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THE POST-VILNIUS PROCESS OF THE EU EASTERN PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

International internet conference on the Public Dialogues website

On February 12-14, 2014 the internet conference “The Post-Vilnius Process of the EU Eastern Partnership Program” was held on the Public Dialogues website.

It was organized within the framework of “Public Dialogues” project implemented by Region Research Center (Armenia) with the financial support of the Embassy of Poland in Armenia.

The following experts participated in the conference:



Hanna Shelest (Ukraine)

leading researcher at the Odessa branch of the National Institute for Strategic Studies



Sergey Markedonov (Russia)

analyst, associate professor at Russian State University for Humanities



Arif Yunusov (Azerbaijan)

director of the Department of Conflict Studies and Migration at the Institute for Peace and Democracy



Sergey Sargsyan (Armenia)

deputy director of the Center for Political Studies Noravank, retired lieutenant colonel



Moderator of the conference - Laura Baghdasaryan
(director of Region Research Center)

The domestic policy crisis in Ukraine and Maidan, with its transformations and probable outcomes

Armenia's turn towards the Customs Union and sped-up process, the publicized Road Map

The referendum in Gagauzia-as a hindrance for Moldova on its way to EU association, as well as a signal to other regions with frozen or latent conflicts

Russia-EU Summit, and in general, acceptable formats of negotiations between these locomotives of the two integration processes

What does a "European package" mean and can it show "to the Eastern Partnership skeptics" that all talks on the unfolding of the European Partnership project are yet untimely

In fact, many more issues and aspects were discussed in the conference. These were related to both integration processes that as practice shows have not yet illustrated any potential for synergy.

This material may be of special interest to experts and analysts in the light of the rapid developments in Ukraine, following our conference.

For the full script of the material please see: <http://www.publicdialogues.info/node/742>.

**EXCERPTS FROM THE MATERIALS OF THE INTERNET CONFERENCE
"THE POST-VILNIUS PROCESS OF THE EU EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
PROGRAM", HELD ON FEBRUARY 12-14
ON THE PUBLIC DIALOGUES WEBSITE**



Sergey Sargsyan (on the reasons of the development of new “European package” for participant countries of the program)

- ...It is much easier for the EU to rethink the EaP, which direction to accelerate actions in, where to "slow down," how to develop a new direction, and quite possibly, from scratch.



Hanna Shelest (on the reasons for a referendum on independence from Moldova in Gagauzia, after the Vilnius Summit, held in February 2014)

- ... As the Gagauz themselves admit, the referendum was just an excuse to draw Chisinau's attention. It had recently slashed their autonomy and "did not share" the European money. They are not against integration with the EU as such, but they want to clearly understand how they will benefit from it, and complain that they see very little of the EU financial support that settles in Chisinau.



Sergey Markedonov (on the provisions in the European package and agreements between Russia and the EU on the post-Soviet countries)

- ...Here and now, in the new "European package" we do not see any serious reflection of the failure of the Vilnius summit. Instead, many promises are made that will be difficult to back up with sufficient resources (for example, increasing the role in the resolution of conflicts). Not an idle question, but what or who was preventing from doing this before? There is an objection to the thesis, put forth by Anna (Shelest - Ed.). Subjects and objects in world politics do not get appointed, this needs to be earned and the role should be attained in the conditions of fierce competition of interests. This is the reality. It is tough, but also irrevocable.



Laura Baghdasaryan (on the consensus between the EU and Russia in the European integration of the former Soviet countries)

- ... Here comes the fundamental difference between the two kinds of collaboration – the EU's cooperation with the EaP countries directly under this program, and the cooperation of the same actors, but indirectly, roughly through the general agreement with Russia . Armenia had to take up the last scenario. And it has already come to an absurd; Russia has been deeply embedded in the minds of the Armenian officials as a strict censor. This is a fact, very pitiable and humiliating for Armenian citizens! Even with consideration of Armenians' traditionally loyal attitude to Russia and Russians.



Arif Yunusov (on the incidental or regular nature of the referendum in Gagauzia in the post-Vilnius period)

- ... Was the issue of the referendum raised accidentally? For example, if tomorrow Azerbaijan speaks clearly in favor of the EaP and head for it like, say , Ukraine or Georgia, then "suddenly" old and well -known problems will revive, say, the Lezghins or the Talish will raise an issue. And, of course, the Russian side will pretend that it has not been involved with it. Russian experts will assure that it all came from the desire of these peoples themselves and that it was the authorities of Azerbaijan who pushed those peoples to take such steps. It is not that this or that problem (the Gagazu, and so on) in its purest form is the product of Moscow. These problems certainly did not arise yesterday. And the authorities of the above-mentioned republics themselves often pave the way for such problems. But it is always important to know why this or that rally is taking place at a given moment in time? I do not really believe that the referendum in Gagauzia is not part of the Russian pressure on Moldova.



Hanna Shelest (on the nature of Maidan)

- It is wrong to perceive Maidan as a manifestation of only European aspirations. Rather, EU aspirations. The impetus was not the rejection of the Association, but rather the way the rejection it was done. It is impossible to tell the population about the intention on signing the Association Agreement for a year, and then abandon this direction in a second. It is this inadequacy of the decision made, without any public discussion that caused the first protest: it was the form rather than the content of the decision that became the quintessential of the policy led. By the way, the protests would have died out within a couple of days, but for the attempts to disperse it. Moreover, since the end of December the number of posters for the EU had increased, the EU had faded into the background, showing the true causes of the protests.



Laura Baghdasaryan (on the quantity of Russia in Armenia)

- I totally agree with Sergei Markedonov that the role of a political subject is earned. Those who have natural resources obtain this role naturally, while those who do not have these “underground manna,” such as Armenia, this subjectivity needs to be won for.

I know how ineptly the Association Agreement for Armenia was being developed, and back then it was already clear that in case Armenia had to face the necessity of choice, it would have no chance of signing this document. That document was being promoted, containing more and more provisions that were almost comparable with those of the instruments for Georgia (that is conflict-free now!) And less dependent on Russia in this matter. So, did anyone from the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the staff members drafting the documents, ask the President or did the President or his entourage ever give any clear indications on how much "Europe" Armenia can digest in this particular case, to avoid the indigestion caused by Russia? No, they did not, hence this development.



Sergey Sargsyan (on modus vivendi of Russia and EU)

– We need the West and Russia to recommend us what to do, suggest some modus vivendi. But then the issue of the discrepancy between what Russia does and what we subjectively expect it to do will come forth. Like it or not - this will again be criticism of Russia.

On the other hand, there is an opinion that if Russia is criticized, moreover, if it is reprimanded, by the West, then Russia is just right in its actions! But Russia needs to really become pragmatic and abstractedly realistic, in the good sense of the word. It should abstract itself from what it wants to hear from its allies, and hear what the narrow circle of "partners" say, partners who tell Russia just what it wants to hear.

Whereas the Western partners have long (well, probably, at least since 1979) learned to hear not only flattery.

Here's an example: time has come for a choice to be made - Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus can accept Armenia into the Customs Union, and the Customs Union can accept Armenia together with the Armenian Euromaidan. And, please, do not ask me why: or else criticism will start, not that of Russia, no, but only of the many nuances of its policy. Both in Armenia, in the region, and even more broadly.

Arif Yunusov (on Armenia's accession to the Customs Union)



- ...Armenia is not Ukraine. Armenia has been openly and historically inclined towards Russia and will continue to move towards Russia. At least, because of Turkey and Azerbaijan. Now let's see what Russia does (not you, moreover, not a certain Russian citizen from the province, and the government and its senior officials): Armenia has not yet entered the Customs Union, but has only expressed a desire, and in relation to Armenia audible notes of arrogance are sounded on the part of Russia, many of its actions are of an extremely rough nature and even Armenian citizens, loyal to Russia, have started to feel irritated. This is understandable: no one likes it when their opinion is not taken into account, when they are called the "outpost," when in fact you are not considered as a sovereign and independent state. So where is the pragmatism? If tomorrow the ally Armenia moves to the West, turns away from Russia, who will be to blame? The US? The Europeans?



Sergey Markedonov (on the factors that arouse interest in the Eastern Partnership Program)

- Moscow considers the post-Soviet space its priority. By the way, not just a priority, but a vitally important one. The Kremlin is annoyed by the U.S.'s unwillingness to accept this fact. And the U.S. rhetoric on the "politics of the 19th century" (and what can in that case be said about Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Latin America?). This is probably the main discord. Moscow and Washington have commonalities with regard to a wide range of security issues, among those the resolution of the very Karabakh conflict. I can mention several levels of interest (of the member states of the EaP - Ed.) in the EaP: 1. Diversification of their foreign policies, attempts to get away from the unilateral dependence on Moscow (or on the idea of such kind of a relationship), 2. Desire to solve some current issues (ranging from territorial integrity to economic issues), 3. Non-governmental organizations and intellectual elites have a need for certain values (I do absolutely refuse to believe the authorities' rhetoric about their dreams of European values). In Russia that is inclined to preserve the status quo (and that is generally conservative-minded, because of the failure of the inflated expectations of the early 1990s was really big) the attempts of some other players to play in the "neighborhood" are perceived at least warily.



Laura Baghdasaryan (on the non-affordability of light force for Russia)

- I can understand why Russia is so suspicious of rights, values, and so on. Because in case these rights are protected in Russia, it face another security issue – that of internal security, which for Russia is of no less vital significance than its interests in the bordering regions. Meanwhile, Armenia, at least, before deciding to join the Customs Union (and I am convinced that this joining will take place) values were exaggerated almost to the level of existentialism. I have already written about this, because I think that the arguments of democratic Armenia would be listened to closer, also in relation to the Karabakh issue.

I understand why Russia would never afford the luxury of soft power. It is a luxury for the state. And this is where the main contradiction between Russia as a state seeking to establish two- or multi-polarity, and never agreeing to a single pole world order, and Russia as a country with a great culture, spiritual people, fantastically talented intellectuals, and most importantly, great human resources. It is the tragedy of the Russian people with an honest and rich soul who can no longer satisfy their spiritual needs only by the knowledge that their country is great by means of suppressing others. The fact that at Solovyov's always prevail those who are for the so-called brutal force does not convince me in the opposite at all. This is merely the superficially visible support of the official line.



Hanna Shelest (on elites, determining the foreign policy orientation of countries)

- What exactly is the motivation of the elite circles and foreign policy and development direction decision makers in the EaP countries? Unfortunately, many of them do not know the answer to these questions as they are simply trying to preserve their own power and balance (usually unsuccessfully) between two perspectives, in the best case scenario. Most of the incumbent elites in our countries are rather Ukraine-centered, Moldova-centered, or Armenia-centered. That is, they would have preferred not to make any choice at all. It is another issue that they are constantly asked both in their countries and beyond on whom they support. And it often does not look as a pragmatic choice, but rather as almost a “civilizational” one. Recently a friend of mine, a large Ukrainian businessman was being interviewed by a British journalist. The reporter asked which union my friend was for – the EU or the CU? The latter replied, “CU would be profitable for my business, as I need their trade flows. But as a citizen, I would choose the EU, because in case of problems I would like the court to comply with the law, inspection bodies to act appropriately, and not to interfere, and so on.” And here the question arises: is all this about values or is it pragmatism?”



Laura Baghdasaryan (the CU company do not inspire optimism)

- The CU company, Armenia will join, is in sharp contrast in terms of its political ideology and human rights and freedoms practices from those of the company it failed to move closer to. The images of Belarus and Kazakhstan in this regard are but poor. Mentioning "Maslow 's hierarchy of needs" in this particular case, I'm afraid, is not correct.

Armenia cannot afford to gradually move to its needs in the stages, according to the principle of Maslow, first "food," secondly "security," with the so-called "spiritual needs" following. Is security in Armenia exclusively a foreign policy category? And can the lack of "dreams" about transparent rules and conditions in the country have a serious impact on the security of the country? And then what to do with the waves of migration from the country? Do you think people are leaving because the Russian military have left the borders of Armenia and Russia has canceled its military presence in Armenia?

No, the reasons for migration from Armenia are caused by internal policy and socio-economic reasons. If there was any hope for even a very slow, but sustainable societal and national development, there would not be such a wave of migration. And where are the respective examples within the CU? This is what actually causes the protesting public attitude in Armenia towards the CU.



Hanna Shelest to Sergey Sargsyan (on the hierarchy of needs in our countries)

- ... And what shall we do about human security, not only in terms of freedom of fear, but also freedom of want? The movement towards the EU for many in our countries was related to simply issues of human security: to have courts that protect you, and do not formulate rulings under someone's control, to have a tax office, whose task is not to "strip" your business, but who adequately replenishes the budget, to have Police, the ordinary citizens are not afraid of, and so on. And these issues are of concern not only for big businesses, but the small ones, too, because they also want to avoid this "danger." You may not be aware of the priority of environmental issues if you do not get to answer questions on this matter in interviews, but you solve these issues for yourself and your family on a daily basis. So today's hierarchy of needs is mixed. And maybe we should want more, and for our country as well, and we will attain the smaller-scale objective on the way to the bigger goal. Otherwise, we have every chance to stay at this small scale and stop developing."



Sergey Markedonov (on the algorithms of Yerevan and Kyiv)

- ...Again, the issue is not in the Customs Union per se. If there was no issue of choice to be made between the CU and the EU, Moscow would not offer it to Armenia at all. I just present what the Kremlin thought to itself in essence. The algorithm was as follows: "The EU will be followed by the NATO, and as the case with Georgia shows, we cannot have any confidence in this matter. An internationalization of settlements without any specifics might be initiated which could disrupt the status quo in the Caucasus. Do we need that? Of course, not. It would be better to insure ourselves and to minimize the European alternative somehow. And how? Oh yes, the CU!" Also let us not forget the context of the decision-making process. Syria and the threat of Turkish intervention into those affairs very seriously alarmed the Armenian government. And this forced them to consider once again whether it is not better to have a bird in the hand, than two in the bush, and maintain loyalty (geopolitical, of course) to Moscow. Besides, the EU was not up to par in terms of specifying support in security issues. Values are important and no one denies that, but they would not hint at what should be done about Karabakh. And also it is obvious that the EU would not make a choice in favor of Armenia to the detriment of its "energy pluralism" (that is, de facto to the detriment of Baku). And all these lines intersected at this one point. As a result we are facing the present situation. Armenia is heading for the Customs Union, whose members are not very happy about this matter. And understandably so, for the interests of Moscow and Astana are not identical. And they have not been identical before either.



Arif Yunusov (on the significance of European values for our countries)

- ... I remember at conferences in Tbilisi, and then in Yerevan in the late 90s on the future orientation of the South Caucasus similar discussions were being held, and again the same arguments were brought that it was early for the South Caucasus countries to think about joining the Council of Europe. And they used to say that it was better to consider economic cooperation among themselves than to hope for a rapprochement with the European countries and European integration. That is, I actually heard all these arguments that I have had to read today, offered by the opponents, in the late '90s. The most interesting fact is that the Europeans themselves then shared the same opinion. But soon, for political reasons, first Georgia, and then Armenia and Azerbaijan joined the Council of Europe. And now, after so many years, we see that we have all just won. Yes, we still do not match the level of European countries, especially the Western ones. But our countries have achieved quite a lot due to this kind of an integration. And a question rises in this regard: if joining the CU today is a small, but yet a victory, won't it turn into a strategic loss for those countries that join the organization?"



Hanna Shelest (on EU and NATO)

- ...Who said that NATO will follow the EU? Joining the Alliance has actually removed from the agenda for all the countries, except Georgia. But please note that 4 out of the 6 EaP countries have actually never been members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Besides, the level of NATO's cooperation with Russia, until recently, has been at such a level that some officials in Brussels asked Ukrainian counterparts, "We have a question: is Ukraine or the Russian Federation joining NATO?" Or whatever Jupiter is allowed, the bull is not permitted, right? Why Russia that has been dialoguing on a visa-free regime with the EU, has made a number of senior officials regularly claim that closer cooperation between Ukraine and the EU will lead to the introduction of a visa regime between Ukraine and Russia?"



Sergey Markedonov (on the role of Russia in resolution of the conflicts)

- ...Why is there no trust (towards Russia - Ed.)? Yes, because the nationalistic discourse, coupled with conspiracy, is quite strong. We can take the example of Cyprus. Russia is not there, and yet there is no merge and there is no full resolution either.

... As for the conflict in Karabakh. What hinders Baku to work out a thorough constitutional draft for the future Nagorno Karabakh autonomic region and to propose that to your fellow, Karabakh Armenians? Not an overgeneral wording on the "Tatar or Bashkir" model, but a concrete project? Is that Moscow's fault? Or is Moscow forcing Aliyev to speak of the military resolution and that the lands of Armenia have been the native lands of Azerbaijan? Putin might have whispered this in his ear in person, might he not? Or is that Putin himself who advises Serzh Sargsyan every day to hold the 7 regions? And in case Putin is done with, the issue of the refugees will automatically get solved?"



Arif Yunusov (on conflicts and Russia)

- ...This is phobia already. It is not only that it is not only impossible to push Russia out of the region, even if there is all the desire to do so, for Russia is part of the Caucasus. The thing is that it is not the EU that is squeezing Russia out, but it is Russia itself, doing everything to make sure that its role in South Caucasus has become weaker and weaker. Why are our governments so much against democratization? Because as a result of such processes the public attitude to them will change and they will consequently lose their power. This is exactly what Russia is afraid of, too: as long as we are weak, as long as our economies are in such a poor state, as long as we have all these unresolved conflicts, we can be manipulated. And the same Karabakh issue – this is simply a punching bag to pressure Armenians and the Azerbaijani. And in the meantime, while we are discussing things here, the USA and the European Union, and Azerbaijan, Japan and Norway, too, have created an international donor group to provide financial aid to Ukraine, to help come of the crisis. And within the framework of the activities of this group Azerbaijan has given its agreement to the USA and the European Union to allocate 1 billion dollars for Ukraine. But laterally, on the very last minute the authorities of Azerbaijan, pressured by another foreign country, gave up intention. Can you take three guesses on who the "foreign country" was?"



Laura Baghdasaryan (on the rules of the game)

- If we focus on the REALITY, which has been spoken of so much here and our conversation ties into, the realities in our own countries are such that the relations with European structures force the elites of our countries to keep to certain rules of the game, to introduce these rules into the everyday life, and thus they become a norm. Surely, it is the elites that break these norms in the first place, for otherwise, the posts and appointments to high positions in the government would not automatically mean a possibility to become wealthy, to accumulate private capital. I. Aliyev, R. Kocharyan, S. Sargsyan, and V. Yanukovich do not seem to support themselves by their salaries only. The same is true about their close circles.

But on the other hand, even the imitation and compliance with certain rules of the game (wherever possible) is great progress for us.

It was almost by such an algorithm that freedom of expression and speech became a norm in Armenia. For on the one hand, freedom of expression is a requirement by the European structures, which would be very good to ensure, and on the other, it did not really threaten the interests of the elite very much! And people are used to this and any infringement on this right will be perceived as a step back. I think I have already written about this.

It was by a similar algorithm that Turkey implemented internal reforms for decades in the process of its EU Association. I do not mean to say that Turkey is a role model in this issue, but on the other hand, you can compare the internal societal life in Turkey at the beginning of its Association and the attainments they have today. Should there have been no such process of European integration (we shall refrain from analyzing why Turkey needed this integration and so on, for this is another matter), there would not be definite progress.



Sergey Sargsyan (on the “European package”, conflicts)

- 2 things draw attention:

1. An impression is formed that Eastern Partnership is eager to once again prove its own necessity, just in case, even though on the whole we can understand that the program will continue. Therefore, we can also see the broadening of the scope of its activities: here we have the speeding of Georgia's and Moldova's signing Association Agreements with the EU and the proposal to make their projectionists' visits to member-states more frequent, and here too, primarily to Georgia and Moldova, to continue the dialogue with Russia, and to focus on the conflicts. The budget of the program may be increased, too.

2. If we “put aside all the right letters” collected into this package (“the European Package” of the EU for the EaP countries – Ed.), only one thing will remain: the intensification of the information support and information pressure onto member-states, from both inside and outside. With the help of both structures, created within the renewed program of European neighborhood, the EaP program – the Parliamentary Assembly Euronest, the European Endowment of Democracy, the Foundation of the civil society with its National Platforms on-site, as well as new ones.

I simply say that the EaP is planning to start the comparison of the CU and the Eurasian Economic Union with the status of the Association relations with the EU at the information level, where Europe and the US have a richer experience than Russia, and where they are planning to beat Russia.

In general, some things at least may start there.”