

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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August 2009 has arrived, and events in the Caucasus continue to move quickly, with some notable developments to mention. Negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan intensified, which has ramifications for not only the two countries but also for the attempts to normalise relations between Turkey and Armenia. Both issues are fraught with complications: despite the initial activation phase in May and June, the latest Moscow meeting between both presidents did not manage to produce a framework agreement, much hoped for and hyped by the Minsk Group in advance. The talks seem to get stuck primarily on the modalities of an eventual “legally binding expression of will” on the final legal status of the region and its interim status. Also, the phased withdrawal of Armenian forces from the seven occupied districts surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh according to the 5+2 scheme appears to be a topic of contention. Meanwhile, the Minsk Group has worked out an updated version of the so-called Basic Principles which is expected to be discussed at the Autumn meeting between both presidents. Whether it will be possible to come to terms on the contentious issues and sign a framework agreement before the end of 2009 remains to be seen. If no progress is achieved in the current year, 2010 will be much more difficult due to the fact that there will be parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan. As the long history of negotiations indicates, it is usually impossible to produce any tangible results in negotiations in election years. As regards the Turkey-Armenia relationship, Azerbaijan indirectly plays a key role, wishing to ensure that normalised relations ensue and do not precede the final resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in order to avoid any toughening of Armenia’s negotiating positions.

Meanwhile, Georgia continues to be in the spotlight, receiving a high-profile visit by Vice-President Biden, who reiterated US support for Georgia and explicitly acknowledged its NATO aspirations in a positive light. This may have appeared rather contradictory for Russia, especially after Obama’s “reset” visit to Moscow in which sparks of hope for improved relations were kindled. And concerning the Georgian-Russian conflict, Moscow in the meantime has failed to garner any international support for the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia – even from such traditional allies as Belarus and Armenia, which demonstrates the fiasco of Russia’s plans for repeating the Kosovo scenario and presages the continuation of the international isolation of both breakaway regions even after their recognition by Russia.

The intergovernmental agreement on Nabucco signed in Ankara raised hopes for the gas pipeline’s prospects. However, Turkmenistan’s recent renewal of its claims to two oil fields already developed by Azerbaijan in the Caspian Sea (and the unexploited one located on the borderline between the sectors of both countries), and its plans to sue Azerbaijan again shadow this problematic energy project, so essential for Europe’s long-term energy security. After successful mutual top level visits during the last years both countries seemed to have smoothed their dissonance stemming from the 1990s. Hopefully, it will be possible to reach a settlement, thus avoiding placing additional stones on an already rugged path for the project.

In addition to these and other happenings, such as tensions mounting in the North Caucasus after a new spate of attacks launched by insurgents, and political upheaval in Iran (all of

which are presented weekly and in critical detail by our [Caucasus Update](#)), now more than ever is the time for in-depth analysis of Caucasian affairs – and the Summer 2009 edition provides a wealth of it. A meticulous assessment of the international media coverage of the Georgian-Russian war of August 2008 is presented alongside scientifically rigorous papers on the systemic impacts of the global financial meltdown on Georgia, and the poverty reduction problems in Georgia. Also, remaining true to our coverage of neighbouring regions, we present profound analyses on the recent intensification of Russian efforts to reinforce the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and its stronghold in Central Asia, on the rationale behind the merging of regions in Russia, and on the possible consequences of regional elections on the Kurdish issue in Turkey. In addition, a review of a book on China's energy geopolitics in Central Asia and two interviews with experts are also presented.

Following the publication of the last issue, the CRIA is proud to announce that we have been added to Columbia International Affairs Online's (CIAO.net) exclusive list of academic journals, an outstanding indication of CRIA's contemporary salience and merit, as well as of the collective work of all our contributing staff and authors. The CRIA has continuously strove to increase its readership, and the coming months will be no exception. Our audience can count on the CRIA being able to keep pace with developments in the Caucasus and beyond, and we thank our staff, editorial and advisory boards, our authors, and all those who come to us for attaining a better understanding of the region.

It is, therefore, with great pleasure that I present to you the Summer '09 edition, and we look forward to your comments, questions, and continuing support.