

THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA AND THE BLACK SEA ENERGY SUBMARINE CABLE PROJECT: GEOPOLITICAL ASPECT²

During 2022 due to the special actions of Turkey, Azerbaijan and a number of European structures and countries, the Republic of Armenia was left out of the "Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable" project. It plans to lay an electric cable under the Black Sea between Georgia and Europe, which will provide an opportunity to export so-called "**Green Energy**" from the South Caucasus to Europe.

Furthermore, the Georgians propose to start the cable on the seashore from the newly constructed port of "Anaklia", connecting to it the substation of the "Inguri" hydroelectric power plant (HPP) located on the border of Georgia and Abkhazia. The Azerbaijanis propose to start it from the Georgian "Kulevi" oil terminal belonging to the Azerbaijani "SOCAR", which should be connected to the Azerbaijani "Aghstafa" high-voltage substation with a terrestrial cable.

All parties of the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project agree that a broadband optical-fiber cable will be laid along with the electric cable with a constant voltage of 450-500 kV and a capacity of 1.500-3.000 MW. Thus, the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project has a complex nature and consists of both a purely electric energy component and an infrastructure component of information and telecommunication technologies. The initial budget of the project is €2.3 billion and is earmarked to be implemented within the framework of the new European "**Global Gateway**" strategy.

The worrisome thing is that neither the President of the Republic of Armenia nor the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia were present at the meeting held in Bucharest on December 17, 2022, during which the leaders of Hungary, Romania, Georgia, Azerbaijan and the EU signed the quadrilateral Memorandum of understanding on the implementation of the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project. Meanwhile, the Republic of Armenia was participating in the Black Sea

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Energy Submarine Cable project as a participant-country both at the level of practical discussions and at the institutional level. This is evidenced by the official booklet of the EC's "Global Gateway" project dated December 2022.

The absence of the RA at the Bucharest ceremony on December 17, 2022, the emphasis made there and other circumstances prove that the RA has consistently been "exiled" from the processes of the initial stage of the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project.

Instrumentally, these "expulsion" mechanisms are noteworthy. The first one consists of the use of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) and related structures (USAID, Black Sea Regional Transmission Planning (BSTP), international "expel" Armenia from South Caucasian high-voltage infrastructure development projects. At that time the construction of the RA–Georgia 400-500 kV line was frozen, and the Turkey–Georgia–Azerbaijan high-voltage "power bridge" was built instead. Turkey, in connection with the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project, among others, indirectly used the format of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, creating an excuse to keep Armenia away from the December 17, 2022 Bucharest ceremony of signing the quadrilateral Memorandum of intentions.

The other mechanism is Hungary–Azerbaijan cooperation on the issue of Ramil Safarov. It was expressed here in the summer of 2022, when, at the request, urging and pressure of Azerbaijan, Hungary was involved in the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project, as the 2nd European country (besides Romania), whose participation is necessary to receive funding from the EU "Global Gateway" program.

THE REAL GOALS OF THE BLACK SEA ENERGY SUBMARINE CABLE PROJECT

We consider that, despite the publicly announced goals, the main, geopolitical, goal of the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project is to contribute to the strategy of "Overrunning Russia", to restrain and expel RF from the South Caucasus.

Considering the complex nature of the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project (energy and ICT components), we expect that despite the publicly announced goals, the technical goals of the project are:

1. In the power sector:

- *To ensure Georgia's electricity supply, to weaken Georgia's dependence on Russia in this sense, to restrain possible geopolitical and economic cooperation between Russia and Georgia;*
- *to validate the fact that the renewable energy plants built in the last decade in Artsakh came under the control of Azerbaijan as a result of the 2020 military aggression;*

- *to present Artsakh's "Green and Clean" energy potential as "Azerbaijani national potential", proposing to use it within the framework of the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project.*

The first goal repeats the policy of the early 90s, when the associated gas obtained during the appropriation of the Caspian Azeri–Chirag–Guneshli (ACG) oil field was supplied to Georgia in large quantities, violating even the planned norms of operation of the ACG field. As a result, BP Company's 3-phase plan for the appropriation of the ACG field was disrupted, the oil pipeline Baku–Tbilisi–Jeihan (BTJ) never reached its planned indicators, but with these supplies, it was possible to cut Georgia's gas and energy connection with Russia, bring Georgia to the Turkish–Azerbaijani oil, gas, electric power, transport and geopolitical pincers.

The last two goals will be discussed in detail in the article devoted to the energy aspects of the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project.

2. In the field of information and telecommunication technologies (ICT):

- *To support the development of the optical-cable highway network bypassing the Russian Federation from the South;*

- *to strengthen the role of Georgia in it, as a regional communication node.*

These goals also repeat the policy of the early 2000s, when the RA due to the efforts of Turkish–Azerbaijani tandem was left out of the South Caucasus fiber optic cable highway project: from TASIM - in the North, from TAE - in the South.

THREATS

In practical terms, the "expulsion" of the RA from the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project is dangerous for us not so much from the energy point of view, but, first of all, from the point of view of the development of information and telecommunication technologies, uninterrupted broadband communication, including the security of Internet communication systems.

Armenia is very sensitive to these issues from the optic-cable hub in Georgia: at least 85% of RA's broadband connection with the outside world and about 80% of Internet flows pass through this "stopper". Moreover, the Georgian government prefers to keep this hub under private ownership, and recently it came under the control of a capital of Azerbaijani origin.

Being completely excluded from the projects related to the optic-cable hubs of the Georgian coast, in this case from the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project, Yerevan may lose, if not its control over them, then at least the possibility of being informed about the processes unfolding around them (confirmation of full control by Azerbaijan/Turkey, certain technical events, etc.).

Contrary to that, the possible "expulsion" of RA from the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project, in terms of electricity itself, is of secondary importance for us. From the point of view of increasing the energy security of RA, the development of the Syunik mining complex, the launch of a new nuclear unit, the construction of high-voltage (400-500 kV) power lines with Iran and Georgia, the construction of HPPs "Meghri" (RA, on Araks River) and "Ushtubin" (Iran) are of primary and strategic importance).

In other words, in the field of electric power, apart from the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project, RA has much more important projects to implement.

OPPORTUNITIES

The Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project may become attractive for the RA if the implementation of high-voltage highway electric network development projects with Iran, Russia and Georgia in the coming decade continues to be suppressed, and the RA–Turkey electric energy cooperation fails.

Armenia's participation in the project will also have significance for the development of propaganda, information and public relations (PR), and will increase RA's investment and image attractiveness. This circumstance can be used for the restoration of RA's participation in the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable project and the reinterpretation of Yerevan's role in it.

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