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### **Iran and the South Caucasian conflicts**

Iran has quite careful position when it comes to the conflicts in the South Caucasus. Primarily, this refers to the conflict of Armenia and Azerbaijan near the Iranian border over Nagorno-Karabakh. In this case, Iran holds relatively neutral position, unlike Turkey, which openly supports Azerbaijan, and Russia, which first of all, is trying to pursue its own interests, supplies armament to Armenia and also to Azerbaijan; while at the same time maintains its military base in Armenia.

In the beginning Iran was trying to perform the role of the mediator between the two parties quite actively. However, soon it became apparent that Iran had only limited space for actions. It was especially hard and offensive to Iran when it was left out of the Minsk Group, created for the conflict resolution.

It is often noted, that in the conflict Iran has more pro-Armenian (though still moderate) position. The fact that Iran may lean more on the side of Christian Armenia is sometimes considered as expression of containment of Baku in case of irredentist activism in Iran's Azerbaijan.

Generally, neither the full victory of Armenia nor that of Azerbaijan was beneficial for Iran, in other words, Tehran was against both – alteration of borders and strengthening of Azerbaijan. To a certain extent, continuation of the conflict is in Iran's interests, because this makes Caucasian Azerbaijan less attractive for Azerbaijanis of Iran.

Iran had practically identical position towards the Azerbaijan-Armenia 2020 war. It must be pointed out that there was no consensus either in the government or in Iranian society concerning the last conflict. During the war there were often mutually exclusive statements. After the re-establishment of the Azerbaijanian control over the border areas and most part of the Mountainous Karabagh Iran was denied direct access to the Karabagh, where Iranian business was extremely active.

In general, from the political view, there are no changes for Iran. Iran supports territorial integrity of Azerbaijan but at the same time has much more close relations with Armenia.

Iran holds more careful position on the war of 2008 between Georgia and Russia. Firstly, this is determined by the fact that also in this case Iran cannot contradict Russia, whose dominant position in the region is recognized by Iran. On the other side, Iran still wants to maintain good neighboring relations with Georgia. Iran perfectly understands importance of Georgia in terms of transit.

Without deciding to condemn aggression of Russia in Georgia, Iran at the same time has officially declared the support of sovereignty and territorial integrity of any country and has emphasized the fidelity to the international standards and agreements. In a consequence Iran also has refused to recognize supported by Russia separatist regions of Georgia.

In general, Tehran has been presenting the 2008 August war as an object of a lesson to the countries of the Persian Gulf: Georgia had made a mistake since it took the US promises for granted and now it has to pay an immense price for its naivety. Therefore, the regional countries would be better off establishing closer links with Iran in the security sphere, rather than looking toward unpredictable America.

Iran considers that any issue (whether it refers to conflicts, territorial disputes, pipelines, etc.) should be decided by all countries of the region, which apart from the South Caucasus countries also includes Iran, Russia and Turkey. External actors (first of all the US) should not interfere in the internal affairs of the region.

After the 2020 Azerbaijan-Armenia war Turkish President Erdoğan proposed new 3+3 platform for collaboration in the South Caucasus which must include three South Caucasian countries and three neighbor powers (Russia, Turkey and Iran). Platforms with such aims existed earlier but with no real impact. It is extremely important for Iran to become a member of such regional projects but this platform is unexpected for Georgia (as Russian forces still occupy its regions) and problematic for Armenia. Due to the Russian pressure, Armenia was obliged to join the platform. The most controversial issue is the plan of the rehabilitation of so called "Zangezur" (Arm. "Suinik") corridor along the Armenian-Iranian border which will connect by rail Azerbaijan with its exclave Nakhichevan via Armenian territory at the one hand and Armenia with Russia via Azerbaijanian territory at the second hand. After the outbreak of the war by Russia against Ukraine the effectiveness of this platform was extremely reduced.