Energy Geopolitics
Why Gazprom is Coming to Georgia

Silk Road Forum Tbilisi 2015

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Energy Geopolitics: Why Gazprom is Coming to Georgia

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA

Last month we were informed that “null cooperation” had begun between the Russian energy giant Gazprom, in the person of its President, Alexei Miller, and the Government of Georgia, in the person of Fuel and Energy Affairs Minister Kakha Kaladze. The two recently met in Brussels to discuss this in more detail, and though the negotiations were secret it subsequently emerged that Gazprom intends to supply Russian natural gas to Georgia and transit it through Georgia to third countries.

Georgia usually consumes about 2 billion cubic metres of gas annually. Gazprom supplied about 0.3 billion cubic metres of this in 2014, representing about 25%, the rest being supplied by the Azerbaijani state energy corporation, known as SOCAR. Georgia receives about 0.5 billion cubic metres of the SOCAR gas as a transit fee from the South Caucasus Pipeline, but the agreement concerning this expires next year, at which point Azerbaijan could impose new terms on Georgia. There are several reasons to believe that it will do so: the geopolitical relationship of the two countries has altered, economic crisis has erupted in both countries and SOCAR is seeking to expand its activities to the point of monopolizing the Georgian market.

SOCAR, Georgia’s state energy corporation, has expressed its desire to transit Russian natural gas into Georgia and construct and restore gas pipelines. Its main revenues come from the Shah Deniz gas deposit and the ACG oil field. However it recently reduced the volume of gas it sends to Georgia for domestic consumption for three to six months, without compensating Georgia with a consequent price reduction. As for the other SOCAR subsidiary operating here, SOCAR Georgia Petroleum, we need only note that the first SOCAR fuel station anywhere was opened here in Georgia, in 2008, rather than in Azerbaijan. As of 2014 there were at least 110 filling stations in Georgia, these forming the company’s largest retail fuel station network. SOCAR Georgia Petroleum was fined for price-fixing in July this year by the Georgian Competition Agency.

We know that a second round of negotiations between Gazprom and Georgia was held earlier this month. However, this was not confirmed by the Georgian government. This might be because the two parties have entirely different interests, missions and goals. It may also reflect the fact that Gazprom, which controls the entire production cycle (geological exploration, extraction, production-processing, transport and selling) of the gas it exports is not exactly a transparent corporation: its corrupt practices have made it the target of economic sanctions from the EU community and USA. If Gazprom and SOCAR, ostensibly rivals, made a deal between themselves they could monopolize the energy markets at regional level, leaving no room for either to offer a better deal to a client country. This is why Georgia is seeking to make separate deals with both parties. Concrete evidence of the need for this has been provided by the Caspian Energy International Media Triumvirate, which stated: “According to the official release by Gazprom, the parties discussed issues of mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation in the energy sector. In particular, they negotiated the assumption of natural gas supplies to Azerbaijan by Gazprom.” Back in 2009, Gazprom and SOCAR signed a gas purchase-sale contract, under which supplies started in 2010. An addendum to this contract was signed in 2012. In 2013, the volume of natural gas supplies from Azerbaijan to Russia amounted to 1.4 billion cubic metres. In 2014, the volume of shipments fell to 0.21 billion cubic metres. No supplies were carried out in 2015.

Azerbaijan and Russia are currently undertaking a geopolitical rapprochement. This further increases the likelihood of the two state-owned energy companies doing a deal which would deprive any country of choice of supplier or price. The Georgian government understands that the country needs to diversify its energy deliveries and occupy a greater market segment itself. As Kakha Kaladze said, “We should not depend on a single supplier. Larger gas supplies from the Russian Federation at competitive prices are not ruled out. Georgia would like to buy more Russian gas.” However, this strategy is also very dangerous. If the two gas companies choose to make their own deal, they are not going to respect any agreement one of them makes with a mere consumer. SOCAR is aware of the details of the Georgia-Gazprom deal and is plotting its next move, which is much more likely to benefit SOCAR and Gazprom than Georgia itself.

Gazprom’s interest in Georgia relates to its desire to transit produced and purchased in Iran via Georgian territory. Gazprom has had an interest in Iran’s South Pars gas field since 1997, having invested more than $2 billion in it, and it announced on Thursday that it was exploring ways to cooperate more closely with Iran in the energy sector. Alexei Miller has welcomed Iranian Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Ali Agha Mohammad to Moscow to discuss bilateral energy issues, and according to a subsequent Gazprom statement, “Special attention was paid to global energy market trends and strategic partnership within the Gas Exporting Countries Forum.” The South Pars field contains 8% of the world’s gas reserves, more than enough to have a profound effect on the energy relationship between Russia and Iran. Opened in 1990, it is located in the Persian Gulf to the northeast of Iran, and is at a shallow depth and close to the shore, thus lowering production costs. The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) owns the field but Gazprom, ENI and Total have sig-
**GEORGIAN PM MEETS AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT IN BAKU**

Georgia will consider gas supplies from Gazprom on top of what the country is already receiving from the Russian state-controlled energy giant if the proposal is commercially viable, Georgia’s Energy Minister, Kakha Kaladze, said.

Georgia receives most of its gas supplies from Azerbaijan; it also receives, as a transit fee, 10% of gas shipped by Russia to Armenia through a pipeline running via Georgia.

Kaladze, who also is Deputy PM, met Gazprom chief executive, Alexei Miller in Brussels on September 25.

“Gazprom is already in Georgia. We receive natural gas from Russia for years already... and I think these relations will continue,” Kaladze told a groundbreaking ceremony for construction of an electricity substation in Marneuli on October 10.

“Our main gas supplier is Azerbaijan, which is our strategic partner,” he continued. “But any developed country thinks of diversifying its energy supplies. We are not talking about additional supplies only from Russia; we are also actively working in respect of Iran.”

He said that at the meeting with Gazprom CEO in Brussels, he discussed possibility of increasing gas shipments through North-South pipeline through which Russia supplies gas to Armenia.

“It is important for us to have this pipeline maximally loaded, because it will give us more gas (as a transit fee). In addition, it is a private companies [in Georgia] want, they also can buy gas from Russia,” Kaladze said.

The issue was raised at a parliamentary hearing on October 10, when opposition lawmakers from the Free Democrats party were meeting deputies of various ministers, among them Deputy Energy Minister Ilia Eloshvili. FD MPs, like lawmakers from another parliamentary opposition party, UNM, have expressed concerns over possible gas purchase from Gazprom.

Deputy Energy Minister Eloshvili told opposition lawmakers, that relying only on a single country in terms of energy supplies, no matter how friendly this country might be, is not a right policy.

**EDEN MINISTRY SAYS GEORGIA OPEN TO GAS SUPPLY TALKS WITH GAZPROM**

Georgia’s Energy Minister, Kakha Kaladze, said.

“The process will be open and transparent, based on our pragmatic interests,” the Deputy Energy Minister said.

**DEPUTY FM SAYS GEORGIA TOLD BY U.S. NOT TO RUSH INTO FULL-SCALE COOPERATION WITH IRAN**

Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister, Davit Dondua, said the U.S. had asked Georgia to refrain from full-scale cooperation with Iran until Tehran fully complies with the Vienna nuclear deal reached in July.

“We have permanent contacts with our American colleagues, who are asking us to refrain from full-scale cooperation with Iran and from becoming open [for Iran] for now – until all the commitments agreed in Vienna are fulfilled and until Iran is given final green light,” Dondua said on October 9.

“We are telling our American and other friends that we remain committed to the policy and sanctions pursued by [the West] in respect of Iran, but you should also take into consideration specifics of Georgia’s role, Iran is a regional state, our important partner, including from the economic point of view, and we want some sort of space for maneuvering,” Dondua said.

Speaking at a meeting with lawmakers from the opposition Free Democrats party in the Parliament, the Deputy Foreign Minister also said that there was one case when Georgia had to decline a request from an Iranian air carrier to launch operations in Georgia after the U.S. advised Tbilisi against it.

Dondua, however, also said that there was a separate case when, based on our pragmatic interests, allowed another Iranian airline to launch operations in Georgia although the U.S. was not encouraging this decision.

“We’ve done it without damaging our relations either with the U.S. or European partners,” the Deputy Foreign Minister said.

He did not specify, but the only Iranian air carrier, which currently operates flights between the two countries, is ATI Airlines.

“Hopefully Iran’s isolation will soon be over,” he said, adding that although it will have positive effect, it may have “certain not so positive” side as well and Georgia “should be ready for this.”

Reuters reported on October 9 that the U.S. has “privately reminded foreign governments and U.S. bankers that sanctions against Iran remain in place. It is not a rush by Western banks and oil companies to invest in Iran’s oil industry and other businesses until the country fully complies with the July nuclear agreement,” reached between Tehran and the P5+1 – the U.S., China, Russia, France, United Kingdom and Germany.

In a statement in July, the Georgian foreign ministry welcomed Iran nuclear deal as “an important step towards international peace.”

**NDI POLL ON MAYORS PERFORMANCE, OTHER LOCAL ISSUES**

Tbilisi mayor, Davit Narmania, is among those three mayors, who have net-negative performance ratings, according to NDI, commissioned polls from nine out of twenty self-governing cities, where mayors were elected in last year’s local election.

The poll, which was fielded by the Caucasus Resource Re-search Centers (CRRC) for the U.S. National Democratic Institute (NDI) in a period between August 8 and September 15, focuses locally on government and among other local issues; it has a margin of error plus, minus 3 percent.

Of the three mayors who scored negatively, Narmania has the largest net-negative ratings,38%. According to the survey, only 12% of respondents approve his performance, 36% rate his performance as poor, 44% are “neutral” and 7% say they “do not know.”

Narmania won slightly over 46% of votes in the Tbilisi mayoral race in June, 2014, in an election including all of 14 candidates. Failing short of outright victory in the first round, Narmania defeated the UNM opposition party’s candidate in the runoff with 72.47% of votes.

The mayor of Gor, the main city of Shida Kartli region, Zurab Abashidze, who criticized possibility of gas supply from Gazprom, is the second largest net-negative rating, 33%.

NDI’s performance with respondents voting with the same number of respondents viewing his performance negatively; 46% are “neutral”.

The mayors of Akhalsikhe, Telavi, Ozurgeti, Mtskheta, and Zugdidi have net-positive ratings, but like the four other cities surveyed, the number of those respondents in these five cities who were neutral exceeds those who have either a positive or negative view about performance of their mayors.

The mayor of Akhalsikhe, Giorgi Kopadze, has the highest net-positive performance rating of 21 percentage points, followed by Mayor of Telavi Platon Kalmakhelidze (14 percentage points); Mayor of Zugdidi Irakli Gogokhiya (13); Ozurgeti Mayor Beglar Sisiistrte (8); and Mayor of Mtskheta Avtandil Nemissvetvidze (3).

Only 13% of respondents agree with a statement that the local government is making changes that matter to them and 46% “disagree; 34% are neutral.

47% of respondents said that living conditions in their cities or villages stayed the same since June 2014, when the local elections were held; 43% responded that conditions got worse and only 9% said that conditions improved.

The survey also shows that interaction between citizens and elected local government officials – mayors; heads of munici- palities (Gamgebeli), and members of local councils (Sabalebis) is infrequent.

6% of respondents reported having ever been con- tacted by municipal council members and 3% by mayors’ offices.

According to the survey, respondents rate highly the perfor- mance of emergency medical services and public service halls, one-stop shops where citizen can get multiple services from various state agencies under the same roof.

Majority of respondents also believe that their village or town is safe (85%) and a good place to raise children (72%)

Residents in Tbilisi were asked about planned Panorama Tbilisi, a controversial large scale development of multi- functional complex on the hillside in the old part of the capital city, which is backed by billionaire ex-PM Bidzina Ivanishvili. The plan is expected to generate proceeds, 39% of respondents who argued that this overscaled project will destroy Tbilisi’s historic setting.

71% of those respondents in Tbilisi, who had heard about Panorama Tbilisi project, disapproved it, 3% approved, and 26% had no opinion.

Residents nationwide were also asked about the location of Parliament.

Currently, parliament has two buildings – one is newly built in Kutaisi and another one in Tbilisi with no official hearings are held. Although the GD ruling council wants to com- plete the Asanishvili parliament building and requires a substantial change which cannot be introduced without the support of UNM opposition lawmakers, who are in favor of keeping the build- ing in Tbilisi.

71% of respondents nationwide said that the Parliament should be located in Tbilisi; 20% were in favor of keeping it in Kutaisi.

Among the cities where the poll was fielded, only in Kutaisi were the majority of respondents (54%) in favor of keeping the parliament building in Kutaisi.
Customers’ idea about ideal lottery

- There must be a wide variety of prizes;
- It would be good to win several times;
- Receive the prize the moment you win;
- The rules must be easy;
- In case of cash prizes, decide myself what to buy.

Having taken into consideration your wishes “Aversi” grand lottery has begun!

The prizes are

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- 20,000
- 5 x 10,000
- 5 x 5,000
- There are also 19,023 instant prizes!

The lottery will be held on the 20th of November 2015 in the broadcast of “Rustavi-2”, after “Kurieri” 18:00.
PRESIDENT APPOINTS OPPOSITION PARTY LEADER AS HIS POLITICAL ADVISER

President Giorgi Margvelashvili has formally asked the government to hold a session with his participation to discuss “situation in Georgia’s energy security and energy transit sector.”

In a letter to the prime minister, President’s administration asked the cabinet to consider including this topic in the agenda of next government session, which, it says, will also be attended by President Margvelashvili and secretary of the National Security Council Tariel Kaltadze.

The President’s request comes after Energy Minister, Kaika Kaladze, said that Georgia may seek additional gas supplies from Russia’s state-صris-owned energy giant Gazprom, causing concerns of opposition parties.

Georgia receives most of its gas supplies from Azerbaijan; it also receives, as a transit fee, 10% of gas supplies by Russia to Armenia through a pipeline running via Georgia.

Georgian Energy Minister told media that Tbilisi was open for talks with Gazprom on possible gas supplies for private entities in Georgia in order to, as Energy Minister Kaladze and his deputy put it, “diversify energy supplies for the country. Kaltadze, who met Gazprom chief executive in Brussels in late September, reiterated in separate remarks for more than times since then that private entities might be interested in purchasing Russian gas if prices are acceptable.

After the Georgian Energy Minister spoke about possible gas supplies from Gazprom last week, PM Garibashvili made a brief and unanswered phone call to Baku where he assured his Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev, prompting speculation in Tbilisi that the surprise visit aimed for mending ties after possible tension caused by Tbilisi’s suggestions over Gazprom gas supplies.

PM Garibashvili has strongly denied speculation and said on October 12 that his recent visit to Baku will remain “friendly and strategic” and dismissed talk of “diversification, replacement of Azerbaijani gas supplies as ‘utterly absurd.’

The PM reiterated remarks when he again spoke about the issue at a government session on October 13.

He also said that talks with Gazprom are of “technical” nature aimed at negotiating possible increase of transit of natural gas to Armenia via Georgia, which, he said, is in Tbilisi’s interest, would result into more gas for Georgia as a transit fee.

Unlike the Energy Minister, PM Garibashvili did not mention need to diversify gas suppliers or possibility of purchase of Russian gas by private entities in Georgia.

According to the Georgian Energy Ministry, the country consumed total of 2.1 billion cubic meters of natural gas in 2014 of which only 200 million cubic meters were from Gazprom, supplied to Georgia as a transit fee, and the rest came from Azerbaijan. Gazprom puts the figure of its supplied gas to Georgia at 2014 400 million cubic meters.

This is the second time President Margvelashvili has requested the government to hold a session on energy transit sector. The previous time, when he called for the cabinet session to discuss foreign policy related issues in November 2014, the request was snubbed by the government.

PENDING VERDICT, CONSTITUTIONAL COURT SUSPENDS LAW ON BANKING SUPERVISORY AGENCY

Nine-member Constitutional Council decided with 5 votes to 4 to suspend application of the disputed law on banking supervisory agency.

As an interim measure, pending final verdict, the Constitutional Court suspended application of a disputed legislation, dealing with operation of newly established banking supervisory agency.

The nine-member Constitutional Council adopted the decision on October 12 by a narrow margin of votes by 4 to 3.

39 lawmakers from the opposition UNM and Free Democrats parties lodged on September 22 a joint complaint with the Constitutional Court, arguing that the newly adopted law, establishing the Financial Supervisory Agency, is unconstitutional. As an interim measure, the applicants were also requesting to suspend the Financial Supervisory Agency, is unconstitutional. As an institutional Court, arguing that the newly adopted law, establishing with operation of newly established banking supervisory agency.

The Financial Supervisory Agency has been established after banking supervision oversight functions from the central bank deprived the latter of its constitutionally defined goal of supporting “stable functioning of the financial sector.”

The applicants also claim that the disputed law violates constitutional terms of presidential powers as the president has no role in selecting and appointing board members of the new agency, which is in charge of banking system oversight.

Civil Georgia

PRESIDENT WANTS GOVT SESSION OVER ‘ENERGY SECURITY’

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ICC PROSECUTOR REQUESTS TO OPEN PROBE INTO AUGUST WAR

The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) requested to authorize investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed during the August, 2008 war in Georgia.

Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda filed the 160-page request, detailing alleged crimes against civilians by Georgian forces.

The prosecutor welcomed the decision of The Hague-based Court’s pre-trial chamber to refer the case to the court for possible investigation and prosecution.

The judges of pre-trial chamber of The Hague-based Court suspended application of a disputed legislation, dealing with operation of newly established banking supervisory agency.

“ICC judges grant authorization to proceed. I will open an investigation…[which] will be conducted with full independence and impartiality,” ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said.

Over time, the case against Bank of Georgia collected by my investigatory team will mature and there will be sufficient evidence. In due course, we can decide whether or not to authorize the Prosecutor to open the investigation.

If authorized, it would be the first investigation by the ICC outside Africa.

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On October 14 EIB announced about lending EUR 15 million to ProCredit Bank Georgia to finance projects by small and medium enterprises. EIB, which opened its South Caucasus regional office in Tbilisi less than six months ago, has signed loans for EUR 548 million in Georgia since it started its operations in the country in 2010.

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**EIB LENDS EUR 100 MLN TO GEORGIA FOR WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE IN KUTAISI**

The European Investment Bank (EIB) is lending Georgia EUR 100 million to finance wastewater collection and treatment infrastructure in country’s second largest city of Kutaisi. EIB approved USD 108 million loan for Georgia to finance improvement of water supply system in Zugdidi and sewerage system in Poti, towns in Samegrelo region in western Georgia, in December.

**DRinking and sanitary infrastructure is high on the EIB’s agenda in Georgia, in line with the government’s priorities. We have all already financed a number of projects in this sector across the country, and this is another loan with a major environmental and health dimension,** said EIB Vice-President László Baranyay, who is in the Georgian capital to participate in the first Tbilisi Silk Road Forum on October 11-15.

**UNM MPS’ DRAFT STATEMENT ON RUSTAVI 2 TV VOTED DOWN IN PARLIAMENT**

Parliament voted down on Friday a draft statement tabled by opposition UNM party, which criticizes the government over pressure on “Tbilisi-based private broadcaster, Rustavi 2 TV, which is in a court battle over censorship dispute.

"Obviously coordinated actions by the executive and judicial branches of the government against Rustavi 2 TV pose threat to the existence of an independent, highly damaged media pluralism and freedom of expression and, consequently, country’s Euro-Atlantic integration,” reads the statement, which was rejected by the Georgian Dream parliamentary majority group.

Parliament plenary session, which started on October 15 and continued for a second day on October 16, were aired live by the Rustavi 2 TV.

**GEORGIAN MOD SAYS TBLISI COMMITTED TO NATO-LED MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN**

In a phone conversation with U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work on Thursday, Georgian Defense Minister Tina Khidashel reiterates Georgia’s commitment to continue troop contribution to NATO-led mission in Afghanistan. The Georgian Ministry of Defense said that the phone conversation took place after U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter announced on Thursday about slowing the pace of U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. U.S. announced its current commitment of 9,800 through most of 2016. According to the Georgian MOD said that Khidashel reiterated once again the Georgian side’s readiness to continue participation along with the U.S. forces in the NATO-led international mission in Afghanistan.

A phone conversation was also held between chief of joint staff of the Georgian armed forces, Lt.-Gen. Alexander Kapanadze, and U.S. Air Force General Philip Breedlove, who is NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe and commander of U.S. forces in Europe.

"They discussed plan of implementation of future mission in Afghanistan and issues of further cooperation,” the Georgian MOD said.

With up to 885 soldiers Georgia is the second largest troop contributor to NATO’s Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan. Georgian troops, whose duties focus on security and rapid response, are deployed in southern Afghanistan, a province under the U.S. command; at the German army’s Camp Marmal in Mazar-i-Sharif, and in Kabul.

Georgia has lost 31 soldiers in Afghanistan with the most recent death in September, 2015, when Private First Class Vasil Chkhikvadze was killed in an attack while on patrol in the Panjwai province.

**TABULA TV HEAD, TWO OTHERS DETAINED FOR STICKING POSTERS IN TBLISI CENTER**

A screenshot from Rustavi 2 TV footage showing Tabula TV head Tamara Chergoleishvili and one of Rustavi 2 TV’s former co-owners, Kibar Khalvashi, in what appears to be a Gazprom uniform.

Police detained on Friday head of Tabula TV, Rustavi 2 TV’s one of the former co-owners, Kibar Khalvashi, as well as another person involved in an ongoing court dispute.

"By refusing to adopt this statement the parliamentary majority assumes responsibility for developments that will take place if political process losses legitimacy in the lead up to next year’s parliamentary elections,” a senior UNM lawmaker, Giorgi Gagoshvili said. "[Adoption of the statement] which will have signified at least the parliament is not part of government-orchestrated attack on Rustavi 2 TV.

"It is clear that the leadership of the government is using this as a cover to attack independent domestic television. The statement eliminates four possible prosecution of his mother. The three persons face charges under the article 150 of the code of administrative offenses.

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