

Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan can build Trans Caspian Pipeline using provisional boundary

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Although the unresolved status of the Caspian Sea hampers the realization of Trans Caspian pipeline, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan can build it using a provisional boundary, political risk analyst at Menas Associates in London, focusing on Caspian energy and political issues **Alexander Jackson** believes.

"Although the maritime border between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan has not yet been settled, if they really want to build a Trans Caspian Pipeline they will do so using a provisional boundary," Jackson told Trend via e-mail.

The Trans-Caspian gas pipeline which runs for about 300 km is planned to be laid from Turkmen coast of the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan's coast, where it will be connected to the Southern Gas Corridor.

Turkmenistan's talks with the European Union and other countries on the construction of the pipeline have been held since late 1990s.

Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan repeatedly stated about their interest and readiness to negotiate over the prospects of this project realization. According to Turkmenistan's President the Trans-Caspian system of pipelines is an important project indicative of Turkmenistan's readiness for mutually beneficial cooperation with all sides concerned.

Earlier the official representative of SOCAR said that Azerbaijan is prepared to offer guarantees and allocations on its territory, as well as transit opportunities and infrastructure to implement the Trans-Caspian project.

Jackson said the EU backs the Trans Caspian Pipeline, but, he believes that it does not have the political will to strongly oppose Russia.

Meanwhile, Russian opposition to this project is extremely strong, he noted.

"Some Russian analysts have suggested that Russia would use military force to stop Turkmenistan. Although this is unlikely, it does indicate that Moscow will put enormous legal and political pressure on Turkmenistan to abandon the pipeline. It will also make the project very unattractive to foreign investors, and could even ban companies which work on the pipeline from securing lucrative deals in Russia," Jackson.

In mid-September, the EU adopted a mandate to negotiate a legally binding treaty between the EU, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan to build a Trans-Caspian Pipeline System. All 27 EU members agreed to task the European Commission with leading negotiations with the two Caspian countries.

Later, Iran and Russia expressed negative attitude toward this project. Tehran and Moscow think that the pipeline construction will damage the Caspian Sea environment.

Jackson believes that Russia (and Iran, to a lesser extent) will use the Caspian's legal status as a tool to put pressure on Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.