

Armenia and Azerbaijan:

Opinions and Comments

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20 Perspectives on Life in Armenia and Azerbaijan - 2011

The parallel interviews with Armenian and Azerbaijani experts present the situation in various fields of activity in Armenia and Azerbaijan. The issues dwelt upon here hardly relate to the Armenian - Azerbaijani conflict. As usual, these are the issues that fall out of the scope of the mass media coverage in both countries when they write on each other: youth, the educational system, the level of employment, leisure, opportunities for the social security of the population, labor and other forms of migration, mass media, democratic freedoms, the European vector of development, courts, modern Armenian and Azerbaijani Diasporas, religious freedoms and so on. The interviews meant to help draw the general sketches of the modern life in Armenia and Azerbaijan are part of a joint project implemented by Region Research Center (Armenia) and the Institute for Peace and Democracy (Azerbaijan). The series of pair interviews with 40 different experts from Armenia and Azerbaijan on 20 topics will be simultaneously published in the newspaper Hetq in Armenia and the newspaper Novoye Vremya in Azerbaijan. The interviews in Armenia will be conducted by Region Research Center, and those in Azerbaijan - by the Institute for Peace and Democracy.

Perspective 18: Turkey As a Regional Figure



Turkey Has Become Unpredictable

An interview with the representative of Armenian National Congress David Shahnazaryan

-What major achievements and omissions has Turkey had in its foreign policy recently?

-The foreign policy of Turkey has become unpredictable and does not contribute to the stability and security in the region. It even has problems with its ally Azerbaijan, and these problems have become deeper because of the Armenian-Turkish protocols. Besides, there are serious disagreements with regard to the territory of Nakhijevan which the official Baku is trying not to voice.

In a word, Turkey has created serious problems with all its neighbors without an exception. It has become unpredictable for both its neighbors and the West.

I cannot mention any objective success Turkey has had in its foreign policy. Instead of "zero problems with neighbors" Turkey has zero relation and zero result today.

-What can the relations between America and Turkey, Europe and Turkey be characterized by? How different are the political goals of the USA, Europe and Turkey in South Caucasus?

Turkey's membership to the European Union is not realistic, the aim is only formal. At least, for the reason that Turkey is not a democratic country today and does not comply with the requirements of the European Union. I think that Europe does not have interests in either Turkey or the region. It is promoting its Eastern Partnership Program and is satisfied with it.

In our region Brussels is initially led by the principle that stability is more important than human rights and democracy. But as a result, there is neither democracy, nor stability, nor security. This region is much more important for the USA due to its activity and interests in Afghanistan and Iran. Stability in the region is more important to the USA and Europe than democracy. We do not need any unnecessary headaches in the region.



Turkey Is for the Restoration of the Territorial Integrity of Azerbaijan and Georgia

An interview with the head of Atlas Research Center Elhan Shahinoghlu

-What can the relations between America and Turkey, Europe and Turkey be characterized by? How different are the political goals of the USA, Europe and Turkey in South Caucasus?

The relations between Turkey and America look like a zigzag. They develop for some time, then the intensity decreases. It is true that it is not always that Ankara follows the directives of Washington, but both countries continue their partnership. For example, when Assad began the repressions against his own people in Syria, the positions of Ankara and Washington coincided, they highlighted the necessity of the resignation of the President of Syria Assad.

On the other hand, B. Obama promised R. Erdogan to provide American pilotless planes, even if Israel asks for the return of the pilotless planes sold to Turkey. As for the relations between Europe and Turkey, there is no positive news here. The two leading states of the European Union - France and Germany - continue to be against the accession of Turkey into the EU. Ankara is also greatly concerned that Greek Cypriots are going to preside in the European Union for six months. Turkey has announced that it will stop its relations with the European Union for these six months. Regardless of this, the perspectives of the USA, EU and Turkey on the issues existent in South Caucasus coincide.

-How are the Russian-Turkish relations reflected on the interests of Armenia and Azerbaijan? What place do Russia and Turkey ascribe to the Karabakh issue?

-The Russian-Turkish relations have two sides. Economic relations are developing between the two countries. In the coming years the circulation of goods will amount to 100 billion dollars and cooperation in the energy sector will continue. Russia will start the construction of a nuclear power plant in Turkey. However, there is a difference in the perspectives of Moscow and Ankara on South Caucasus and Azerbaijan.

The Kremlin is not interested in the fair resolution of the Karabakh conflict and the restoration of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Russia continues to arm its last outpost Armenia, and is against the NABUCCO and Transcaspian projects. On the contrary, Ankara looks at Nagorno Karabakh as a part of Azerbaijan, considers it necessary to put pressure on Armenia, and is for the rapid implementation of the NABUCCO and Transcaspian projects. At these points the differences between the political interests of the two countries become obvious. The Kremlin does not accept the active mediating mission of Turkey in South Caucasus, since Turkey is for the restoration of not only Azerbaijan's but also Georgia's territorial integrity.

For the full script of the interviews see: <http://hetq.am/rus/interviews/6325/>
<http://www.novoye-vremya.com/new/2011/11/11/get=53866m>, <http://hetq.am/rus/interviews/6324/>

Perspective 19: NGOs in Armenia and in Azerbaijan



Armen Alaverdyan, Executive Director of Unison NGO, supporting people with special needs

-What are the strengths of the civil society today, what were they 10 years ago, 20 years ago when Armenia was becoming independent?

-I can say that we can now see a mostly mature field. One of the most notable weaknesses is that the funding for the major part of the NGO sector is totally dependent on international organizations. Eventually we should realize that the grant, which in essence is an order for a project, does not always come from the interests of our country. If the heads of NGOs are people of principle, they will never betray and sacrifice their principles and mission for the sake of the money. However, we cannot exclude the possibility of the opposite. Our state does not support NGOs, and the RA Law on "Non Governmental Organizations" prohibits them to become self-sufficient and sustainable. The situation is different in developed countries, and in order to develop its activities NGOs can earn money. This is not entrepreneurship. If we had an opportunity to cover the expenses for the maintenance of our premises, the transport fares and pay the salaries of our employees, it would be easier to be independent and sustainable. Another weakness is that some NGOs directly interfere with political processes.



Inga Zarafyan, President of EcoLur NGO

-How strong are the positions of NGOs in the society? Are there any of the so-called GONGOs? What is the attitude towards them in the public?

-And as for how strong the position of NGOs in the civil society is, very often stereotypes are imposed on the people from above and a persistent campaign of defamation against those organizations start who do not agree with the perspectives of the power. In such conditions it is very difficult to work among such people who live in the regions and only watch the public TV. A barrier is erected due to the lack of confidence, and every time we have to overcome that barrier. They have started to call us grant devourers overlooking the act of the principle that our officials receive huge grants from international financial institutions who impose their own policy on the country. And most importantly, as taxpayers we have to pay back this money in the future. Sometimes activists expect actions from the non-governmental organization the government is in essence responsible for. It is ridiculous but currently people are so tense that they have started to hit anybody, and everyone gets beaten. People are not ready for a dialogue, but rather they demand changes. These are only recent examples, we did not use to have anything of the kind before. Now people become active not in the form of non-governmental organizations, but social groups, and new relations start here. This is very important.



Eynulla Fatulayev, President of For Human Rights NGO

-What institutions of the civil society now operate in Azerbaijan and what role do they play in the democratization of the country? Can we claim that the present non-governmental organizations are the axis of the civil society in our country?

If the whole of the society is subject to arbitrary manipulations, is it reasonable to speak of being free from the immediate interference of the state? Whereas by saying a civil society, we understand protection from such infringements on the part of the state. The civil society is a union of free citizens.

There are no free citizens in our country, for if the citizens of the country are deprived of their main Constitutional right to elect and be elected, if there are no elections, there is no parliament, there are no political parties and other attributes of the democratic system (or rather, they do exist, in the correct form but of ridiculous essence), if there are no sectors in the country left beyond the scope of interests of the power that totally controls the whole of the life of the society, what civil society can we be speaking about? There is no freedom of the media, union and assembly, this lacks, that lacks! In a country in which social stability has been equated with its political stability, there is no and can never be a civil society. In a country where liberalism is the truest patriotism, the notion of civil society can excite only the foolish who do not aim to gain politically.



Anar Mamedli, Head of the Center for Election Monitoring and Democracy Training

-How strong are the positions of NGOs in the society? Are there any of the so-called GONGOs? What is the attitude towards them in the public?

-There is a serious need for independent, transparent and professional non-governmental organizations. However and unfortunately, year by year the number of such organizations is reducing. This has been caused by the unfriendly attitude of the power. They are denied in registration, their access to TV time is hindered, and their activities are impeded. Instead, they cooperate with the GONGOs - organizations they have established themselves. The GONGOs have a loyal attitude to omissions, do not demonstrate any professional and comprehensive approach to human rights issues.

In the Azerbaijani media and during public discussions such organizations are sometimes criticized. Generally there is lack of confidence in such organizations, since they are perceived as false representatives of the civil society.

For the full script of the interviews see: <http://hetq.am/rus/interviews/6691/>
<http://hetq.am/rus/interviews/6700/>, <http://www.novoye-vremya.com/new/2011/11/17/get=54039>

Perspective 20: Processes of Democratization in Armenia and in Azerbaijan



Tevan Poghosyan, Executive Director of the Analytical Center for Human Development

-How are evaluations and recommendations on the democratic reforms in Armenia given by the European Union, Council of Europe and other international organizations reflected on practical activities? Which are the most effective levers held by European structures for the advancement of the democratization process in the country?

-Until now all the European institutes without ceremony have been speaking about the deficiencies existent in Armenia. I assume that the state structures in Armenia are trying not to receive any negative estimation. With this regard the assessment given by European structures has a positive impact, but as we all know, their judgment may also be biased. For example, they have declared that they do not recognize the elections in Karabakh. It is necessary to realize that any European institute is first of all a political institution, and naturally, their assessment is subjective. The mechanism of the formation of judgment proper is interesting, too, for example, by a European institute like PACE (The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe). Any judgment on Armenia that sounds from the lips of the head of this structure will never be positive. By my assessment, these very institutes somehow have a positive influence since these people do come and leave, and try to ensure progress. Besides the purely political announcements made by them, technical assistance is provided, training courses and workshops are organized.



Levon Barseghyan, Chairman of the Council of Asparez Journalists' Club

-What is the situation in Armenia in the field of human rights like? Do human rights organizations in our country cooperate with the institute of the Ombudsman? Who do citizens turn more to and on what issues - to the Ombudsman or human rights organizations?

-The power is not making any substantial effort to cut the number of violations in the human rights sector; it is a reactive activity under the pressure of human rights organizations and individuals rather than a proactive trend. A number of human rights organizations, including ours, do not cooperate with the Ombudsman's office. Neither with the previous Ombudsmen, nor with the incumbent official cooperation will ever prove productive for two reasons. The first reason is that this very structure cannot have any considerable influence for legislatively its competences are always limited. It does not have any legal basis for active interference. The Ombudsman's office can be compared with a large non-governmental organization. The only positive trait is perhaps the presence of a prompt response resource which one can directly apply for in case there is a restriction of rights in any structure. Another reason of personal nature: I personally do not feel any confidence in the activities of the incumbent Ombudsman. I assume that the power is usurped in Armenia and when someone accepts the proposal of cooperation from the usurper the former in fact sides with the latter.



Fuad Hasanov, Director of Democracy Monitor NGO

-How are evaluations and recommendations on the democratic reforms in Azerbaijan given by the European Union, Council of Europe and other international organizations reflected on practical activities? Which are the most effective levers held by European structures for the advancement of the democratization process in the country?

-In fact, there are not many opportunities for the European structures to influence. The Council of Europe, a member of which Azerbaijan is, does have some mechanisms of pressure, but in the last 5 - 7 years these mechanisms have considerably lost their power of influence. The PACE speakers have become more passive and are not taken seriously by the power of Azerbaijan. The only mechanism that does have power of influence continues to be the European Court. However, the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights take several years and we can speak about its efficiency in prospect. Control over the implementation of the decision of the European Court, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe cannot be considered an effective body in this sense. The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe also has very limited possibilities of influencing the political decisions of the administration of Council of Europe member states.

In all cases the Council of Europe mechanisms cannot force the power of Azerbaijan to implement fundamental democratic reforms, since Azerbaijan is considered a serious energy partner by Europe. The European Union has only two serious mechanisms - the Eastern Partnership Program and the New European Neighborhood Policy. Both programs have a condition of implementing serious reforms directed at democratization, human rights and rule of law. But they do not have considerable influence, since they prioritize economic and energy security interests. The Eastern Partnership Program considers that the civil society must play an important role in the issue of European integration, however, the mechanism of influence will not become more intensive as long as the representatives of the civil society do not take part in the official negotiations with the administrations of member states. In order for all the mechanisms to be effective, Europe must move from "real politics" to "moral politics."



Rasul Jafarov, Chairman of Human Rights Club

-What is the situation in Azerbaijan in the field of human rights like? Do human rights organizations in our country cooperate with the institute of the Ombudsman? Who do citizens turn more to and on what issues - to the Ombudsman or human rights organizations?

The organization I represent highly appreciates the activity of the apparatus of the Ombudsman in the sector of human rights. We assert this on the basis of certain facts. This testifies to the point that the apparatus of the ombudsman does not have serious possibilities in this field. For example, we called the attention of the Ombudsman to the issue of violence applied by the Police in the Nakhijevan village of Pusian in the autumn of 2010. At that time the brother of an oppositional figure Chapay Alisoy and his family were seriously intimidated and harassed. The Interior ministry of the NAR recorded a fact of torture applied against a driver. In January 2011 a youth activist Jabbar Savalan was arrested. By the law the Ombudsman has a right to independent investigation of all the facts. However, we have never become witnesses of such an independent investigation.

Besides, the apparatus of the ombudsman has a right to go to court to punish and to institute criminal proceedings against officials, as well as turn to the President of the country on the most important and significant issues in the country, however there has been no such case yet. This means that the apparatus of the Ombudsman is not an independent structure.

The Ombudsman of Azerbaijan depends on the executive power. I consider that the citizens realize this and prefer going to law-enforcing bodies.

For the full script of the interviews see: <http://hetq.am/rus/interviews/7179/>
<http://www.novoye-vremya.com/new/2011/11/24/get=54221>, <http://hetq.am/rus/interviews/7180/>,
<http://www.novoye-vremya.com/new/2011/11/24/get=54221>



From the online interview with a Member of the Turkish Parliament, President of the Center for International Relations and Strategic Analysis Turksam **Sinan Ogan**

● According to me, the probability of military intervention to Iran is very low. No one, even the people thinking about intervention to Iran, cannot estimate the results of this. As for me, they will want to change the regime in Iran using methods that are similar to those in the Arab Spring.

● This discourse of Turkey is absolutely realistic. As you know, the European Union (EU) Presidency Term for an EU state lasts 6 months. Hence, if Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus gets the presidency term, relations will be pended by Turkey for 6 months. "Is it possible that Turkey will avoid EU Presidency Term of the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus?" We will live and see this.

● The military relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey are actually very good. But taking it one step further is also possible. In the context of regional balances, "How true correct is doing it now?" this should be estimated well. The profits and damages to the regional peace after creating Russia- Armenia and Turkey-Azerbaijan military blocs should be calculated comprehensively. But, in principle, it can be done, and if it is realized, I personally will support it.

● Despite Turkey's long-lasting republic and democracy history, Turkey does still have problems with democracy. So, is it true if Turkey interrogates Azerbaijan, who is 20 years old young republic in terms of this issues? Here, we have not solved our democratic problems literally yet.

The interview was conducted in Caucasus Journalist's Network on December 14, 2011. Sinan Ogan answered the questions of the journalists from Armenia (newspaper "Hetq" - www.hetq.am, news agency "News Armenia" - www.newsarmenia.am, news Agency "News.am" - www.news.am, internet newspaper "Panorama" - www.panorama.am, news agency "Арминфо" - www.arminfo.am, newspaper "jamanak" - www.1in.am, National Radio of Armenia- www.armradio.am) and from Azerbaijan (newspapers "Zerkao" - www.zerkalo.az and "Bizim yol" - www.bizimyol.az)

For the full script of the interview see:

<http://www.caucasusjournalists.net/interview.asp?idinterview=137>

Current project



Alternative Information for the Armenian-Azerbaijani Dialogue

Region Research Center in Armenia (Director Laura Baghdasaryan) and the Institute of Peace and Democracy in Azerbaijan (Director Leyla Yunus) in May 2011 started the implementation of the project called Alternative Information for Armenian-Azerbaijani Dialogue under the support of the British Embassies in Armenia and in Azerbaijan. During the period of May - December 2011 the partners of the project have been working along a number of lines to give the Armenian and Azerbaijani mass media a possibility to receive first-hand information on various spheres of activity in contemporary Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The preparation and publication of a series of parallel interviews with Armenian and Azerbaijani experts (interviews with 40 experts on 20 different topics): youth, education, mass media, democratic freedoms, migration, judicial system, the development

of information technologies, civil sector, freedom of speech and mass media, the system of social security of the population, economic development and so on. All the interviews have been published in the Caucasus Journalists Network, as well as in the newspapers Hetq (www.hetq.am, Armenia) and Novoye Vremya (www.novoye-vremya.com, Azerbaijan).

Organizing and conducting online interviews for Armenian and Azerbaijani journalists with experts from different countries on topical issues arousing interest in both countries. These first-hand interviews have been published by the Armenian and Azerbaijani journalists in their media outlets.

Organizing and conducting Internet-conferences in Caucasus Journalists Network with the participation of Armenian and Azerbaijani political scientists and analysts on the topical issues and on the ongoing processes of the Karabakh negotiation process.

The materials of the Internet conferences are available in the Discussions section in the Caucasus Journalists Network (www.caucasusjournalists.net), as well as in the Armenian and Azerbaijani press.

Throughout the project the readers who felt interested in the contemporary Armenian - Azerbaijani realia could regularly familiarize themselves with the whole materials of the project in the electronic bulletin Armenia - Azerbaijan - 2011: Events and Comments.

The bulletin have been disseminated among users in different countries. All the issues of the bulletin are accessible in the Caucasus Journalists Network.
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