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## **GEORGIA UNWILLING TO CREATE PROBLEMS WITH DELIVERY OF RUSSIAN GAS TO ARMENIA**

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The Georgian authorities assure that by agreeing to transit Russian gas to Armenia Georgia emphasizes the importance of economic and political rapprochement with the neighboring country. The issue, however, remains a hot topic in Georgia.

Under the pressure of the opposition, the authorities have revealed some details of the deal with Gazprom. Deputy Minister of Energy Mariam Valiashvili has said that had Tbilisi not agreed to the terms offered by Moscow, the transit of gas through Georgia would be terminated and Armenia would get gas from Iran.

The existence of the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline is no secret to anyone. The capacity of the pipeline is 2.3 billion cubic meters, which is much more than Armenias demand. In case the demands increase, it will be possible to quickly reshape the infrastructure, just as Russia did in case of Ukraine, where such infrastructure did not exist at all, Valiashvili said.

This statement raised even greater wave of criticism on the part of the opposition. Opposition MP David Darchiashvili says that Georgia should first think about its interests rather than those of the neighboring country.

Negotiations on the deal were held behind closed doors, and the society does not have enough information about the content of the agreement. We have to be cautious with Russia on such important issues, as it is a matter of our national security, Darchiashvili says.

Besides, the opposition insists that Gazpom has no alternative route for delivering gas to Armenia, otherwise it would have used it over the past ten years.

Although the opposition is confident that the deal is not fully acceptable, it helps solve a very important issue.

To refuse from preconditions of Grzpom, as the opposition insists, would mean creating energy problems for a friendly country (Armenia), refusing from the function of being a transit country and breaking all ties with Gazprom, says MP Gia Volski, a key member of the Georgian Dream.

The Georgian authorities do not want to create additional problems for the neighboring country, Volski said in an interview with Public Radio of Armenia.

By accepting the preconditions of the Russian side, Georgia keeps transporting gas to Armenia, thus emphasizing the importance of economic and political rapprochement with the country, he added.

Expert on energy issues Liana Zarvelidze considers that the concessions of the Georgian side are justified by the countrys position of maintaining its reputation as a transit country.

All conditions exist for the delivery of Iranian gas to Armenia, the pipeline is there. Armenia could possibly get more gas from Iran, which Georgia would also use. However, Georgia is unwilling to endanger its reputation of a transit country by opposing the Russian side, she said.

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