RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH CAUCASIA – ALEV KILIÇ

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There is still no stability in the region of south Caucasia consisting of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. This is due on the one hand to Armenias ongoing invasion since 1992 of Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven provinces at its periphery, to the failure to end the invasion, to the failure to provide a peaceful solution that will allow millions of people who were forced to migrate to return to their homes; and on the other hand due to the Georgia-Abkhazia and Georgia-Russia wars. For Turkey, to which all three countries are neighbors with shared borders, the establishment of peace and stability in the region is no doubt an important and prominent subject. It is possible to state that despite Turkeys effort to guide the region toward stability, peace and cooperation; relations in the region have come to a deadlock, especially due to Armenias unconstructive, even hampering demeanor.

There have been noticeable new happenings and new trends in the region in recent times. The overshadowing of these is Armenias decision in September 2013 to change course away from the European Union, and to join the Customs Union-Eurasian Economic Union spearheaded by Russia. With this decision, Armenias future, its relations with Russia, and Russias role and activities in the region has come to the fore that no doubt must be taken into account. Russia saw no harm in demonstrating its increased interest towards the region and announcing its desire to increase its influence in the region. As a matter of fact, in the short time that that has elapsed, important economic and military steps have been taken.

At the beginning of January 2014, Armenias natural gas distribution company handed over its remaining 20% share to the Russian Gasprom company in exchange for its 300 million dollar debt. With this, the Gasprom company has acquired all the shares of the natural gas distribution network in Armenia. After this, Russia declared its decision to bolster its military bases and power in Armenia through air support, by adding attack helicopters to its Mig-16 squadron in the Erebuni airbase in Yerevan, which is a part of the 182th military base in Gyumri.

Conversely, citing technical reasons, Azerbaijan petroleum and natural gas company SOCAR suspended on 13th of January 2014 the gas delivery that it had been providing to Russia since January 2010 in accordance with the agreement it signed with the Russian Gasprom company on October 2009.

Russia has started to seek new means of transportation to Armenia. Upon disruption of the only railway with Russia after the Georgian-Abkhaz war, Armenias land connection to the world has been limited to roads via Iran and Georgia. Upon an official declaration by an Armenian official on September 2013 stating that a railway connection would be constructed, both Georgia and Abkhazia refuted this declaration, and as such the railway connection has remained disrupted. Meanwhile, Russia has taken control of the Armenian railways and has pledged to upgrade them. Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey; in the meantime, have reached the final stage of the construction of the new Kars □□□□□□□□□□□□ railway.

The Minsk Group - to which Turkey is a party - was established in order to reach a peaceful solution to the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven provinces at its periphery, which is one of the leading causes of the instability and tension in the region. In the light of the latest developments, there is a need more than ever for the efforts of the Minsk Groups three co-chairs (Russia, France, and the USA) who are actively tracking the problem on the ground to quickly reach a peaceful and constructive solution. It would be wise to consider the potential of positive effects of Minsk Group as a whole to take up the problem with renewed and more encompassing methods and efforts.

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To cite this article: KILIÇ, Alev. 2026. "RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH CAUCASIA □ ALEV KILIÇ." Center For Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Commentary No.2014 / 8. January 22. Accessed October 30, 2026. https://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/RECENT-DEVELOPMENTS-IN-SOUTH-CAUCASIA-ALEV-KILIC

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