
ALEXEI FENENKO: "IF ARMENIA FOCUSES ON WEST, IT MAY LOSE SECURITY GUARANTEES"

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22.11.2017

Vestnik Kavkaza, 21 Nov 2017

The 5th Eastern Partnership summit will take place in Brussels on 24 November, the main event of which is expected to be the signing of the European Union Association Agreement by Armenia, which was postponed in 2013 after Yerevan's decision to join the Customs Union. Armenia will become the first country participating in Eurasian integration projects, which will conclude agreements on economic and political integration similar in their goals and functions with the EU. Before that, the Association Agreement was joined by Georgia, which does not have diplomatic relations with Russia, and Ukraine after the violent change of power. The Associate Professor of the Department of International Security of the Faculty of World Politics of Moscow State University, Alexey Fenenko, told Vestnik Kavkaza about the potential impact of this step on Armenia and Russian-Armenian relations.

- First of all, Aleksey Valerevich, what are the threats from Armenia's EU Association Agreement for Russia and Russian-Armenian cooperation?

- First, I want to draw your attention to the fact that it will not be easy to sign such a document for Armenia: the republic does not have any land or sea border with the countries of the European Union, or any convenient communications through third countries. In general, it is a mystery how the development of economic ties between Armenia and the EU is possible if Turkey blocks its border with Armenia due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, even if the border is open, it is hard to imagine how transit is to be carried out, and delivery of goods to the EU via Georgia, the Black Sea, the ports of Bulgaria and Romania will be quite expensive. There is another question: what can Armenia sell to the European Union countries? In the case of agricultural products, neither Greece, nor Romania, nor Bulgaria will allow any competitor to appear in their markets and markets of neighboring countries - once they clearly showed this to Georgia, which joined the EU Association Agreement. If we are talking about deliveries of a rare stone, for example, pink tuff, then a successful trade does not require a free trade association agreement.

So far, we have only political speculations, and it does not even matter whether the agreement is signed or not, as by holding such negotiations the West has two objectives. The first object is to blur the Eurasian Economic Union as much as possible, because if we assume that Armenia will be a member of both organisations, the entire customs system of the EEU will collapse, its basic foundations will be undermined. The second object is an attempt to support the anti-Russian segment inside Armenia to provoke an anti-Russian Maidan in the future under the slogan of Armenia withdrawing from the CSTO and the EEU.

- Should we expect even deeper separation between Armenia and Russia and its greater focus on the West?

- This has been happening for a long time. I would say that it has started in 2003 when the rapid and cautious development of military contacts between Armenia and NATO has begun, as well as the political dialogue between Armenia and the EU. Today Armenia is the only CSTO country that has a powerful military partnership program with NATO, here it is worth recalling the joint Armenia-NATO drills in the territory of Georgia, which were held this autumn. Against whom were they directed? If we talk about Armenia's EU Association Agreement, so far the Armenian leadership has tried to use it as a bargaining chip in some kind of bargaining with Russia: "Either you provide us better support in Karabakh, or we find new partners, observe this balance." But as we know, sooner or later any balance ends. The Armenian leadership did not notice a whole shift of young and not so young politicians, in late 30s, who are very critical of Russia and positively relate to the further development of ties between Armenia and the West, which has grown in Armenia over the past 15 years. At the same time, they forget the simple thing that the development of ties between Armenia and the West requires Armenia's withdrawal from the CSTO, which automatically leaves it alone with Turkey and Azerbaijan.

- What is the most probable impact of a greater focus on the West for Armenia and Russia?

- For Russia, it would be an unpleasant blow to the CSTO. If it was just about Armenia, this wouldn't be a big deal, but we remember that in 2012, Uzbekistan suspended membership in this organization. If the second country withdraws from the CSTO, the question of preserving the CSTO in its current capacity will inevitably arise. I do not rule out that the West's game with Armenia has been played for that purpose: to undermine the CSTO, to deal a blow at it. The break with Russia will have crushing strategic consequences on Armenia, because it will sharply weaken its positions and strengthen Azerbaijan's position in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

- Why is Russia better than the European Union for Armenia?

- First of all, Russia is close to Armenia, and the European Union is far away from it. Armenia's goods transit mainly through the Russian territory, not through any other, currently, Russia is the key market for Armenian goods. In the area of security, Russia provides guarantees to Armenia, it was once again confirmed at the CSTO summit in Yerevan last year. If Armenia focuses on the West, it may lose it. Although so far the Armenian leadership used this association agreement only as a bargain in relations with Russia, if they reach a serious level in this issue, it can blow up the whole strategic situation in the region.

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