



TOPICAL DIALOGUES

A "Region" Research Center Project

ON ARMENIA'S NEW INTEGRATION AGENDA

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ON THE ONLINE PRESS CONFERENCES FOR THE ARMENIAN MEDIA

Within the framework of the "Topical Dialogues on Armenia's New Integration Agenda" project, supported by the Office of Public Relations of the US Embassy in Armenia,

Region Research Center organizes a series of online press conferences for the media in Armenia, in which experts from different countries provide commentary to journalists' questions on the integration processes and events in post-Soviet countries.

The topics of and issues brought up at the press conferences may be directly or indirectly related to the current integration agenda of Armenia, but they all make up an overall picture of the current situation.

These "first-hand" commentaries get published by the Armenian journalists in the editions of the media outlets they work for.

In this issue of the newsletter you can find excerpts from the materials of online press conferences that were held in March 2015.

ONLINE PRESS-CONFERENCES FOR ARMENIAN MEDIA



From the Internet press-conference with political scientist AIDOS SARYM (Kazakhstan) for Armenian media.

20.03. 2015

TOPICS: Eurasian Union: problems, perspectives and relations; early presidential elections in Kazakhstan: Causes, predictable results and their impact on Kazakhstan's membership in the EEU.

About EEU

- “Really serious countries would not join the EEU. They may play along, they may request loans to solve their problems, but they will not join in. So do not expect more and more from the EEU. This project will soon die out”
- “No offense, of course, but why should Kazakhs care for Armenia? What can it give to us? We do not have common borders. Trade turnover - well, it almost looks like a statistical error. How much Kazakh investment is there in Armenia? Well, almost none. So why should we rejoice? In addition, we have moral, political, human obligations to Azerbaijan, to which you do not hold any good feelings. You still have a fierce war to fight for Karabakh, which will have to be returned in the end. I can understand Armenia, which has found itself in a rather difficult situation and is surrounded by hostile countries. Your government apparently sees Russia as the only means of survival. Armenia actually rests on Russian bayonets”.

About CSTO

- “We have bilateral programs with Russia on missile defense and military machinery. But it's slightly different. CSTO, I believe, is Russia’s attempt to create its own NATO. No more, no less. But the CSTO will have the same prospect as the EEU. Remember though that the CSTO could not do anything even in Kyrgyzstan. Well, just nothing. And many of your colleagues naively believe that the CSTO will defend Armenia from Azerbaijan. If your leaders think that the CSTO is the cornerstone of your national defense and security, they are fools. Armenia's relations with Russia are a real thing, but the CSTO is a mere fiction.”
- “I understand that for many of your colleagues pan-Turkism is a terrible word. In fact, any normal, sane Kazakh who is happy with our history, culture, and our collective memory is for pan-Turkism in his or her heart. Probably you will not understand us. Because Armenians have no brothers. While we are nations that belong to the same family. There are many of us, we have had different fates. Sometimes difficult fates. But normal people should think about their brothers, think about the way they live in, how we can help them. Every Kazakh is a Turk and a Muslim. It is a given. It is part of our ambivalent soul. And with time the number of Kazakhs will increase, so will such views, and they will prevail.”
- “Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are fraternal countries and are strategic partners, as it is reflected in numerous documents. We are linked by a number of joint economic, political and cultural projects. I believe that over time, such cooperation can go up onto the level of military and political cooperation. At least such a union would be much more effective and more responsible than say our ephemeral obligations within the Collective Security Treaty Organization.”
- “We and Azerbaijan are brotherly Turkic peoples. We are neighbors across the Caspian Sea. We have energy projects. And so on. Aren’t all these obligations and commitment? I believe that in the distant future Turkic countries will establish their own integration project. Ideally, this will be a confederation. Can’t a confederation have a common army and navy? Call me an idealist or utopian, but that will happen. Simply we need to work very hard for that purpose”.

On the upcoming April early presidential elections in Kazakhstan

- “This is a normal, albeit cynical political calculation. The government wants to hold elections in a comfortable and predictable environment. What will happen next year

with oil? No one can answer. In addition, we will have another devaluation of the tense. In 1998-1999 we held two election campaigns precisely after such a scenario.”

- “Nursultan Nazarbayev will win these elections. There can be no doubt about this. He will not pass his power to anyone. At least in the next 5 years. Then things will become clearer when there is a competition of political programs. The elections are necessary, so to speak, to prolong the uncertainty. Nazarbayev simply wants to solve tactical issues, including those related to his succession. Well, as I said above, very unpopular economic measures will be taken after the elections which we need a new mandate of trust for”.

Full version of the material here: <http://regioncenter.info/en/Internet-press-conference-with-Aidos-Sarym-eng-Interviews>



**From the Internet press-conference with analyst
GORDON HAHN (USA) for Armenian media.**

26.03. 2015

TOPICS: European and Eurasian integration processes and security issues for the countries of our region; Current policy of Russia in promotion of integration processes; Islamic extremism in the post-Soviet countries and territories of Russia.

About integration processes and security issues

- “Unfortunately, the failure of the EU and Russia to negotiate over Ukraine’s relationship with the EU and EEU - despite the divided preferences inside Ukraine that remain to this day according to a recent opinion survey – has led to a security crisis reflected in Moscow’s withdrawal from the CFE treaty and recent trial balloons regarding a European army. Washington will be pressuring NATO member countries to comply with the 2% of GDP minimum for defense expenditures, likely making a European army an overly expensive luxury. The EU is forced to follow NATO which will be stepping up its pressure on Russia, leaving Europe between two flames.

Moscow is likely to push gradually for the further militarization of SCO, a more robust CSTO military potential, and semi-militarization of BRICS.”

- “I have repeatedly recommended that cooperation become the cornerstone for trust-building in Russian-West relations in times of tension. After all, despite the horrors of Stalin, we were able to cooperate with the USSR against Nazi Germany. ISIL and AQ are no less a potential problem, and Putin’s Russia is far better than Stalin’s USSR. Unfortunately, the ubiquity and instantaneity of communications keeps tensions higher than they should be. So has Ukraine. ISIL and AQ are threats to the US, EU and Russia, so there is no reason not to work together, and this threat is actually a good reason not be fighting over Ukraine.”

About the impact of the struggle between Russia and the West on the outcome of the Karabakh conflict

- “It is possible that if the new ‘cold war’ continues to escalate that Russian-Western competition in the Southern Caucasus will intensify. This is already happening with NATO’s plan to expand its ‘Atlantic Resolve’ military exercises to Georgia and the nearby Black Sea region. In addition, the pipeline wars are likely only to intensify as problems between Ukraine and Russia persist and the EU seeks to end its dependence on Russian energy supplies. Russia’s Turkey Stream project also signals that the South Caucasus is likely to become a more coveted energy transit route. Russia’s successful courting of Armenia to join the EEU is another sign of the region’s growing geopolitization. The US is therefore likely to pay greater attention to Baku as a counter to the Russian-Armenian axis.”
- “Unless Yerevan and Baku can come to terms on their own, then with Russia’s close ties to Armenia long-standing and now further consolidated under the EEU, there are only two options: (1) continued conflict driven by the parties themselves and/or by competition between Russia and the West with the latter taking Azerbaijan’s side to counter the Russian-Armenian alliance or (2) a resolution of the conflict sponsored and guaranteed by Russia.”

On prospects of EEU

- “The customs posts are the consequence of Lukashenko’s policy of embracing Moscow but maintaining a wandering eye on the other girls in the neighborhood to keep his options open. Because of geography, Belarus, like the other European former Soviet republics, is in some ways more torn between Europe and Russian than are the other

former Soviet republics, and it tries to play both sides of the fence as a result. I would not regard the EEU as an Eurasian integration project to be a failure, unrealistic, or neo-imperial. Russia seeks to consolidate a sphere of influence, security and markets near its borders. This is normal for a great power, and it is likely to succeed to some extent over time, as long as it is patient, develops its own economy so it is an attractive partner, and limits the military component of its foreign policy in the region.”

- “I believe there is real geographic (proximity), political (similar systems and political cultures), and economic logic for the formation of a regional economic association in the former USSR. This is the practice in every other region of the world. Each country has reasons to join, but Russia is not any desire to recreate the USSR or be a new ‘Third Rome’.”

Full version of the material here: <http://regioncenter.info/en/Internet-press-conference-with-Gordon-Hahn-eng-Interviews>



From the Internet press-conference with the deputy of the Moldovan Parliament, political analyst BOGDAN TSYRDEA (Moldova) for the Armenian Media.

31.03. 2015

TOPICS: Issues of Moldova's European integration after the signing of the EU Association Agreement, public perceptions of the EU integration in Moldova, the relations between Moldova and Russia.

On the adjustments the Ukrainian crisis introduced in the Moldovan foreign policy

- “The neutrality of the country is in question. The flirting with NATO as well as the dependence on the US and the EU have increased. Moldova is practically operating synchronously with Romania and Ukraine. It has acquired an even colder position in its relations with Russia and the CIS. The anti-Russian sentiments have intensified in

the Moldovan media. The deeper military cooperation with NATO and the attempts to destabilize Transnistria and Gagauzia are troubling."

- "In contrast to those countries the combat contingent of our army is only 6,000 people (with all the bureaucracy structures, it will amount to 12 000). We do not have any combat aircrafts, tanks, and even helicopters. The military budget is 0.3% of the GDP. Who can we fight with? And how many hours can we hold out? In addition, Moldova has no significant natural resources (oil, gas, and so on). It has no special geopolitical position (it is landlocked, no access to the sea and so on). We are interested in the West only because of the limited contingent (about 1,500 soldiers) of Russian army 14. It is this fact that holds some politicians from more radical actions, for example, from the Anschluss of Transnistria by force. Moldova is a neutral country. But in the recent years, the efforts of the ruling elites to drag the country into NATO have intensified. If this happens, the war will be difficult to avoid. "

On the prospects of unification of Moldova and Romania

- In Moldova in the current format of power there are no unionist parties (parties, calling for unification). The pro-Romanian Liberal Party was forced out and has turned into opposition. Consequently, the current power elites are not very enthusiastic about the idea of unification. Romanian consultants who actually advance the agenda of Bucharest have been involved in all the ministries since 2009.
- In 2010-2014 Moldova and Romania signed a series of secret agreements between the gendarmerie and the Ministries of Defense, SIB and SRI (special services of Moldova (SIB) and Romania (SRI)), the Ministries of Education, and so on. the introduction of the Romanian principles in these areas. The media started talking about the fact that the Moldovan security service transferred the personal data of Moldovan citizens to the Romanian secret services! In 2010, acting President Mihail Ghimpu signed an agreement on strategic partnership for European integration, in which Romania was supposed to play the role of "Moldova's counselor".
- "In 2013, the Constitutional Court, in which 5 of 6 members are citizens of Romania, ruled that Romanian is the language in Moldova. And this is despite the fact that Article 13 of the Constitution clearly states that the language is Moldovan. This was already direct sabotage against the Moldovan statehood. "

- “In November 2014, the President of Romania Traian Basescu openly stated that the next national project of Bucharest, after joining NATO and the EU, is the unification with Bessarabia! We should keep in mind that the Parliament of Romania already has a group of deputies who are for Moldova’s unification of with Romania. On March 27, 2015, the members of that group arrived in Moldova. Many Romanian politicians name year 2018 (the 100th anniversary of the unification with Romania) or 2023 as the dates of Moldova’s merger”.
- “We cannot even decide who we - Moldovans or Romanians, what to do with the country - to build it or fling ourselves at the mercy of Romania, to be in the EU or in the CU. But Romania is one of the poorest countries in Europe. Ukraine is a totally bankrupt state. ”

On the impact of the economic break-off from Russia

- “The crisis has been aggravated. The national currency has depreciated. GDP growth in 2015 will be equal to zero. Now inflation in Moldova is at 4.7%. Experts assess that it will reach 19-20%.”
- “The Russian Federation has always been and still remains a major economic partner for Moldova. We get 100% gas from THERE. We get electricity only from the Kuchurgan TPP (“RAO UES”). It also employs about 500,000 Moldovan migrant workers. In 2013, our citizens in the Russian Federation transferred approximately 1.3 billion Dollars. In 2014, the Russian Federation introduced restrictions on the export of Moldovan products. Results are quite sad. Exports fell by 3%. Exports to Russia decreased by 30%, and by 19% to the CIS countries. The national currency depreciated by 25-30%. Suppliers require an increase in the prices for gas and electricity by 50-60%!

But this is only the beginning. If the agreement on free trade zone is fully enforced, the EU goods will simply beat up our manufacturers. The sugar, canning, and wine industries are already on the verge of bankruptcy. And what will happen to a budget that is constituted of customs duties by 70%?”

- We incur economic losses. The Moldovan railway, transporters, exporters, tourism companies are losing hundreds of millions of dollars because of the difficulties with the transit, export, and so on. The risk of exporting instability and even war to Moldova has increased. Transnistria has found itself in a complete economic blockade

due to the actions of Kiev. The risk of war in Transnistria has grown many times. Besides, the anti-Russian sentiments have intensified in Moldova, accompanied by the expulsion of Russian journalists and political scientists. And this is just the beginning. It is scary to think of what is there to come next.

Full version of the material here: <http://regioncenter.info/Internet-press-conference-with-Bogdan-Tsyrdas-rus-Interview>