

A "Region" Research Center Project

# ON ARMENIA'S NEW INTEGRATION AGENDA

2015

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### INTEGRATION REALIAS AND PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR OWN SAFETY BY MEMBER STATES OF EASTERN PARTNERSHIP-2015

"Integration Realias and Perceptions of Their Own Safety by Member States of Eastern Partnership-2015" conference was held on the internet discussion platform of "Region" Research Center on May 25-27.

The conference was organized in the framework of a "Region" Research Center project, entitled "Topical Dialogues on Armenia's New Integration Agenda", which is supported by the Public Affairs Office of the US Embassy in Armenia.

The following experts participated in the conference:

Alexander Krylov (Russia) - President of the Scientific Society for Caucasus Studies,

Arman Melikyan (Armenia) - retired Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary,

**Valeriu Ostalep (Moldova)** – former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Moldova, Director of the Institute for Diplomatic Studies and Security Issues,

Yelena Khoshtaria (Georgia) - founder of Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS)

The conference was moderated by **Laura Baghdasaryan**, Director of "Region" Research Center (Armenia).

- What were the expectations of the participants from the Eastern Partnership Riga summit and are they commensurate with the concrete outcomes?
- What are the new security challenges for Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Russia in the context of integration processes?
- What are the perceptions of integration projects of Russia and the EU in the Eastern Partnership member states today; have there been any changes in these perceptions since their public proclamation?
- What impact does the Ukrainian crisis have on the integration agendas of other countries?
- What "level of well-being" do the countries of the conference participants have and what is it determined by?
- How can the stated principle of differentiated approach and cooperation with EP members influence the Eastern Partnership program, in general, and the main expectations from it?

These and a number of other questions were discussed in the three-day internet discussion. This issue of the newsletter introduces excerpts from the materials.

The full text is available here: http://regioncenter.info/node/1104

# THE TAKEAWAY FROM THE RIGA SUMMIT FOR THE PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES



Laura Baghdasaryan (Armenia) – The contexts of European (Eastern Partnership as part of the Neighbourhood Policy) and Eurasian (EAEU) integration processes continue to hold on the surface the most urgent issues and challenges relating to the security of the participating countries.

This situation resulted mainly from the discrepancy between the available collective instruments in the sphere of security ensuring and the geopolitical realias facing our countries at a time when there are unresolved conflicts in 5 of the 6 Eastern Partnership states.

After the first wave of the tough selection, the countries were grouped according to their interests: Armenia, Belarus – they are members of the EAEU, but at the same time, members of the Eastern Partnership. Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia - a group of countries heading for the EU without looking back at the EAEU. Azerbaijan - a country with ambitions for special bilateral relations with both the EU and Russia, which believes that it does not need any integration unions.

From my point of view, a new phase is starting between the so far conflicting integration processes- European and Eurasian. And it is possible that relatively moderate tones will be dominating over what we were observing during the last one and a half year.



**Arman Melikyan (Armenia)** - Officials from the EU started talking about Armenia almost mockingly and practically claimed that the country could forget about the prospect of building a special relationship with the EU. They were supported by other member states of the EP program. The Ukrainian crisis that led to a change of power, the actual loss of Crimea and the beginning of large-scale armed hostilities in the south-east of the country, forced everyone to review the decision taken in Armenia. Therefore, whereas our European friends initially claimed that Armenia had to choose between the Euro association and the EAEU, obviously under the influence of bitter Ukrainian lessons, the tone started to change and the statement of Armenia on the expediency of the development of relations in both directions began to be perceived adequately.



Alexander Krylov (Russia) – We can agree with the dominance of moderate tones in the near-term prospect to the effect that the principle of "either...or", which was previously rigidly enforced by the EU has now been replaced with the principle of "both...and" (here we should congratulate the Armenian diplomacy which has insisted on this principle for many years). Let's hope that the situation will develop in this direction and the European and Eurasian integration projects will eventually start complementing each other, putting an end to the confrontation. However, there is a possibility of less optimistic variants of confrontational character and return to the principle of "either...or".



Valeriu Ostalep (Moldova) - The Moldovan government and the Moldovan society had no illusions about the Riga Summit. Moldova is shaken by corruption scandals, severely criticized by the European Union. Moldova has already been granted a visa -free regime with the EU and has ratified its Association Agreement. Therefore, on the background of economic degradation, corruption and conflicts within the country, objectively, Moldova cannot expect anything from the relationship with the EU at the moment. Therefore, neither the Moldovan government, nor the Moldovan society had any expectations from the summit. The EU fell into its own trap with Moldova. For five years, they have been turning a blind eye to any violation, in order to show off with a story of success in the Eastern Partnership, and now they do not know what to do with this "fairy tale".



Helen Khoshtaria (Georgia) – Over recent years, we have accumulated enough experience of communication with Brussels. We understand the logic of bureaucracy and the logic of ripening of political decisions. We had no special expectations and illusions about the Riga Summit. Two issues on which we were working were a visa-free regime and concrete statements on the prospect of membership. In the process of consultation, even before the summit, it became clear that these issues were not going to be resolved at the summit, although we expect a decision on visas before the end of the year.

We realize that Russia's aggression in the region requires certain tactical adjustments in the actions of the EU and no abrupt steps are going to be taken now; but also we understand that the Russian threat to the entire European security after the events in Ukraine is clearly realized in Brussels and our integration is a completely irreversible process. Threats and blackmail from Russia strengthen our arguments and positions.



Laura Baghdasaryan (Armenia) - "Experts even share, from my point of view, a slightly cynical opinion that the only country for which this summit was significantly fruitful was Armenia."

I mean the fact that unlike other countries, which claimed more, but received signed documents with less, Armenia, without an actually existing agreement, but only with the permit to return to the cohort, is considered to have maximally received its dividends. To Georgia, which went further in reforming and conforming to the requirements as opposed to Moldova, which, as previously stated, is considered a leader among the three associates, only a prospect of being granted visa-free regime in a two-year period was offered. By the way, according to president Poroshenko, Ukraine gained maximum what it could gain from the summit, - again a promise of visa-free regime and investments of 1.8 billion euros. Even in the case of Ukraine, when it is not clear what will happen to its eastern borders - such a prospect, I think, is really an outcome.



**Valeriu Ostalep (Moldova)** - However paradoxical it may sound for the other participants of the visa-free regime with the EU, the case of Moldova has a great symbolic meaning. The geographical location of Moldova, the population of 3.5 million, the facilitated visa regime, which we have already had for a long time, double citizenship, the fact that Moldovan citizens have 2-3 European passports (Romanian, Bulgarian, Italian citizenship) – due to all this, the visa for the EU was a symbolic problem.

In fact, taking this step, the EU simply legalized the existing order of things. For Moldovan citizens, trips to Europe ceased to be a problem long ago. The EU risked absolutely nothing cancelling the visa regime for Moldova and this is proved by the past year. The rate of migration into Europe did not rise. Meanwhile, it was a great bonus for the pro-European politicians in Moldova, who were rapidly losing their credibility and who work exclusively in the footsteps of European politics ignoring the needs of the population, and practicing the European "eyewash" - EU flags on administrative buildings, protests for the EU, the continual rhetoric of irreversible European course.

It should be noted that an integral part of the pro-European politics was the anti-Russian rhetoric. The more you criticize Russia, the more "European" you become. The end of this absolutely absurd behavior was that Moldova lost the Russian market, it no longer has a political dialogue with Russian, its economy is degrading, and the number of supporters has never been so low. Hardly can the EU be proud of this result.



Helen Khoshtaria (Georgia) - I would like to respond to the skepticism about the unity of the Georgian population around the European idea. Quite simply, it is not necessary to know the complicated bureaucratic concepts in order to make a choice between the West and what is offered by Russia. The lifestyle, the attitude to people and the values that are in the basis of the West, are just close and attractive. West is a method of education, freedom, development, and Russia is violence, moreover, not abstract violence, but one that has touched all the generations. We have also formed a very strong pro-Western political elite. For more than ten years, the support for the EU and NATO did not fall below 65 percent. The maximum of pro-Russian forces was 10 percent. There were methodological mistakes in the latest data of NDI (data of a social survey in Georgia, according to which the number of supporters of the Eurasian direction of development has increased - Ed.) Many did not even know what the Eurasian union is.

... All the countries have got interests, including geopolitical ones, and Europe and the USA are no exception. But the main difference between the West and Russia is that in the realization of these interests, certain game rules are followed. A good example of this are the negotiations between Georgia and Russia on entry into the WTO. In spite of the interest of the US in Russia's entry into the WTO, no one has put a pressure on Georgia and our interests were also taken into account in the negotiations.



**Arman Melikyan (Armenia)** - I completely agree with the opinion that the interim benefit of Armenia was not so much the result of the country's masterly diplomacy, as a consequence of the unacceptable and irresistible rigidity of conditions imposed on it by the EU. That is, Armenia had no real reasonable alternative, and time put everything in its place. Along with this, I would like to mention the following: Belarus, as a full member of the EP program, together with Russia and Kazakhstan became the co-founder of the Eurasian Union, about the entry into which Armenia announced several months after its foundation. As a result, instead of laying claims to Belarus, the EU chose to mock Armenia, which probably helped to create an appropriate atmosphere in Ukraine in relation to the distant objector and not focus attention on the important nearest neighbor. However, Armenia's refusal to sign the Association Agreement attracted the attention of the west more than the consistent policy of official Minsk to establish EAEU.



**Helen Khoshtaria (Georgia)** - I would also like to emphasize that the issue of visas became particularly important for Georgia due to the fact that Russian propaganda is growing in the country, spreading skepticism. In this sense, the visa-free regime is the positive factor that will help to feel the presence of the EU and give tangible results to the population.

## NEW CHALLENGES TO THE SECURITY OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP MEMBER STATES ON THE BACKGROUND OF GEOPOLITICAL PROCESSES IN THEM AND THEIR ADJACENT REGIONS



Laura Baghdasaryan (Armenia) - Russia's attitude to the Karabakh conflict is somewhat different from its attitude to the issue of Crimea. It is emphasized all the time that Karabakh is quite a different case and differs from the Crimean affairs. Thus, the coincidence of positions of Armenia and Russia in the direction of Crimea (the position of Armenia regarding the statements on Crimea in the initial version of the final declaration of Riga Summit Ed.) – should be considered a purely technical matter.



Alexander Krylov (Russia) - The difference between Crimea and Nagorno-Karabakh is as obvious as the difference of positions of Russia and Armenia on these issues. I have not written about the "coincidence of positions of Armenia and Russia in the direction of Crimea "; it would not correspond to reality. However, the certain hint at the known circumstances in the speech of S.Sargsyan can be seen in terms of the fact that different states have different positions on issues of this kind. This fully applies to Crimea, too.



Laura Baghdasaryan (Armenia) – When an ordinary citizen in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh hears the statement that "The difference between Crimea and Nagorno-Karabakh is as obvious as the difference of positions of Russia and Armenia on these issues", quite reasonable, in my opinion, questions arise in him/her, to which I would like to give more detailed answers.

What is the actual difference between Armenia's position on Karabakh conflict and Russia's position on Crimea given the fact that both entities were once annexed to other republics by the decision of the Soviet authorities, that referendums took place in both regions under certain circumstances, that the official arguments of Armenia and Russia on issues of Karabakh and Crimea, respectively, are based on the fact that the separation from Azerbaijan and Ukraine was the result of expression of the will of the population and, most importantly, given the fact that in the past the question of the possible danger of physical destruction of population, respectively, the Armenian population in Karabakh and the Russian population in Crimea, was raised in both regions, leaving aside all the politological and other arguments not relating to this issue and often discussed in certain time-serving considerations?



Alexander Krylov (Russia) - you listed all the common things between Crimea and Nagorno Karabakh. The difference (along with all these similarities) is that the government of the Russian Federation has taken steps that were not taken by the government of Armenia. I cannot judge the time-serving considerations, whoever they belong to, but the actions of the Russian government were determined by principal considerations and this position was supported by the majority of Russian citizens. Many countries considered this an annexation and they had the right to. In Russia, the majority of the population does not share this qualification. With regard to Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan and its allies use a different term "Azerbaijani territories occupied by Armenia". And they have this right, but it seems to me, that such a characterization is unlikely to be accepted by the authorities, the population of Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora.



Armen Melikyan (Armenia) - Despite the relative stabilization of politicalmilitary situation in the south-east of Ukraine and the achievement of Minsk agreements, Ukrainian crisis still has great potential for deepening the conflict and significantly expanding the territorial coverage. In this respect, the detonator can be Transnistria, as the resumption of the armed conflict between Chişinău and Tiraspol in the present state may lead to increased centrifugal sentiment in the Odessa and Nikolaev regions of Ukraine and, eventually, to the loss of control of Kiev over entire south of the country. Perhaps this scenario seems too radical, but I hold the view that today the preservation of territorial integrity of Ukraine interests the external actors even less than at the time of excommunication of president Yanukovych from power, when it was clear that if he left Kiev the inevitable process of territorial fragmentation of the country would begin. Part of the Ukrainian elite seizing the power at that time was not able to oppose to negative tendencies and today it is in a much worse situation and, apparently, does not have sufficient credibility among its citizens.



Laura Baghdasaryan (Armenia) - From my point of view the Ukrainian crisis is developing in two foreign policy dimensions. This is a conflict between Ukraine and Russia and a confrontation between Russia and the so-called Collective West. In both cases, there are a number of challenges that can undermine the security of other countries, that is to say their basic components.

There is a rather entrenched statement according to which if Ukraine agreed on joining the EAEU, Armenia would not be such an important candidate for Russia at the current stage of the formation of the EEU. Otherwise, the perseverance towards Armenia would have been manifested at the stage of formation. The decision of Official Yerevan to deploy its direction from the EU towards the EAEU is one of the obvious manifestations of the impact of the Ukranian crisis on the integration agenda of Armenia.

Another strong stimulus for such a solution is the opportunity to defrost the Karabakh conflict. The frequent incidents on Karabakh frontline, unprecedented clashes by the involvement of its forces, nature and geography, between Armenia and Azerbaijani armed forces, which occurred throughout 2014 and periodically continued until recently were primarily the indicators of the possibility of such defrosting. Another alarming fact is that the confrontation between Russia and the Western world may have an impact on the Karabakh issue, where the preservation of the ceasefire in the absence of peacekeeping forces was still possible due to the multi-layered and complex balance of power of geopolitical actors, the parties themselves and so on. This balance can be disrupted.

Generally, the problem of defrosting the conflicts is more urgent, considering the fact that now each of the parties of global confrontation in our regions presents its foreign policy actions as a response and not as an action of their plans and interests. Such principle holds the other countries hostage, which, in my opinion, are glad to wait out the storm until their roofs are blown off. But not all succeed because of a number of reasons.

Another intriguing possibility is to defrost the Transnistrian conflict. As it is known, Russia and Ukraine act as guarantors for the preservation of status quo. Moreover, until recently the transit of Russian troops to Transnistria (peacekeeping forces) was carried out through the territory of Ukraine. So, on the opening day of the Riga summit, May 21, Ukrainian Parliament announced about the denunciation of the whole package of documents on this issue; on the transit of the forces and resources for positioning the Russian peacekeepers in Transnistria. Next comes the decision of Chisinau to allow the use of the airport only in case of notification about this a month in advance. During the referendum in Gagauzia, the integration treaties between Russia and South Ossetia, Russia and Abkhazia were signed. There are a number of examples...



Alexander Krylov (Russia) - The challenges and potential threats from the South can be added to the security issues which are of paramount importance for the South Caucasus (far greater than for the rest of the EP), but which are often forgotten, being drawn away by other scenarios (such as compliance with European standards and so forth). And these scenarios are of great importance, but what is happening right next to the boundaries of the South Caucasus is simply terrifying, no end in sight, the coverage of radical Islam adherents and the creation of a Worldwide Caliphate have been steadily expanding. The Collective West, undertaking military actions, was able to defeat a number of states in the region, but is no longer able to provide an effective response to Islamic Radicals.

Are South Caucasus countries ready to confront this threat? To what extent can the foreign forces, particularly NATO, the US, the EU, guarantee their safety? On the background of the actions in North Africa, the tragic events in the Middle East, the current period of misunderstandings between Russia, the US and the EU, I do not see any reasons for hope and optimis. Should this issue be taken into account in the formulation of policies of the South Caucasus with respect to the EU and the EAEC?



Valeriu Ostalep (Moldova) - From my point of view it is naive to believe that there can be conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, which can be solved by heavy artillery, tanks and destruction of their cities and not through a peaceful dialogue. I am expressing a purely personal point of view saying that the actions which occurred last year in Ukraine and continue happening hardly correspond to any European or International standards relating to the change of government and resolutions of conflicts, whatever they may be... I perceive it as a conflict between the US and Russia, in which Ukraine, unfortunately, plays the role of a passive performer.

... I would like to emphasize that between Chisinau and Tiraspol, between people of the country, there is absolutely no problem. My concern is that different actions, occurring more and more frequently in the West, can provoke such conflict. The most surprising is the attitude of Ukraine on this issue, as the majority of its actions related to Transdniestria are not only coordinated with Tiraspol and Chisinau, but also are unlikely to help the settlement of this issue. It is obvious that either Kiev or other players are just trying to use Transnistria to exert pressure on Russia, which, of course, does not correspond neither to the interests of Chisinau, nor that of the Transdniestria, and ultimately does not contribute to the stability in the region.

#### THE MAIN THREATS TO THE SECURITY OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES



Valeriu Ostalep (Moldova) - The number of ethnic Romanians in Moldova is 5%. The number of voters for the right-wing party, who are for the unification with Romania is about 7%, which means that the real role of these people is insignificant.

However, Romania makes military statements and constantly provokes Moldova. Of course, even though it is a provocation, it's a threat for us. Besides, can you imagine how Transnistria will react to such statements from the Romanian side. But considering the fact that Romania is a member of NATO and the EU, how friendly are these actions towards neutral Moldova?

However, the major threat for Moldova is not the external but the internal factors - absolutely corrupt political class and economic collapse. These two factors hinder the development of Moldovia, allowing the political players to use that to their advantage.



**Arman Melikyan (Armenia)** - Contrary to the promises and expectations formed on their basis, the economic decline in Armenia this year is evident. And people, in general, do not care why this recession is really happening: for many these negative economic trends are linked to the decision of joining the Eurasian Union.

On the level of the expert community we often hear the statements about the futility of integration within the scope of the union in the power of the inability of the ruling elites of the participating countries to organize a functioning business environment ruling elites of the participating countries, capable of creating high-quality and competitive goods and services in the world market. This opinion should be considered. Without understanding that the appropriate business environment can only exist under qualitatively new governance system, different from all the inherited post-Soviet countries, no integration projects will give the desired positive results. I have the impression that the current Armenian authorities expected to obtain certain economic preferences out of a quite politicized decision of joining the Eurasian Union primarily by Russia. I do not think these expectations have real implications.



Alexander Krylov (Russia) - The European choice is not a conscience one, some absolutely certain "High road" to a brighter future, with the detailed map of the entire way. For most of the people it is a dream to a happier future people have the right to dream, and no rational explanation can be given. But for the others it is a way of political existence, solution to their own problems, even with the awareness that the uttered beautiful slogans are not basically feasible. Morally all this is very unattractive, but obvious from a practical point of view. If a politician talks about the fact that people can pursue a happy future through a serious and hard work, experience troubles, hardships and all kinds of adversity, that is to say - the real truth instead of dreams (the Worldwide Commune, the Worldide Caliphate, European elections, etc.), he will not have any impact as a politician. People need a dream, they are "happy to be deceived" but over the years many of them start looking at life without rose-colored glasses.



**Helen Khoshtaria (Georgia)** - The main threats to the security of Georgia arose after the collapse of the Soviet Union, without any qualitative changes.

The first block of threats is related to Russia's claim to sovereignty of Georgia in various manifestations: territory, support for the separatists, direct intervention, occupation and annexation attempts, attempts to interfere in the internal politics, support of the political forces and individual politicians, NGOs, advocacy to influence foreign policy.

In this block of threats the war in Ukraine represents a new stage: 1. It is obvious that Russia is ready to go further enough to restore influence in the region and new forms of actions, the hybrid war, "little green men", soft power, etc. were created. 2. Europe and the US have realized for the first time that Russia still poses a threat to European security and seriously thought about a new strategy of relations. This situation in the short term greatly increases the threat from Russia, thus providing chances for greater consolidation of the West and greater involvement in the region.

The second block of threats is associated with the construction of the state and democratic institutions. Despite the fact that the recent years have been intensive in terms of reforms and Georgia has turned into a positive example of the transformation in the former Soviet Union, there is no guarantee for the irreversibility of the processess.

#### THE LEVEL OF "SENSE OF SECURITY" ON A 5-POINT SCALE



Alexander Krylov (Russia) - The defining factor here is not the nature of security threats to the countries (which have always been and will continue to be numerous), but the ability to counter these threats, the level of support of the government policies by the population, the level of preparedness of the population in the worst-case scenario to make sacrifices and hardships.

Modern Russia is radically different from France of 1940 or that of Russia of 1917 with its massive party of "defeatists". For this reason "today's Russia has a high level of "sense of security".

At the present time, despite of all our Russian internal and external problems, I can estimate it on a 5-point scale. It is obvious that such estimations may seem too optimistic to many colleagues. It should be emphasized that it is crucial for the Russian authorities to maintain a high level of support of the population, which in the current situation is a very challenging task.



Valeriu Ostalep (Moldova) – Moldova is at the crossroads of geopolitical processes and for the coming years the major threat for us will be the possible collapse of Ukraine, the constant threat from Romania, and the conflict between the US and Russia, during which Moldova will constantly be pulled from one side to another.

Security Perception can be rated at 2, coming from the threats that I mentioned, plus the dire economic situation and the high level of corruption in the country.



**Arman Melikyan (Armenia)** - So far, the major and immediate threat to the security of Armenia is the aggressive policy of Azerbaijan, constantly threatening to solve the Karabakh conflict by the military force, as well as the logical continuation of this policy in the form of threats of the arms race initiated by official Baku. Unfortunately I should state the fact that out of the three Minsk Group co-chair countries (Russia, the USA, France), undertaken the mediatory mission for the settlement of the conflict, only Russia has massive arms supplies to Azerbaijan. In the same context another threat is the transport blockade by Turkey against Armenia. In the category of potential threats can be the actions by Islamic states, possible excesses, associated with the probability of the ismplementation of independent Kurdistan project, also due to the Kurdish-inhabited south-eastern regions of modern Turkey bordering Armenia.

At the moment, the level of "Sense of security" for Armenia would be estimated 3 points.



Helen Khoshtaria (Georgia) – Before the elections in the United States in 2016 there won't be any significant changes in the relations of the US and Russia. It is quite obvious that the foreign policy, including the failed reboot and aggression of Russia in the region, will play an important role in these elections. The dynamics of the relations will depend on the development of the actions in Ukraine, partly, also, on the situation in the Middle East.

Regarding the relations of our countries with the EU in the short term, we should not expect any drastic changes. Both because of the internal processes, and the revaluation of relations with Russia. In the nearest future, we will focus on the development of already existing formats. It is advisable to develop greater coordination between Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, as Association Agreement countries. At the beginning of next year, Ukraine and Georgia will get visa-free regime. Of course, this also depends on Russia's actions in Ukraine. A new round of armed hostilities can accelerate specific solutions. The internal political situations in our countries will also affect the process.

The strongest impact on the security of Georgia will have the internal political situation in Russia and the development of actions in Ukraine. The role of Turkey is also essential. The level of "sense of security" is 4.