազանի պաշարների դեպի եվրոպական շուկաներ արտահանման համար: Հասկանալի է, որ ժամանակին Հայաստանի դիրքորոշումն այս հարցում բացասական է եղել, բայց ժամանակները փոխվել են, եւ Հայաստանի մոտեցումները կարիք ունեն վերանայման:

ВАГРАМ ТЕР-МАТЕВОСЯН

*Кандидат исторических наук
Институт Востоковедения НАН РА
ermatevosyan@aua.am*

ТУРЕЦКО-ГРУЗИНСКОЕ СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКОЕ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО И АРМЕНИЯ (ПРОЕКТ ЖЕЛЕЗНОЙ ДОРОГИ КАРС–АХАЛКАЛАКИ)

Грузия, Азербайджан и Турция планируют завершить в 2017 году проект железной дороги Баку-Тбилиси-Карс, строительство которой началось в 2007 году. В рамках проекта строятся железнодорожные пути из Ахалкалаки до Карса. Кроме того, предусмотрена перестройка линии Ахалкалаки-Тбилиси. Финансирование разделили поровну Азербайджан, выделивший кредит Грузии, и Турция.

Реализация проекта и строительные работы начались очень оперативно, однако срок завершения проекта откладывался несколько раз, что свидетельствует о наличии мешающих факторов. Судя по текущим обсуждениям и информационным утечкам, существующие проблемы обусловлены как техническими, так и политическими причинами.

Основная цель реализации проекта – обеспечить альтернативное транспортное сообщение между Западом и Востоком, а также ослабить роль России в данном вопросе. Однако при лучшем изучении проекта становится ясно, что Турция, Азербайджан и Грузия преследуют и свои собственные цели. Для Турции эксплуатация железной дороги Баку-Тбилиси-Карс имеет геополитическое значение. Она еще раз подчеркнет роль Турции в регионе и усилит ее претензии на роль энергетического узла. Для Грузии станут более ощутимыми преимущества транзитной страны. Для Азербайджана железная дорога важна в том плане, что она станет дополнительным транспортным путем в Турцию и далее в Европу.

Армения изначально выступала против проекта и предлагала использовать уже существующий железнодорожный путь Карс-Гюмри. Из-за призывов Армении США и Евросоюз воздержались от содействия строительству дороги Баку-Тбилиси-Карс. Тогда Армения рассматривала проект как очередной шаг по усилению своей изоляции. Тогда ситуация была иной: Армения не воспринимала этот проект как возможность для развития

экономики и преодоления изоляции. Более того, два крупных проекта по экспорту энергоносителей из Каспийского бассейна только начинали осуществляться в полном объеме, вследствие чего перспектива усиления изоляции казалась неминуемой. Однако сегодня реальная политика подсказывает нам необходимость другого поведения. Это вызов, в котором Армения должна искать для себя возможности.

Можно сомневаться, что изоляция Армении была единственной целью этого проекта. Основная его цель – укрепить экономические связи между Азербайджаном и Турцией, повысить объемы товарооборота и пассажирских перевозок, а в дальнейшем создать дополнительные возможности для экспорта на европейские рынки энергетических ресурсов Средней Азии и Каспийского бассейна. Следует различать цели, средства и последствия. Армения должна сама решать, в каком ключе рассматривать данный проект: как попытку изоляции или как новую возможность.

В свое время позиция Армении по данному вопросу была негативной, но времена изменились, и подходы Армении также подлежат пересмотру.