

ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN TODAY EVENTS AND COMMENTS

Electronic Bulletin

N 14, 2013

ELECTIONS JUST AS THEY ARE



Region Research Center (Armenia) and the Institute for Peace and Democracy (Azerbaijan) continue their cooperation on the joint internet platform “Public Dialogues” (www.publicdialogues.info) with the support of British Embassies in Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the Embassies of Poland in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The electronic bulletins “Armenia and Azerbaijan Today: Events and Comments” are issued with the financial support of the Embassies of Poland in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The parallel interviews of experts from Armenia and Azerbaijan (Virtual Parallels), as well as the internet press conferences held with the participation of experts from different countries for Armenian and Azerbaijani mass media are organized with the financial support of British Embassies in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The views and opinions expressed on this bulletin are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of British and Polish Governments.

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"PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN SOUTH CAUCASUS IN 2013: DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN CONDITIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS"

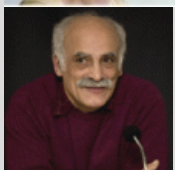
INTERNATIONAL INTERNET CONFERENCE ON "PUBLIC DIALOGUES" WEBSITE

Another Internet conference was held on the Public Dialogues website on November 11 – 13. This time, the invited experts focused on presidential elections in the three countries of the South Caucasus earlier this year (in February 2013 in Armenia, in October 2013 in Azerbaijan and Georgia).

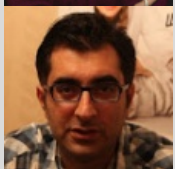
The following experts took part in the "Presidential Elections in South Caucasus in 2013: Domestic and Foreign Conditions for Democratic Elections" conference:



Marina Muskhelishvili (Georgia)
Director, Center for Public Research



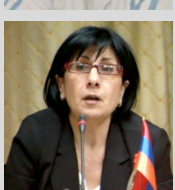
George Tarkhan Mouravi (Georgia)
Co-Director, Institute of Public Policy



Anar Mammadli (Azerbaijan)
Director, Center for Monitoring Elections and Democracy Training



Ruben Mehrabyan (Armenia)
Expert, Armenian Center for Political and International Studies



Conference facilitator - Laura Baghdasaryan
Director of Region Research Centre (Armenia)

The conference was organized within the "Public Dialogues" project. This project is implemented by Region Research Center (Armenia) and the Institute for Peace and Democracy (Azerbaijan) with the support of the Embassies of Poland in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The "Public dialogues" (www.publicdialogues.info) was created in September 2012 with the support of the British government.

- Domestic political and socio-economic conditions for the presidential elections held in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in 2013.
- International factors and political conditions for democratic elections.
- Possible consequences and developments after the 2013 elections in the South Caucasus.

These topics were discussed and in general analyzed in the three days of the conference:

- What was the main specificity of these elections: how were they similar to and different from one another?
- What background experience and resources were already there to hold transparent elections?
- What is the real role played by the voters themselves in the South Caucasus in the election cycle?
- What foreign policy factors were brought up in the last presidential elections, and in general the place they occupied in the political discourse?
- Was the attitude of the international community, that of the global superpowers to the forces involved in the race for power in our countries, and to what extent?
- What is the role played by international observers in electoral processes in our countries?
- What is the electorates' and other players' attitude to them and how much are they trusted?
- Will the relations between the government and opposition radically change after the 2013 presidential elections in the South Caucasus ?
- Are there opportunities to create new opposition forces, or to reformat the existing ones?
- How will the authorities live up to their social and political promises?

Full conference proceedings can be found here:

<http://www.publicdialogues.info/node/630>

Below we present excerpts from this material.

THE NATURE OF THE ELECTIONS



Ruben Mehrabyan – The main feature of the elections in all the three countries in the South Caucasus, in my opinion, is that the outcome was predetermined, despite the different internal conditions, the nature of the election campaign, the voting process and so on. The differences are due to the pre-election conditions which, in virtue of certain circumstances, have developed in each of our countries over the years. Hence, it was as good as it could get.

... In general, we can only speak of success only in Georgian elections. Armenia has a lot of problems, the problems in Azerbaijan are even more. At the same time, we can say that in Armenia there is a very active civic element, which, despite their degree of agreement or disagreement with the opposition, literally "fight" for fair elections. Luckily, Facebook, Youtube and other delightful tools, as well as the freedom in online media allow to have an idea of the developments in reality.



Marina Muskhelishvili - I remember 2003 - the Rose Revolution was happening in the street while I was sitting in front of the computer and criticizing that revolution in an online conference about the elections. Thanks for the opportunity to celebrate the anniversary in the same format.

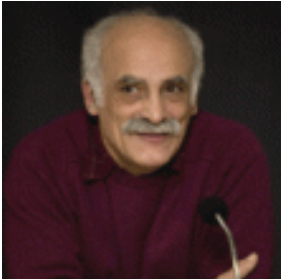
What is special about this year's election? For Georgia, the most obvious option, which shows the difference, was the turnout. Never before was such a low turnout registered in presidential elections. The regular turnout is about two million - with a variation in a couple hundred thousand. The turnout in parliamentary elections last year was unusually high - two million two hundred thousand. The turnout in presidential elections reached only a million and seven hundred thousand.

The decline of the voter turnout from 2012 to 2013 can be explained.

Georgia did not expect a change of government in the presidential elections of 2013. It was obvious that the Georgian Dream Party that came to power last year enjoyed the support of the majority. In addition, there was no struggle among charismatic leaders - the main contenders for the post were rather pale characters on the sidelines. And, most importantly, presidency was presented as something outdated and unnecessary. Thus, the future president was devalued.



Laura Baghdasaryan - Yes Marina, I find your participation in our conference during Saakashvili's arrival in 2003, and now, during his retirement quite an interesting intrigue. Because I also very well remember that you wrote that whoever comes to power through a revolution, leaves approximately in the same way – to the catcalls.



George Tarkhan - Mouravi - Although I'm not very happy with the way things are going in Georgia, no big mistakes have yet been made, and in general I would like to note progress in some important areas, such as political pluralism and freedom of expression, and the end of such crazy projects as the founding of Lasik city or the transfer of the Parliament to Kutaisi. So in general I think that so far Georgia is really a leader in the region, although not by a large margin.



Laura Baghdasaryan – The specificity of our countries is that even authoritarian regimes are forced to adhere to some rules during the elections. In the case of Azerbaijan and Georgia, the rules were changed by the same authorities to legitimize the longer-term steering of the country. That was the reason for the amendment to the Constitution of Georgia, devised to ensure Saakashvili as head of state but in the prime minister's position. Otherwise, how can we explain the initiation of these changes and the organization of their formal ratification by, in M.Muskhelishvili's terms, the "criminal and authoritarian regime?" Another thing is that these plans were interrupted by the suddenly appearing and not widely known businessman Boris Ivanishvili. The success of the project, entitled "Georgia without Saakashvili" currently in power, was obviously related to three factors: the fact that Ivanishvili is a good manager, he supplied the project with his own resources rather than foreign means, and it combines the basically diverse opposition forces on the principle of "my management and finances for your support." Ivanishvili from the outset stressed he was coming to politics only temporarily to complete Saakashvili's resignation.

And all this happened in the eyes of the international community the attitude of which is extremely important for Georgia because of its constant yearning for the West, and due to the so-called "off Russia" policy.

It was to legitimate the already indefinite tenure of I. Aliyev that Azerbaijan initiated the amendments to the Constitution, according to which the President can remain in power for more than two terms. The so-called international community regarded the new rule of the game with favor. The long stay of the present rulers of Azerbaijan in power was handy to all, because otherwise everyone had something to lose. Aliyev may lose a stable source for putting together a fantastically huge fortune, and the international community would lose a stable energy supplier in the person of Azerbaijan.

Why am I saying all this? Because the international observation is also a kind of a rule of the game, which, in no way, should be contrary to the above-described state of affairs.

In the case of Armenia, the situation in this regard is contradictory. The packaging in the form of rules has been the same. The arbitrators was not only the electorate, which is quite worthy of trying to stand up for their voices and demand a review of the official results of the vote, but international appraisers who officially congratulated Serzh Sargsyan , when there were violent post-election mass protests in Armenia.

ON THE POST-ELECTION DEVELOPMENTS

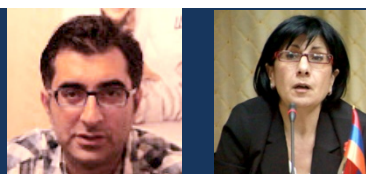
Laura Baghdasaryan to Anar Mammadli



- What is your optimism based on when you write that "in 6-7 years it will be possible to see that there are strong alternative democratic forces that can form a separate platform for the society?" Will Aliyev's position weaken by the time the attitude of foreign countries and international forces to it changes?

And one more question - how do you assess the fact that R.Ibrahimbekov was not allowed to participate in the election because of his dual citizenship? Did Russia help Aliyev in that? Or were there real procedural costs and "Ibrahimbeyov did not manage" to apply with his renunciation from Russia? And would the electorate then choose to vote for him?

Anar Mammadli to Laura Baghdasaryan



- I think that after the massive violations in the elections on October 9 the leadership will face a problem of legitimacy and justification in the country and abroad. It is obvious that the reputation of the country's leadership is definitely damaged after the publication of corruption rates in the last 3 years.

I think that the proponents of the Azerbaijani government in Europe and the United States were weakened after the massive criticism of the October elections in the media and by non-governmental organizations in Western countries. Therefore, before the local elections in 2014 and parliamentary elections in 2015 Aliyev should implement some reforms. Otherwise, the political problems will increase every year.

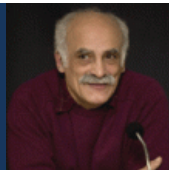
At the same time I do not think that opposition groups will be able to build the necessary alternative force in a year. They started the process very late, and such an undertaking takes some time.

As for R. Ibrahimbekov. Unfortunately, the National Council of Democratic Forces did not prepare R.Ibrahimbekov's nomination in time. Some documents were required to be obtained in Russia and NCDF failed to do so before the election.

However, the CEC's decision on R.Ibrahimbekov was illegal. CEC and the Azerbaijani government hoped that the Russian government would not provide Rustam bey with properly executed

documents. But I do not know why it was impossible to renounce the citizenship of Russia, and whether this issue was agreed between the Azerbaijani and Russian governments.

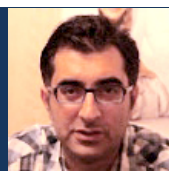
George Tarkhan - Mouravi



– Is the attitude of the international community and that of the world's leading powers to the forces involved in the race for power in our countries reflected on the process of voting and its results, and to what extent? - I think that at the moment the West's influence on public opinion and the electorate has decreased, but the influence of the political elite is largely preserved.

- What foreign factors were voiced during the last presidential elections, and in general what place do they occupy in the political discourse? - Basically, it was the accusation of the ruling coalition in the pro-Russian orientation, and the latter's emphasis on the success in restoring trade relations with Russia, and simultaneous confirmation pro- Western orientation (and the mentioning of progress in the respective direction). I think these were the central themes along with economic promises and criticism.

Anar Mammadli



- It's hard to talk about the position of domestic actors on the foreign policy orientation of Azerbaijan. Government officials are trying to avoid talking about this issue. There is no benefit for the government to start negotiations on an alliance with Russia. It seems that the economic effect of this union was not highly regarded by the government.

As for the relations between Azerbaijan and the EU, I must say that there is only economic interest in the development of this cooperation. The EU is a major partner of Azerbaijan in natural resources, and the leadership of Azerbaijan wants to maintain this cooperation at the current level. However, Azerbaijan has been involved in the Eastern Partnership since 2009, and no significant changes have been made to improve the preparation of the Association Agreement with the EU.

Azerbaijan will participate in the November Vilnius Summit without commitments and ado. The leadership of Azerbaijan has sufficient commitments to the Council of Europe and the OSCE, and it will be very difficult to fulfill the obligations to promote human rights and democracy.

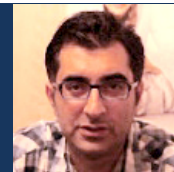
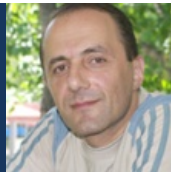
I have to say that the political opposition and civil society do not have much influence in determining the foreign policy orientation of Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, opposition groups and in particular the National Council did not express their political position on the relations between Azerbaijan and the EU on the eve of the Vilnius Summit.

Ruben Mehrabyan



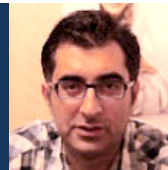
– As for the foreign policy agenda in election campaigns, I would say that it is relegated to the second place. The power focuses on the "social" needs and I say this, using quotation marks, because it contains only banal material interest. And this situation of corrupt of morals talking about the foreign policy is simply too "boring." Alas, it is. September 3, which we are "granted" by Serzh Sargsyan from Moscow on the occasion of the entry into the so-called Customs Union, is a logical extension, a consequence of this decline and institutional degradation. And the whole political system of Armenia - power plus the title-bearing opposition - unable to resist this decline – accelerated the free fall. That is why I consider it untimely to speak about the candidates, their potential electoral and other categories in electoral terms. A new social and political movement is necessary to challenge the flawed system and will assume political responsibility. Then new and different candidates will come afore.

Ruben Mehrabyan to Anar Mammadli



- Tell me, please, dear Anar, what role does Turkey play in the internal democratization of Azerbaijan? I mean not only the official but also the informal level - NGOs, civil society organizations, the media ...

Anar Mammadli to Ruben Mehrabyan



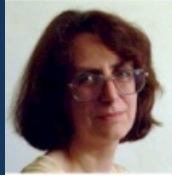
Dear Ruben! To continue our discussions on the external factors during and between elections, I must emphasize the influence of Turkey, Iran and the United States, along with Russia and the EU.

After the 2003 presidential elections, Turkey has become a closer partner to Aliyev and has distanced itself from the independent civil society groups and opposition parties. I think the first reason is related to the pragmatic policies of the ruling party in Turkey. Erdogan's interest in Azerbaijan is rather economic than political. Nevertheless, there are certain religious groups in several regions that are associated with Turkish religious groups. Unfortunately, unlike the situation 10 years ago, now the Turkish media and civil society organizations share the policy of the Turkish government and do not build a strong relationship with the independent non-governmental organizations and democratic forces in Azerbaijan. Another fact to be mentioned is that in recent years various Parliamentary missions, NGO representatives and some of the pro-government politicians from Turkey have visited Azerbaijan as supporters of the ruling party.

The U.S. is the main sponsor for human rights advocacy, the rule of law and democracy in Azerbaijan. But the experience of the past 10 years shows that the funding of governmental and non-governmental projects in these areas is not enough and there is a huge need for the political support of the USA . Nevertheless, the US consider Azerbaijan as a strategic partner in matters of transportation of oil and gas, energy and national security in the Caspian basin.

Finally, I must emphasize that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran, and Russia did not show interest in promoting human rights and democracy in Azerbaijan.

Marina Muskhelishvili



- We can simply say - the elections will not have any consequences, because these elections have not changed anything. They only reconfirmed the stability of the existing situation. Even in Georgia, where authorities have recently been replaced, the elections held did not entail choice.

It seems to me that the situation in our countries is different not only because we have recently changed the power, but also because the change of power was associated with the change of agenda. If the previous government prioritized the foreign policy orientation and identified country's development route by the relations with NATO and Russia, the foreign policy has ceased to be a dominant determinant. The focus has been repositioned inside the country, and the success and failures of the authorities commensurate with economic and other domestic reforms.

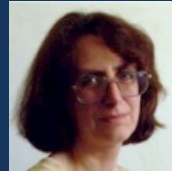
The domestic reform, especially amid the economic downturn, is a rather complicated and unappreciated job. High percentage of dissatisfaction and criticism of such reforms is guaranteed – the foreign policy in this respect is much more profitable as the main "chip" for any government. Quite a lot of people are already disappointed by what is happening in this regard, rather, what is not happening. However, on the whole the "Georgian Dream" did a lot to strengthen the social sphere in an election year and retained its primary electorate.

However, the further development of the political life seems to be rather vague. If the domestic policy is a priority, it requires clear ideological and social differences between enemies and supporters. The current political spectrum is not suitable for such a policy. It requires new parties and coalitions, and therefore new elections and important new public discourses.

As I have already said, democracy does not contribute to spikes. No one in the government is interested in rearrangements today. Therefore, there will be a strong tendency to return to the past - foreign policy will constantly return into domestic propaganda as a method of political consolidation.

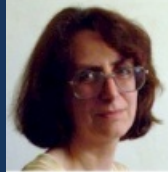
I think that Georgia comes a certain period of confusion and chaos, when people will wait for a coherent domestic policy, and these elites, unable to ensure it, will talk about external orient. Time will show where it will take us. Let's hope for gradual progress, but we should not be excluded the probability of a less democratic scenario.

Ruben Mehrabyan to Marina Muskhelishvili



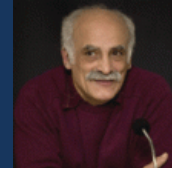
Ms. Mushelishvili, a direct question – will Saakashvili be persecuted?

Marina Muskhelishvili to Ruben Mr. Mehrabyan



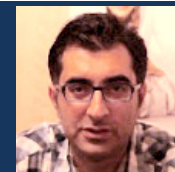
- Saakashvili is unlikely to be persecuted. At least, for his old sins. Given his nature, he will do everything to bring forth new circumstances. Then we'll see.

George Tarkhan - Mouravi



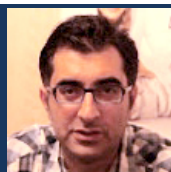
- The recent presidential election was important not because of their predictable results would change something, but as an important milestone in the development of political processes. The "co-habitation" ended, and it will no longer be attributed to any setbacks, the ruling coalition is now fully responsible for what is happening in the country, and some solutions, including legal ones, have been postponed until the election, and now begin to unfold. The election, on the one hand, demonstrated the continued (relative) support of the ruling coalition, but also somewhat disappointing, partly expressed in the passive voter. At the same time, it was yet another demonstration of vague principles and criteria for personnel policy, mainly based on personal preferences of leaders rather than meritocratic basis. Important questions come to the fore after the elections: how will the decisions be made when the country's most influential politician moves into the shadow? How stable is the ruling coalition, united by the desire to replace the previous system, but not sharing a system of values or plans? What will the strategic vision in both domestic and foreign policies be, and how will it be formed? Will there be a situation of competitive political pluralism, or will there be the same as before - one of the winning political forces will dominate political life, contributing to the development of authoritarian, elitist approaches? Thus, the election was certain bifurcation point, and answers to the above mentioned questions will determine our future and affect other very important solutions. In general, I am moderately optimistic about the future, and I do not foresee radical deterioration.

Laura Baghdasaryan to Anar Mammadli



- The prolonged suppression of the oppositionally-minded forces and people in Azerbaijan not only create an atmosphere of fear, but also destroy any dissent. Is it possible in such conditions to form new opposition forces, which will be more successful and get a lot of support from the population, than the current opposition forces do?

Anar Mammadli to Laura Baghdasaryan



- I am the Chairman of the local group of election observation, and our organization has watched more than 12 elections in Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, after each election, we were faced with

"punishment" and persecution by the government. And I can say that this is the nature of post-election processes in Azerbaijan.

This year, after 2 weeks of the election, we are faced with new challenges. On October 27, 2013, the General Prosecutor's Office instituted a criminal case against our NGOs and our partners, and we do not know how it will end. They also began to put pressure on the activists and journalists who have been very active in the elections. For example, a member of the Alternative Altai Republican Movement Goyuushov was dismissed from his position as professor at Baku State University. It was because he was an avid user of Facebook and wrote political positions. Perhaps you can imagine the complexity of working in such conditions. Now I am writing and simultaneously tracking messages on social networks on the new violations against newspapers, activists, lawyers, and so on.

After these bad elections, Aliyev's government will try to control the political stalemate in the country, created by them back in 2005. I cannot say how long they can continue to pressurize. But they cannot create another Turkmenistan or Belarus in Azerbaijan