

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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With the signing of the protocols between Armenia and Turkey in Geneva, the world waits on the two countries' parliaments to ratify these accords and open the border—a move that could have various implications for the region and beyond. Being part of Turkey's zero-problems policy, normalizing relations with Armenia is another step toward resolving regional problems with its immediate neighbors—measures which may prove to be too impressive for Brussels to ignore. On the other hand, resolving problems with immediate neighbors may come at the expense of creating new ones with long-time allies. Cue Azerbaijan, which also plays a large role in this process, demands a substantial progress in Nagorno-Karabakh, including the phased withdrawal of Armenian troops, before opening of the Turkish-Armenian border.

For Armenia, which clearly has more to gain from the thaw, the protocols are strongly opposed by the diaspora and opposition parties, not least because of the proposal to create a so-called “historical commission” to investigate the 1915 events, which many Armenians feel calls into question the use of the genocide label. President Sargsyan's Republican Party, however, has a parliamentary majority, which will make it difficult for any opposition forces in Yerevan and beyond to attempt to derail ratification, if the Armenian government really decides to embark on it. Nevertheless, President Sargsyan seems to be disinclined to push for the ratification until the Turkish parliament has done so. Conversely, being bound by his repeated clear-cut pledges to Azerbaijan not to open the border until the end of occupation, Turkey's Prime Minister Erdogan is also demonstrating a similar reluctance.

The Nabucco gas pipeline project, meanwhile, hangs in the balance as these three countries iron out their grievances and demands. If the border opens and Baku decides to decrease ties with Turkey, Azerbaijan's energy resources may end up being routed through the Black Sea, Russia, or Iran, thereby reducing Turkey's stake in transit, supply, and overall geopolitical influence.

Speaking of Russia and Iran, Moscow remains lukewarm in agreeing to take severe measures against Tehran's nuclear ambitions. Instead, Russia's leaders seem to prefer to make as few commitments as possible, giving only minor and rather contradictory concessions to both sides – Washington and Brussels on one, Tehran on the other.

Finally, the situation remains critically tense in the North Caucasus. After Ingush president Yunus-Bek Yevkurov was wounded in a suicide car bomb attack, Chechnya's president Ramzan Kadyrov's efforts to increase his power in the region have multiplied and received at least tacit support from Moscow. The firm response from Moscow, not to mention its support for Kadyrov, has arguably only increased resistance by insurgents, and still no tangible result has been produced in finding the murderers of human rights activists and journalists who have been killed while relaying stories to the world from this war-torn region.

The present Autumn '09 issue presents a meticulous assessment of importance of introducing an alternative dispute resolution mechanism in the North Caucasus, an in-depth analysis of the implications of the 1993 UN Security Council action for the

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement, as well as a thorough research of old-age pension reforms in Georgia. The issue also includes a comment on Ukraine's current quandary between Russia and NATO, scientifically rigorous papers on corruption in Russia, and China's soft-balancing "experiments" in Africa and the Arab world. A review of a book on the Russian-Chechen conflict is published alongside interviews on current South Caucasus issues with experts from Germany, Georgia and the US, as well.

In addition, we are excited to announce that we are currently working on a new design for CRIA's website, which we hope to be able to present quite soon, and which will provide a fresh perspective for our readers, old and new. And, as always, we thank our readers for their comments, support, and participation, all of which help to make the CRIA an increasingly relevant and authoritative source of scholarship and information.