



TOPICAL DIALOGUES

A "Region" Research Center Project

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ON THE ONLINE PRESS-CONFERENCES FOR THE ARMENIAN MEDIA

Within the framework of the “International Press-Center “Dialogue”:
Diversification of the Sources of International News for Armenian media”
project, supported by OSCE Office in Yerevan, “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 topical events and processes in international politics.

The topics of and issues brought up at the press-conferences may be directly or
indirectly related to the current foreign policy 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.

ONLINE PRESS-CONFERENCES FOR ARMENIAN MEDIA



From the online press conference with the former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova VALERIU OSTALEP (Moldova) for the Armenian media

17.09. 2015.

Topic: Protest Actions in Moldova

On the Protest Actions in Moldova

- The protest mood of the population in Moldova is extensive. If today there was a strong leader, clearly articulating his political views and ready to sweep away this power by legal means, he would have easily won the sympathy of the majority of the population. The hatred towards the authorities is enormous. But at the moment this mood has been taken advantage of by some right-wing people who want to create their own party. This is how it will all end in terms of this particular protest. But the trouble for this power will not end, it will only get worse. Now, in addition to internal pressure, they will get more of exterior pressure, too, by the way, from their former political sponsors. Therefore, these changes in Moldova will still have to wait, but not specifically due to this protest. Today we can surely state that Moldova is just another place where the EU got disgraced and proved its complete lack of understanding of the realities to the east of its borders.

On the Unionism Moods in Moldova

- In Moldova, there is a certain representation of the Romanian minority. They are about 7-8% of the population. Due to certain circumstances, it is the most hysterical and the least tolerant part of the Moldovan society, which constantly calls for several things - the disappearance of the Moldovan state, they do not recognize the existence of the Moldovan people and the only thing that they perceive in this life is the union of Moldova with Romania. It is this hysterical part of the society that keeps screaming and against the background of the comparative passivity of the rest of the population, their vociferous statements are impossible to ignore. But the unionist sentiments in the country are rated at 3-4%. In fact, there are no prerequisites and no legal or other justifications for the unification

with Romania, it's impossible, and it is possible to perceive as a certain form of hysteria. It must be admitted that Romania is pretty unfriendly towards us, it systematically makes territorial claims, political claims on our sovereignty, as the top leadership of that country also claims that Moldova should cease to exist, and the political project of Romania is the union with Moldova and therefore the elimination of the Moldovan statehood and against the background of the lack of any progress in the economy these empty cries, that are in clear violation of the Moldovan law and are disrespectful for the Moldovan people are just heard in the media. In fact, no real preconditions may exist in principle, but as a definite threat in the form of provocations and hysteria, it exists, it has been there since 1989, it has never been stopped, it is neither more nor less, and this should be treated accordingly.

On the Transdnestrian Conflict

- The status of Transnistria is the same as it was three years ago or five years ago. Maybe due to the events in Ukraine the situation is tenser, for obvious reasons, and the economic indicators have generally deteriorated. Otherwise, there is no much change. Chisinau politicians are busy looting in the territory under their control, and no one cares about Transnistria case. Therefore, the so-called negotiation process has a sluggish, formal character and is about nothing. Moscow has enough problems in the international arena to deal with more, and Moldova does not really matter much in terms of its political or economic interests, except in formally cultural and historical terms. Moldova can only benefit from closer relations with Russia, but since it refuses from these relations, Russia has its hands full even without the suicidal policy of Moldova.

Full version of the material here: <http://regioncenter.info/en/Online-press-conference-with-the-former-Deputy-Minister-of-Foreign-Affairs-and-European-Integration-of-the-Republic-of-Moldova-Valeriu-Ostalep-eng-Interviews>



**From the Internet press conference with the former
US Ambassador to the Republic of Armenia
JOHN EVANS (USA) for the Armenian media**

25.09. 2015

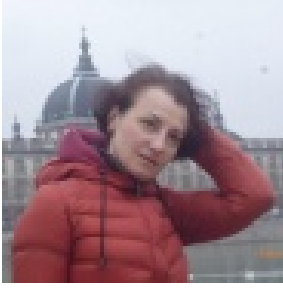
**Topics: The Near East, waves of migrants to USA, Iran,
security issues in the global context**

- For all who were hoping that the long-running conflict between the Turkish state and its Kurdish citizens had taken a decisive turn in the direction of a peaceful, political solution, the resumption of violence this summer was a grave disappointment. It was all the more disappointing in view of the apparent motivations for renewing the violence, which seem to be closely connected with the results of the June 7 election and the prospects for the next round at the beginning of November.
- There is corruption everywhere, but in Armenia I think a general lack of transparency and a perception that the courts do not deliver fair and timely justice compounds the problem. We would all like to see more American and other foreign investment in Armenia, but unfortunately there are a number of impediments, only one of which is the corruption factor.
- The Middle East is sadly undergoing a most violent and chaotic period in its history, and we need all the players to take a deep breath and look for ways to bring the fighting and the killing to an end before the region is destroyed, as several cities in Syria have been. The agreement reached with Iran by the six powers on its nuclear program is only a first step, and the U.S. sanctions, some of which go back many years, will not be lifted all at once. In the long run, I do believe that Iran must be brought back into the Middle East equation as a responsible power that contributes to stability rather than threatening to undermine it.
- There are many actors in the Middle East, and the United States is only one of them. We would like to see the region be stable, prosperous and at peace. Unfortunately, it is not so simple to bring about the conditions that lead to such an outcome, and violence begets violence. One can hope that the world leaders who are now gathering for the U.N. General Assembly in New York may put their heads together and come up with some new approaches, particularly as regards Syria.
- Islam is one of the world's great religions, but I think the extremism, fundamentalism and intolerance displayed by these groups have greatly tarnished the reputation of Islam with

peoples of other faiths. I cannot believe that the majority of Muslims want to see ISIS become the face of their religion.

- There is a world-wide movement of people underway, not only Arabs, but Afghans and Africans and people from South America. The causes are many. By no means all are refugees in the strict legal sense. Many are leaving because of conditions at home and hopes of a better life elsewhere. Some will be disappointed to learn that the streets of Europe and America are not paved with gold. Others may find what they are looking for. In the meantime, the traffickers who take large sums of money from migrants in return for dangerous boat rides across the Mediterranean are exploiting these people's fears and hopes, often with the tragic consequences that we have all seen. Armenia has been right to offer refuge to Syrians and Yazidis; you will find that they can contribute to building your country.

Full version of the material here: <http://regioncenter.info/en/Internet-Press-Conference-for-the-Armenian-Media-Questions-for-Mr.-John-Evans%2C-former-US-Ambassador-to-the-Republic-of-Armenia-eng-Interviews>



From the Internet press conference with the with the expert on conflicts NATALIA MIRIMANOVA (Belgium) for the Armenian media

28.09.2015

Topic: The conflicts in the CIS countries

On the Escalation of the Karabakh Conflict

- The Karabakh conflict is on the periphery of international attention. The option of the escalation of the war is not considered. Hence the lack of response.
- This situation is a blow to the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The lack of commitment by both parties to the rules and regulations that might otherwise be expressed in the investigation of such incidents and to sharing the results of such investigations, strengthening control and interaction on issues of local security, does not enable the effective development of a large-scale negotiation process. If we do not trust each other in the small things, how can we trust each other in large matters?
- This is neither the first nor the last escalation. I do not know what served as the factual cause of the escalation, just, like many other people, but the intensification of the shootings may be either random or scripted.

On the Conflict Resolution Process in Ukraine

- There are probable solutions to the conflict in Donbas. However, there is no two way process in which it would be possible to find solutions. The Minsk process aimed at the cease-fire, but it was not created for the development of a peace plan and the search for the ultimate formula. This process is unique in that none of the parties (the Republics, Ukraine and Russia) has a clear purpose. For Kiev, it is important not to remain in the same camp with the republics as the Russian Trojan horse, the population is divided about taking back these formations. In the territory of Donbass that is not under the control of Kiev, there are not only supporters of the Donetsk Peoples' Republic and Lugansk Peoples' Republic, but also their opponents as well as people without a certain standpoint on the matter who are waiting for stability and security. The "New Russia" project was not a priority or a failure for Vladislav Surkov, and Moscow is not ready to receive a new package of sanctions for a dubious prize in the form of ruined Donbass.

Since from the very beginning the independence movement in the Donbass or accession to Russia was constructed in no way similar to the national movement in the early 90s, they have no ideological, ethnic or other bases. The leadership of the Republics declares willingness to be part of Ukraine, but is also seriously concerned that Kiev will not agree to a contract with them.

On the Exhausted Nature of the Conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

- If by "exhausted" you refer to the "solution", of course, I do not. The resolution of the conflict is possible if the conflicting parties find a solution acceptable to all. Since 2008, the process of finding solutions in the bilateral format has stopped. From the Russian-Georgian war in Georgia till the elections of 2012, won by the "Georgian Dream" coalition, the conflict was officially considered purely Georgian and Russian, and the format of talks with Abkhazia and South Ossetia was blocked by Tbilisi. Sukhum(i) and Tskhinval(i) blocked this format, considering it exhausted after reaching their goal of recognition. Currently the Georgian-Abkhaz dimension has become topical in Georgia once again, but there is no response from the Abkhaz side. The Treaty on Cooperation (Abkhazia) and Integration (South Ossetia) does not change the positions of Georgia and the international community. The conflict persists, Russia is now added as an active party.

Full version of the material here: <http://regioncenter.info/en/Internet-press-conference-with-the-expert-on-conflicts-Natalia-Mirimanova-for-the-Armenian-media-%28Belgium%29-eng-Interviews>



From the Internet press conference with the Executive Director of the Center for the National Interest PAUL SAUNDERS (USA) for the Armenian media

9.10.2015

Topics: Presidential Elections in the US, the Military Operations of Russia in Syria, Issues in the Near East

On the Presidential Elections in the US

- Democrats seem to have a structural demographic advantage, but also have a weaker than expected candidate in Hillary Clinton. Republicans have so far been extremely divided both in the presidential race and on Capitol Hill. The outcome will depend on whether Republicans can unite around a strong candidate. So far this looks questionable.
- If the U.S.-Russia relationship continues to worsen, it is possible that a U.S.-Russian rivalry will develop all around Russia's periphery. This would put significant pressure on Russia's neighbors and could be very dangerous, especially for those countries. The main victim of the U.S.-Russia rivalry in Ukraine has been Ukraine itself. I expect that very few governments want to be in a similar position. If I were the leader of a country in this region, I would try very hard to avoid becoming an object of competition.
- This outcome is not unique to these particular promises. The Armenian community is an important voting bloc in certain U.S. states and politicians naturally say whatever they can to try to win support. That said, the same is true of Hispanic American voters, who have regularly heard promises about immigration reform, and of many other groups (ethnic, social, or otherwise) who politicians want to attract. Sometimes these promises are genuine but naïve, in that they ignore political or policy realities that make them difficult to fulfill. Other times they may be less genuine. But the phenomenon is not specific to the problem of the Armenian Genocide.
- Donald Trump's popularity is overwhelmingly a result of popular anger and political and even economic elites in the United States. However, while the anger is widespread, it appears unlikely to be sufficiently broadly based to carry Trump into office, especially because he has high "negatives," meaning that many people do not like him and will not vote for him. That said, any other politician who ignores this public anger is making a big mistake.

On the Military Operations of Russia in Syria

- The idea that ISIS was created deliberately by the United States is totally false. ISIS has been able to succeed because Syria has been in an extended state of crisis and chaos. The reason for that is the lack of international consensus, particularly among permanent members of the UN Security Council and among states in the region, about how to end the fighting and more specifically about what to do with President Bashar al-Assad. From that perspective everyone is responsible for failing to find a solution sooner.
- Russia's airstrikes and missile attacks are primarily symbolic, in that Moscow is conducting many fewer attacks than the United States and its allies. However, if Russia is able to coordinate its actions effectively with the Syrian Army's ground offensive, Moscow may be able to give the Assad regime some "breathing room." The key question is how quickly the forces that Russia is targeting will develop counter-measures.
- The Obama administration has already acknowledged that Assad may need to remain in government during a transitional period in order to reach a stable negotiated agreement. What the administration insists on is that Assad's departure should be a precondition of negotiations. Neither Assad nor Russia accept this. I think that Russian officials probably agree that Assad's rule is not indefinitely sustainable-even if he wins the civil war, which seems unlikely, he will be severely damaged as a leader. The key questions are how and when Assad leaves.
- The United States generally takes the view that democracies are more stable and more peaceful than autocracies. Over the last 40 years, the U.S. has applied pressure to many of its non-democratic allies to reform. South Korea and Taiwan have been successful at this in a gradual way over time. In the Philippines, the Reagan administration abandoned a long-term ally (former President Ferdinand Marcos) in favor of people pressing for democracy. The U.S. presses many of its Persian Gulf allies to introduce reforms and some of them have done so. Also, the U.S. usually applies different standards to allies and friends than to others. This is hardly unusual in international politics.

Full version of the material here: <http://regioncenter.info/en/Internet-press-conference-with-the-Executive-Director-of-the-Center-for-the-National-Interest-Paul-Saunders-eng-Interviews>