Friendly Relations between Georgia and Turkey shall be put to the test in Kirnati

It often occurs in Georgia that villages carry the same name. Take for example Kirnati. While one is situated in Abkhazia, a republic with limited recognized sovereignty, the other is located in Adjara, at least for now, as around this particular Kirnati some very strange events have been occurring; events that may bring some very serious consequences. According to local residents, agricultural land, which has been used since time immemorial, has appeared to be, as of today, on the Turkish side.

The “Anschluss” of farmland has suddenly occurred. Just the other day at the border, at the river separating Georgia from Turkey, Turkish border guards crossed with dogs and blindsided those working in the fields, demanding that they immediately vacate the area and henceforth never again appear on Turkish soil... “What can we do? We had to comply,” said the residents of Kirnati to well-known Georgian journalist and a Tbilisi mayoral candidate, Irma Inashvili.

To interrupt my election campaign in the capital and set out to the other side of Georgia has, to a large extent, been forced by the position of the authorities, who, in response to the pleas for help coming from Kirnati, pretended nothing had even occurred, and in fact one of the officials in the region even stated that the truth was on the Turkish side. After Tbilisi media interpreted the situation in Turkey’s favor. And while Inashvili with a small delegation arrived in Kirnati, authorities there slightly altered their position, acknowledging that in Adjara a border incident had indeed occurred.

“Georgia doesn't possess so much land that it can afford to lose any or give it away. If the pain felt by the residents of Kirnati doesn’t become the pain felt by the entire nation, then the country will just simply implode,” said Inashvili.

Upon the arrival of a group of people from Tbilisi, Kirnati responded with an impromptu village gathering. People did not hide their indignation at the State for not taking measures to ensure their protection; and even more so, practically blamed it for the provocation, and justifying the actions of the Turkish border guards: “And the very same thing was reported on TV channels, without even bothering to think about an alternative interpretation of the events, if they could not even get to us.”

The Tbilisi delegation explained the reason for the strange attitude of authorities to the situation as the following: Mikhail Saakashvili shortly before his resignation conceded several hundred (or even thousands) hectares of land bordering Turkey. Georgia's new authorities, knowing full well that they were in no condition to play the situation and confront Ankara, tried working the problem at first by “chewing” on it. And when that didn’t work, they declared that the local residents themselves had encroached on Turkish territory, forcing a reaction from the Turkish border guards. According to Irma Inashvili, she met with the chairman of the Department of Border Protection, Zurab Gamezardashvili. He confirmed to her the information about the conflict, but did not mention about Turkish border guards crossing the border. Obviously, an analysis of the events occurring at the border is complex. But now experts are rather pessimistic: if Saakashvili really transferred land to Turkey for a nominal amount, and in this respect there is a document (as without it, turkey would not allow itself to do what more than a 100 residents of Kirnati accuse it of doing), it is unlikely the land will be returned.
Representatives of the radical opposition of Georgia call the happenings in Kirnati as the first sign of “brotherly” relations with Turkey. They argue that not only the village or farmland was transferred to a neighboring country, but indeed all of Adjara. “Just go and see who owns and operates businesses in Batumi, the dubious entertainment establishments in Gonio, Kobuleti and all along the Adjarian coast. Note how Turkish citizens there behave as masters,” said the “radicals”, accusing Saakashvili and his regime of creating conditions favoring Turkey and in addition accusing the current government of inaction.

Indeed, the collective appeals of the residents of Adjara to the press, outlining the various complaints against foreigners has become rather common. It is of course very frustrating when guests for one reason or another act beyond the rules of proper etiquette. On the other hand a painful reaction to the residents of Adjara as “off the scale”, according to their opinion, the Turkish presence in the autonomous republic; it can be considered a kind of exaggerated perception of reality, a probable consequence of their own business or other failures in their native land. However, the Georgian side indicates a more serious problem than domestic “inconsistencies” with representatives of Turkey in Adjara.

Certain Turkish circles consider autonomous republic as being temporarily lost, remembering the period when Adjara was part of the Ottoman Empire. It is not uncommon to find modern maps printed in Turkey where Adjara appears as a Turkish province. It is troubling that the airport in Batumi was recently taken over by the Turkish company and placed under the management to function within the rules for domestic traffic. Finally, the Georgian side points to progress on intergovernmental agreements on historical heritage. According to documents agreed upon, Turkey must restore within its territory early medieval monastic complexes, Ishkhani and Oshki, while Georgia is to construct several mosques in Adjara and Javakheti instead of them being demolished. As reported by expedition members charged with monitoring the progress in Turkey, restoration is not always carried out efficiently and often times they neglect or fail to take care of architectural monuments. And while Turkish authorities react formally to complaints coming from the Georgian side, if not dismissively, Turkey meticulously monitors the work occurring on the Georgian side, insisting the Georgians follow the requirements strictly.

A high ranking Georgian source, commenting on the situation in Adjara, said that nothing particularly alarming is occurring with regards to its in autonomy. “Post-Soviet history of Adjara can be divided into two stages, before the Rose Revolution of 2003 and after. Before the revolution, an autonomous republic rule of the Supreme Council of Aslan Abashidze was formally subordinate to Tbilisi. Saakashvili de facto returned Adjara to Georgia, however, the autonomous rights of the republic were, in a certain sense, affected. This same period saw a strong influx of Turkish investments, direct entry of Turkish business into the region, and as a consequence, increased Turkish influence. And it should have been for the Georgian authorities, if not troublesome, then at least something to keep them vigilant, remembering that the autonomous status of Adjara agreed upon by the terms of an international treaty, signed in Kars in 1921, a guarantor of the this autonomy being Russia and Turkey,” said the author of the source.

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