

TURKEY FIGHTS FOR CONTROL OVER ENERGY EXPORTS FROM CASPIAN SEA

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It seems that new players joined the geopolitical 'game' of 'Alternative routes for pumping Central Asian gas' (circumventing Russia) as Turkey revealed its intentions to control a natural gas delivery station at the European border. If the plan goes through, Turkey will strengthen its position and most likely join the EU.

Turkmenistan hosted Azeri and Turkish leaders in a summit at which gas pipelines were discussed.

It was not a big deal to predict who would attend the summit: Turkmenistan takes part in almost all summits (where it only gives promises); Azerbaijan and Turkey are connected with the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines; and Turkey hopes to become a regional energy hub.

This summit illustrates the exporters' willingness to broaden the number of market outlets and be more involved in forming transport infrastructure for energy supplies. Another proof to this is their refusal from sizeable western investments that would enable western companies to control energy supplies from Central Asia and the Caspian Sea.

Thus, Europe has got a rival – Turkey. With its geographical situation, it can become a regional energy hub and a global mediator that would control a natural gas station located at the EU border. Turkey will benefit if Europe loses control over the oil and gas infrastructure and Russia loses its status of a monopolist as a supplier of gas from Central Asia to Europe. Perhaps, Caspian states most likely backed up Turkey at the summit.

The conventional 'Alternative routes for pumping Central Asian gas' project looks dull. Gas exporting countries and Turkey do not want the EU to control supplies while the EU does not want control from exporters' and Turkey's side. Russia opposes creation of an infrastructure bypassing its territory while the US backs such projects. Anyway, Europe will not benefit from this situation, while Russia's 'defeat' is doubtful. Even if a pipeline circumventing Russia is built and Europe gains control over energy supplies, there is no guarantee that there are enough gas to pump through the pipeline. Turkmen gas reserves are not proven, unlike Russian. Europe should understand that, blocking construction of pipelines via Russia, it can forget about energy security.