Georgia-Iran: Neighbors Quarrel

The Iranian province Fereydan is a place of compact residence of Armenians and Georgians. In the town Fereydunshahri, where there are especially many Georgians, an unpleasant incident took place. Local Georgians erected a monument to the Georgian alphabet. The event was held in a festive atmosphere. According to local sources, the unveiling of the monument was attended by old and young. It was decided to erect the monument on the main square. The Iranian minority did not like it very much. And, as it turned out, that was not all.

The holiday is over, but in the morning the city's inhabitants did not find the monument in its place. It was far outside the city. As the locals found out, the monument was demolished and removed by security officers and soldiers of the Iranian army. One of the local Georgians expressed general resentment on the pages of Facebook: “We are trying to defend our identity, but here this... Over the four centuries of our stay in Fereydan nothing has happened like what happened in these days. The whole area is awash with intelligence agencies.” The event could be attributed to purely “internal rules” of the game in Iran, if not for one "but", for which the Fereydan Georgians can be "grateful" to the government of their historical homeland.

Recently, the Iranian Embassy in Tbilisi issued a statement in which it accused the Minister of Justice of Georgia Thea Tsulukiani of xenophobia, and expressed regret that the statements that were made by the Minister could overshadow the friendly neighborly relations between Iran and Georgia.

The issue is that the Georgian authorities, trying to get a visa-free regime with the European Union at the May summit of "Eastern Partnership" in Riga, whether at the instigation of the EU, or on its own initiative, rushed to tighten its visa regime with many countries of the world. You can have different attitudes toward the former government of Georgia - Mikheil Saakashvili’s government, but the fact is that it knew the major role tourism can play in the normal existence of the country. And therefore it abolished the visa regime with almost all countries of the world, at the same time thereby facilitating conditions for potential investors to enter and stay in Georgia. Actions immediately took effect. The number of tourists dramatically increased. Businessmen, having freedom of entry and residence, never ceased to extol the progressiveness of the Georgian government. Such advertising could not be faked - entrepreneurs are lured to Georgia by the simplicity of life and business.

Once in power, the “Georgian Dream” soon revised the procedures for entry and rules of residence in Georgia, restoring visa requirements for citizens of some states and term limits for other citizens. These actions had an immediate effect - the number of tourists has decreased slightly, but the number of entrepreneurs who conduct business in Georgia decreased noticeably. Especially since some of them are faced with serious problems entering Georgia.

Minister of Justice Thea Tsulukiani, whose department developed and implemented a new regulation, in a speech on local television stations seeking to prove the correctness of the government's actions, issued an incorrect statement, the meaning of which boiled down to the following: think of it, 42,000 less Iranians, Egyptians, Chinese, and Iraqis have arrived - but control has increased, only well-wishers can come to the country, and it is hoped that this will be
evaluated on the merits at a summit in Riga, where Georgia may obtain a visa-free regime with the EU.

The Iranian Embassy was piqued by the dismissive tone of Tsulukiani and the fact that the Iranians were recorded as potential detractors. In a special statement, the diplomatic mission of the country, said: "We want to say a few words in connection with the unqualified and ill-considered statement of Mrs. Tsulukiani... Throughout history, the Iranians, as intelligent and highly cultured people, wherever they lived, facilitated the success and well-being of the country of residence.

So, we can consider the established restrictions for Iranian investors and tourists as a loss by Georgia of knowledge, capital, and valuable cooperation with Iranian friends. However, this will not affect the existing relations of the peoples of the world, despite the racist and xenophobic views of some officials."

The Ministry of Justice of Georgia responded to the "insult" the Iranian Embassy statement with a reply, in which it tried to smooth out the ambiguous statement of the head official. However in the public and political circles of Georgia at the time controversy was sparked over whether it was necessary to abandon the general liberal visa regime embedded by the former authorities and the dive between the Justice Department and the Embassy of Iran had receded far into the background.

By the way, it is curious that despite having recognized the new regulations in general as not in the interests of Georgia, the government has not yet started their abolition. Only repentance was heard for the haste and rashness of its actions. And this begs the question - what's in the way of stopping the self-flagellation, just fixing the mistake, and getting everything back to normal?

Of course, the events in Fereydan may not be directly related to the inaccurate statement of the Minister of Justice of Georgia, but the "themes are too intertwined". So, in Fereydan the Iranian side has decided to show the Georgian side: the manifestation of xenophobia. And in general, what happened to some extent reflects the unattractive feature of the Georgian government - solving their problems, not thinking about the fact that at the same time neighboring countries taking a different line on a certain issue may be affected.

They wanted to please the EU, and "hook" to Iran, but there was still no guarantee that the EU will somehow positively appreciate the manifestation of "zeal".

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