

## Kaukaz Południowy: imperia się nie ścierają? Rosja uważa się tu za hegemona

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### South Caucasus: empires do not clash? Russia is considered a hegemon here

*Russia perceives the area of the South Caucasus as its exclusive sphere of influence. But do other actors perceive it as such? What to expect in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in the near future? Experts agree: there are no US activities in the region, Turkey cooperates with Russia, Russia manages the countries of the Caucasus through conflicts that fire up from time to time. And 2008 showed that the West does not react quickly to crisis situations.*



The situation in the Southern Caucasus, Russia's activities, the role and interests of Turkey, Iran, the European Union and the United States in the region were discussed at the College of Europe in Natolin by Dr. Tracey German from King's College in London, Yana Zabanova from the University of Groningen, **Prof. Mustafa Aydin from the Kadir Has University in Istanbul**, and the debate was moderated by Dr Tobias Schumacher from the European College in Natolin, head of the Chair of the European Neighborhood Policy.

**The most active in the region is definitely Russia. However, there are other powerful actors in the region: Iran, Turkey, the West; the USA and the European Union.**

**Dr Tracey German (Kings' College)** reminded that Russia is the dominant power in a historical perspective from the 19th century. It perceives the region as absolutely crucial from the point of view of security. Stability in South Caucasus means stability in the North Caucasus. Moscow also recognizes that it is the hegemon in this area. As a challenge, he takes away the policies of Turkey, Iran in the region, but especially the actions of Western countries. Signs of commitment from the European Union and the USA make Russia feel uncomfortable.

**Mustafa Aydin of the Kadir Has University** in Istanbul noted that how Russia is perceives its role in the region is one thing, how it is perceived by other countries in the region is another.

Thus, others say that Russia is a regional power, not a hegemon, as hegemony requires consent and there is not a consent for Russia's role in the region.

He also argued that 2008 was the crucial year for the South Caucasus. In 2008, Russia showed that it would use force to achieve political gains. According to the researcher, this has not changed. In addition, everyone learned about one more thing - that if Russia uses force, the West would not close enough to help. This situation also affected what happened in 2014; The annexation of Crimea. The United States, on the other hand, looks like it either has withdrawn from the region through loss interest or being unable to generate effective responses. Other countries also have not shown perseverance to fight in the region. This also applies to Turkey. Ankara has not been very active in the region in recent years for various reasons. You can see that its cooperation with Russia is stronger; it was dominated earlier more by rivalry.

Russia, as the researcher noted, is present in Armenia, and advances arguments there that "as long as Russia is in Armenia, it will not be attacked by Turkey". In Georgia, Russia is hated. Azerbaijan tries to play on two sides.



**Yana Zabanova from the University of Groningen** noted that Iran maintains relations with all the actors of the region. However, Iran sets priorities in its relations and these are in the Middle East. It seems that it accepts Russian aspirations to lead in both the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

The new formula is the trilateral relations between Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia. According to **Professor Aydın**, it is not that Turkey withdrew from the South Caucasus completely, but it changed policy and gave up its rivalry with Russia. Such competition took place earlier in the 1990s and also more concerned the energy sector. He added that, unlike Russia, Turkey does not look at this region as a key safety issue. Turkey is now buying S-400 systems from Russia; there is also an agreement on the construction of a nuclear power plant by Russia in Turkey. At the same time, from Turkey's point of view, when the US gets involved in the situation in the

Southern Caucasus and a rivalry emerge between Russia and the US in the region, then Turkey is pushed towards the margins. According to the researcher, Turkey could also have good relations with Armenia - however, historical issues stand in the way and the border between the two countries remain closed. Russia, for its part, continues to fuel the Armenian fears and present themselves as the guarantor of their state survival.

The trilateral relations between Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey, as **Aydin** said, are perceived by Armenia as a threat. Azerbaijan is against Turkey's rapprochement with Armenia - because it believes that under pressure Armenia will finally give-in in its dispute with Azerbaijan.

The scientist said that Armenia is unfortunately a country that is truly penetrated by Russia. As he commented, all the media, energy sector, important industries etc. have been bought by Russians. If not Russia, then Turkey would enter Armenia. However, if the current situation continues, Armenia will remain on the side, lonely.

**Yana Zabanova** notes that Armenia does not enjoy isolation. He has good relations with Georgia. Iran too maintained its relations with Armenia. However, according to the expert, Armenia expects more than Iran can offer. Iran struggles for investment itself, and people are disappointed there with little progress after the lifting of sanctions.

**Professor Mustafa Aydin** said that Russia and Turkey had warred for 500 years; more than dozen or so times. But today, bilateral relations are marked with cooperation combined with competition; pragmatism prevails in them. The cooperation of both countries is based on the fact that both are against the US influence in the region.

**Tracey German** from King's College said that Russia aims to gain more and more influence and uses the fact that the West is focused on the situation in Syria and Ukraine. In Georgia, Moscow is constantly pushing the border. It is trying to block the real chances of Georgia joining NATO. There is a threat of Russian propaganda. - Russia benefits from the lack of attention of the West to consolidate its position - said the expert. She also stressed that Russia had sent Javelin missiles to Georgia. Russia did not expect this.

**Yana Zabanova** also noted that Iran is interested in resolving the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but will not be able to interfere because there is no means to do so.

**Tracey German** added that Russia tells everyone that he is not a party in Georgia, and in the event of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, he sells arms to both countries. Conflict is becoming more and more dangerous because military equipment is more and more advanced.

**Mustafa Aydin** remarked that there is an understanding in Turkey that solution of any of the conflicts in the region would be benefit her. However, through conflicts, Russia controls the countries of the region and Turkey has no instrument to induce Russia not to play such a role in the region. Russia's behavior also aims to destroy all multilateral formats.

**Tobias Schumacher** from the College of Europe in Natolin said that everyone agrees that there is no prospect of conflict resolution. Pragmatism dominates the relations in the region. Probably everyone would benefit from changes, but the actors might be more interested in maintaining the status quo, because stability is important for Iran and Turkey as well. The researcher also said that Russia does not want to resolve conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and also Azerbaijan and Armenia use the Nagorno-Karabakh case in internal politics to legitimize power.

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