
Invitation of Georgia to NATO on the threshold of G8 summit is a blunt challenge to Russia.

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Regnum's interview with Arif Yunusov, political analyst, head of Conflictology and Migration Department, Institute for Peace and Democracy, Azerbaijan.

In what formulation the Karabakh problem will be presented at the G8 summit in St. Petersburg (most probably, on the sidelines of the summit)?

I suppose, the Karabakh problem will not occupy any significant place in discussions at the St. Petersburg summit. Most probably, the Karabakh problem will be somehow discussed on the sidelines of debates between Russia and the USA. However, it will be in context of settlement of other conflicts. In other words, the top priority at the summit will be discussion of Kosovo. In its turn, Russia would raise the issue of necessity of a universal approach to all the conflicts, and in this aspect, probably, a discussion will be held on Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Karabakh; if the Karabakh problem is to be reflected in the documents officially, it will be only in the form of supporting position of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs conveyed on June 22. But separately the Karabakh problem will not be discussed at the summit.

What is Russia's mission and role in settling this problem?

Concerning the Karabakh issue, Russia's role is significant indeed.

It is another matter, how strongly it aspires for using its opportunities. Until now Russia has been taking a hesitating position, giving the initiative to the US. And. I suppose, the Russian authorities will not be distressed, if what at the current stage is named as the Prague Process ends up with another failure.

Will Russia, which itself has faced separatism in Chechnya in its case, insist upon universal nature of the Kosovo precedent?

Of course, Russia would insist upon universal character of the Kosovo precedent. Essentially, both Russian authorities of various levels and many representatives of the political elite have repeatedly talked about it. At the same time, Chechen separatism will play no special role for the Russian authorities. The Chechen separatism did not hinder Russia from playing a negative role in the conflicts in Azerbaijan (Karabakh), Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and Moldova (Transdnestr). It is exactly the case, when one should speak of double standards.

What aims will the group of Western countries pursue and are there any objective grounds for possible criticism of the Russian policy?

The G8 summit in St. Petersburg can become very important for Russia and the whole world too. It is not a secret any more that relations between Russia and the West have started worsening considerably recently. After more than ten years of talking about Russia's "integration" with the West and "strategic partnership" between Moscow and Washington, today officials from the USA and Western Europe express

their concern publicly concerning internal political situation in Russia and its relations with republics of the former USSR. And Russia's making advances to China and Iran stir serious alert and the question, what to do with Putin Russia. At first, criticism towards Russia was made through Western mass media. And on May 4, US Vice President Dick Cheney directly accused the Kremlin in "unfair infringement upon civil rights" and use the country's energy resources as "instruments of intimidation and blackmail". And recent almost demonstratively pompous reception by George Bush to Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili and proposal to join NATO on the threshold of the summit are just a blunt challenge to Russia. This way, it is shown that the period of the carrot policy towards Russia has failed and now a stage of stick has been started. Of course, at the summit, first of all, the issue is to be considered of Russia's using energy resources for exerting political pressure and blackmail of the former Soviet republics. There will be also criticism of Russia's policy towards former USSR countries, as well as in the East. In a lesser extent, a question about reduction of democratic processes in Russia itself.

In many expects, this criticism will be of undoubtedly objective character. However, the matter is, that policy of leading Western countries has also dual nature, and just like Russia, the USA connives at actions of authoritarian leaders if they have energy resources and agree to support policy of the West. It will let Putin rebut the criticism. On the other hand, the West should comprehend: Russia for many reasons cannot be fully pro-Western or anti-Western.

It is an internal Russia's problem, and its tragedy and strength simultaneously. So, the West should take Russia as it is, but not live in the world of illusions and believe that Russia has a chance to become a part of the West. In his turn, Putin will try to turn the summit into a large-scale propagandist show in order to prove that Russia has regenerated, become a superpower again, although a democratic one and with free market economy.

What can Azerbaijan expect from the summit in terms of securing energy safety?

To a known extent Azerbaijan can gain profit from the summit. Because one of the most acute discussions will be the problem of energy security of Western countries and their fear that a new Russia, as they believe, has assumed the policy of effective use of weapons in foreign policy. In this connection, not so important in scale of Russia and Arab countries energy resources of Azerbaijan can be partly an alternative for Georgia, Ukraine, Poland and some other countries. I suppose, in this issue the West will pay even more attention to the problem of safe supply of Azerbaijani energy resources and strengthening its influence in this country. But Russia would hardly agree with such developments, and that means that geopolitical life at South Caucasus will only increase.

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