

ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN TODAY

EVENTS AND COMMENTS

Electronic Bulletin

N 9, 2012



ABOUT THE PROJECT

ENHANCING KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF 'THE OTHER SIDE' BY ARMENIANS AND AZERBAIJANIS THROUGH ALTERNATIVE AND FIRST-HAND INFORMATION

With the support of the British Embassies in Armenia and Azerbaijan Region Research Center (Armenia) and The Institute of Peace and Democracy (Azerbaijan) are implementing a project "Enhancing Knowledge and Understanding of 'The Other Side' by Armenians and Azerbaijanis through Alternative and First-Hand Information" (April 2012-April 2014).

In fact, it is a new round of work aimed at improving the knowledge of Armenians and Azerbaijanis about each other.

Public Dialogues is a new platform for virtual interactions or distance communication among specialists from Armenia and Azerbaijan who represent various spheres of life in both societies. We assume that readers may both find trustworthy information here about contemporary Armenia and Azerbaijan, and draw parallels between the situation in the various fields of their specialization in both countries due to the absolute parallelism of topics and addressed issues.

Parallel interviews and video materials for the website "Public Dialogues" are held with experts and specialists from the two countries and reflect the present situation. These dialogues do not necessarily touch upon the issues of the Karabagh conflict or Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, they also raise and discuss problems which are no less important for the two conflicting societies. These parallel interviews are simultaneously published in Armenian newspaper "Aravot" and in Azerbaijani newspaper "NovoyeVremya".

On-Line Discussions: With the help of these Internet discussions Armenian and Azerbaijani political scientists will be given an opportunity for joint discussions on various issues related to the most topical developments in the international life and will help to adjust their assessments and perceptions with the approaches of their counterparts from the opposite party. Our discussions are held according to the rules of correct and comprehensive discussions where the representatives of both sides are involved.

Joint Online Press Conferences: Armenian and Azerbaijani journalists working in various mass media will have a chance to participate in online joint press conferences with Armenian and Azerbaijani professionals and political figures, as well as with political figures and experts from other countries and receive direct answers to the urgent issues they are interested in. Materials based on these conferences will be published in their mass media outlets.

The electronic bulletin "Armenia and Azerbaijan Today: Events and Comments" reflects the results obtained in the process of cooperation of the Research Center "Region" (Armenia) and The Institute of Peace and Democracy (Azerbaijan).

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ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN TODAY: EVENTS AND COMMENTS

PARALLELS

THE INTERVIEWS IN ARMENIA ARE CONDUCTED BY REGION RESEARCH CENTER AND
IN AZERBAIJAN BY THE INSTITUTE OF PEACE AND DEMOCRACY

THESE PARALLEL INTERVIEWS ARE SIMULTANEOUSLY PUBLISHED
IN ARMENIAN NEWSPAPER "ARAVOT" AND IN AZERBAIJANI NEWSPAPER "NOVOYEVREMYA"

WHAT WILL BE WITH THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS?

The Impact of the So-Called "Safarov Issue" on the Further Course
of the Negotiations on the Karabakh Settlement

ARMENIA NOW HAS NO "PARTNER FOR PEACE"



*An interview with the director of Regional Studies Center (RSC)
Richard Giragosian*

- What are the main postulates of the public discussion started off in Armenia? What do their strengths and weaknesses consist in?

- At the same time, Azerbaijan's reckless disregard of the implications and aftermath of its moves also reveals the international community's limited capacity to exert pressure on Azerbaijan. This external impotency was also an important element of the extradition discussion between Budapest and Baku, as Azerbaijani officials reassured Hungarian officials that they were quite willing and even eager to bear the brunt of international criticism.

For both the Armenian and Azerbaijani sides, the crisis also has an obvious domestic political context. For both sides, the crisis tends to unite the population around the president, helps to weaken any opposition by painting it as an act of betrayal or treason, allows the government to shape and control a new political discourse of nationalist posturing and display of national pride, and also distracts from more pressing domestic shortcomings. But for Armenia, the timing of the crisis also provides political dividends, by bolstering the ruling pro-government Republican Party only one week before important local elections set for September 9th and offering the chance for sustained popularity in the face of President Sarkisian's reelection bid in the February 2013 presidential election.

- Is it possible to stop communication between Armenian and Azerbaijani NGOs, and on the whole, how useful is cooperation between the representatives of the conflicting parties going to be from now on?

- The problem now is how to restore dialogue. In many ways, Armenia no longer has a "partner for peace" as Azerbaijan has exceeded all reasonable bounds. It will take time, but dialogue is a necessity, for each side.

THE FUTURE OF PEACE TALKS



*An interview with the expert and analyst
Toghru Jouvarly*

- What are the main postulates of the public discussion started off in Azerbaijan? What do their strengths and weaknesses consist in?

- The part of the society that approved of this step of the authorities are not willing to answer the subsequent questions that only reveal the weakness of the position of the authorities. Let us assume that the act of pardoning a person, who has already spent 8.5 years in prison serving his sentence, can be morally justified just as it is. But the decision to pay him his salary for the 8.5 years, he spent in prison, in fact means a complete denial of Ramil Safarov's fault. His promotion to a higher rank is a clear sign of mere glorification. You can definitely speak of a split in the political elite. It is less noticeable within the ruling elite, for it is trying to look unified. But the split became noticeable in the opposition, too. Several members of the House of Representatives even wanted to resign because they considered the signature of a joint (the ruling party and the opposition parties represented in the House of Representatives) petition, to be sent to the European Parliament on the resolution passed on this matter. Some are directly criticizing "Musavat" and APFP for the compromise with the authorities. Questions remain open on the real cause for this act of the opposition. Was it the desire to please the electorate or was it only to try to show the world at least once in the history that in some matters the ruling power and the opposition may be united? The opposition is also openly accused of mercantilism, although it was probably promised things that the power was supposed to be obliged to ensure even without any preconditions, that is to promote the amended law on political parties as soon as possible, to continue the dialogue between the government and the opposition proclaimed by the authorities back in the early summer. The worst part of this story is the blow to the image of Azerbaijan. The Armenian side has often claimed that in principle the coexistence of Armenians and Azerbaijanis is impossible in an undemocratic country. Now Armenia has got another argument in favor of the impossibility for the Armenians in the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh being a part of Azerbaijan, since the current regime in Azerbaijan is a constant threat to their security.

- Can the dialogue between the Armenian and Azerbaijani non-governmental organizations be suspended, and in general, how useful is the cooperation between the parties of the conflict?

- No, it will not be suspended in case of any scenario. This dialogue, just like the negotiation process, has its own inertia, which cannot be undone. In both societies, there are people who understand the political background of all the hoopla – who benefits from this, what the motives are and so on. Cooperation between the parties of the conflict is very useful. These contacts can always come in handy in case of both the exacerbation of the situation and the success of the peace talks. But above all, they want to "compare notes", in order to understand what happens in the societies.

Full versions of the interviews: <http://www.publicdialogues.info/en/node/317>

**What did the results of the Parliamentary elections in Georgia demonstrate?
Is the change of power through elections possible in Armenia and Azerbaijan?
What are the main lessons to be learnt from the Georgian elections and post-election
transformations in Georgia by Armenia and Azerbaijan?**

GEORGIA HAS SET A POSITIVE EXAMPLE IN THE REGION



*An interview with the Deputy Chairman of "Free Democrats"
Anush Sedrakyan*

- What do you associate the outcomes of the Georgian elections with - the level of democratic development, the development of the civil society, the external need for the change of theregime in Georgia? Could you name a different reason? Is the transition of Armenia's ruling party into the opposition possible as a result of the elections, after the Georgian scenario?

- If the Russian priority is the only possible way of the formation and development of Armenia for us, which, in my opinion, is quite debatable, the Georgians have never had a political myth of the kind. They have always considered the idea of their own independence a priority, of course, in the context of their integration into more developed structures (NATO, the EU and others).

Thanks to these conditions Georgians have first ensured stability in the country, formed a civil society on its basis, which later was seen to be ready to make a choice of its own.

Armenia has no stable life, and this makes it difficult for us to hold democratic elections. In fact, we never had a chance to choose, we always choose the worst possible of all the bad options. Do I think a similar turn of events possible in Armenia? In my opinion, in Armenia the power cannot move into the opposition through elections, because at the moment Armenia has no active opposition. The parties are struggling to be proclaimed oppositional. Even if now the Republican Party announced that it would resign without any elections and hand the power over to, for example, the Prosperous Armenia Party, I would not consider it a democratic choice.

- On the eve of the elections in Georgia, the legislation was amended to incorporate the transition from a presidential to a parliamentary form of government. Which of these forms of government and which political system is more suitable Armenia? Why?

- In ideological terms I stand for the parliamentary form of government, because there is possibility for consensus there. But I believe that in the transition period the presidential form of government can also contribute significantly to the making of Armenia, as we are accustomed to individual decisions. If the president suddenly takes a single-handed decision on the correct organization of the society, it will be a good preparatory step for the adoption of parliamentary democracy. I think that Georgia has matured enough to transition from the presidential to the parliamentary form of government, and if a complete culture of parliamentary government develops there, it will be a vivid sign of the political maturity of Georgia. We are not ready for such developments yet.

- Who has the Armenian population in Georgia voted for? What expectations does the Armenian population in Georgia have from the factually new government?

- According to the statistics we have received, the Armenian community in Georgia voted for Saakashvili. It is noteworthy that the Armenians in Syria support the incumbent government - Assad. The choice of the Armenian population is due to the fact that Armenians are a conservative community. They assess the situation, and if the conditions of their current lives under the incumbent government are more or less comfortable, any change can be viewed as negative and even dangerous. They want safety and security for themselves in the country they live in and it is in accordance with this logic that they choose to avoid turnabouts or major changes.

GEORGIAN CITIZENS DETERMINE THEIR COUNTRY'S FUTURE



*An interview with the head of East-West Research Center
Arastun Orujlu*

- What do you associate the outcomes of the Georgian elections with - the level of democratic development, the development of the civil society, the external need for the change of the regime in Georgia? Could you name a different reason? Is the transition of Azerbaijan's ruling party into the opposition possible as a result of the elections, after the Georgian scenario?

- I think, first of all, the reforms that were carried out after the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia played an essential role. It empowered the Georgian society to believe in itself. The openness of the society played an important role in the further enhancement of the role and influence of both the civil society and the legal mechanisms and institutions. A Georgian citizen has come to realize the role he/she plays in the politics and the public life in the country and that it is difficult to exclude him/her from politics, which cannot be said about Azerbaijan. In Azerbaijan, the very system of socio-political relations is either completely destroyed or is in crisis. It is hard to imagine that such a development in these countries would ever be possible. As for external factors, I do not think they played an important role or influenced the outcomes of the elections, because the election results were primarily due to the expression of the political will of the Georgian electorate.

- On the eve of the elections in Georgia, the legislation was amended to incorporate the transition from a presidential to a parliamentary form of government. Which of these forms of government and which political system is more suitable Azerbaijan? Why?

- The parliamentary form of government is in every way preferable over the presidential system, but it is effective only in case there is precise interaction among all state institutions and the branches of the government. This, in turn, will only work when there is a clear division of authorities among the branches of government and the separation of regulatory legislative norms, and an independent judicial system. If we consider that Azerbaijan lacks all this and will not acquire them soon, the highest efficiency can be achieved by introducing the same reforms that were carried out in Georgia. However, to implement such reforms it will in its turn take the political will of the country's leadership, which can hardly be expected from the incumbent establishment. This means that the implementation of the Georgian model (through a revolution) is so far perceived as the only way out of the socio-political and socio-economic situation in Azerbaijan.

- Who has the Azerbaijani population in Georgia voted for? What expectations does the Azerbaijani population in Georgia have from the factually new government?

- According to the available data, the Azerbaijani population of Georgia in the places of their residence mainly voted for the motion, led by President Saakashvili. This behavior of voters can be attributed to several factors, of which the following seem to be more likely in place.

First, national minorities always try to side with the authorities, because they want political stability and they do not tend to believe there may be any changes, whereas supporting the opposition may cause the distrust of the power in the community, which may, undoubtedly, lead to undesirable consequences.

Second, Azeris are often advised from their “motherlands,” and it is possible that this time the recommendations were in favor of the incumbent government in Georgia.

Finally, community leaders often represent the authorities, and this plays an important role in determining the political sympathies of the population in the regions in Georgia.

Full versions of the interviews: <http://www.publicdialogues.info/en/node/344>

THE PROTECTION OF WORKERS' RIGHTS IN ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN

**What is, in practice, the protection of workers' rights in Armenia and Azerbaijan?
Are the activities of trade unions and of other associations
of workers effective in Armenia and Azerbaijan?**

HOW ARE WORKERS' RIGHTS PROTECTED IN ARMENIA?



*An interview with a lawyer of Trade Unions Confederation of Armenia
Elen Manaseryan*

- How do transnational companies, local and foreign entrepreneurs treat trade unions or other organizations promoting the rights of employees?

- One cannot state that in Armenia foreign investors violate the workers' labor rights more often than local companies. Of course, the employer's attitude towards the unions is not unambiguous, because the unions are constantly making demands and raising problematic issues. Today, there are companies in 24 different sectors and industries whose workers have individually got organized, have formed trade unions and can negotiate with the employer. The provided solutions that are in favor of employees and are realized no matter by whose means (at the expense of the trade union or the employer), raise labour efficiency, which in its turn is beneficial for the most employer.

To join the union, the employee must pay a membership fee established by the union charter, which is usually a sum equal to 1% of the employee's monthly salary.

- How are the workers' rights protected in Armenia in practice? Are there any judicial precedents for such cases?

- From January to October 2012 three employees already took a legal action with the assistance of CTUA with claims of the abuse of their labor rights. CTUA annually receives about 80-100 written and 300 oral complaints over the phone or by a personal visit, all of which are followed up. The statistics of the last five years has shown that the complaints are gradually decreasing. The reason for this is the high level of unemployment and the workers' fear to lose their jobs. However, we have won legal cases which reinstated the employee in his/her former job and ensured payment for the idle time not by his/her own fault. There were cases when the case did not come to court: a letter containing the violations and the possible implications drafted by us and addressed to the employer, the employee was reinstated in his/her former job. We have also had cases when the employee was not paid for the holiday, and again as a result of our consultation, he received the amount due.

The Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia also works with potential migrants. We mainly disseminate information and hold consultations to prevention the possible cases of forced labor abroad and labor trafficking. We conduct these activities in the most vulnerable cities and regions in Armenia.

WE NEED INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONS



*An interview with the Chairman of the Committee
for the Protection of Oil Industry Workers' Rights
Mirvari Ghahramanli*

- How do transnational companies, local and foreign entrepreneurs treat trade unions or other organizations promoting the rights of employees?

- "The Confederation of Trade Unions of Azerbaijan" is a "puppet" structure in the hands of the government and employers. Moreover, employers prevent the establishment of alternative unions. The transnational companies operating in Azerbaijan also impede the establishment of independent trade unions, and the Confederation does not protect the rights of illegally dismissed workers. According to the law, seven members suffice to create a trade union. However, in practice employers prevent the establishment of trade unions with threats of dismissal. In the absence of fair courts in the country citizens prefer not to have any confrontation with their employers.

- How are the workers' rights protected in Azerbaijan in practice? Are there any judicial precedents for such cases?

- Workers' rights are practically unprotected in Azerbaijan.

There was a curious case at Balakhanineft. The chairman of the trade union of the enterprise represented the administration of the company at the trial on the woman's illegal dismissal. This case is a vivid manifestation of the lack of independence of trade unions.

If the worker disregards the management of the company or the factory, he/she will immediately lose his/her job. At the moment, trade unions live off 2% of their members' salaries, which is withdrawn from the oilmen's salaries by the accounting department. To date, regardless of the newly-appointed employees wish 2% of his/her salary is automatically withdrawn at the person's assumption of a position in the SOCAR. And it is worthwhile to ask what that person gets in return? Are the person's rights protected? In the best case the person

gets a 5-day stay in Nabrani (a resort on the shores of the Caspian Sea) for the 2% membership fee. By the way, not everyone is able to get such a voucher, much fewer get a small financial aid.

In reality, trade unions engage in anything, but control over compliance with the law. The whole point is that if unions are autonomous, they would, of course, protect the workers' rights. In winter, they go out of their offices because it is cold. In summer they sit in their offices because it is too hot in the street. In simpler terms, the unions are always on undeserved vacation at the workers' expense. It is important to recognize that the unions are not elected by the workers and are not independent organizations; they do not fulfill their functions of an independent structure under the employers.

I would, of course, like trade unions in the country to engage in their duties in good conscience. There is no explanation for those who take money from the people and fail to protect their rights. I would like many officials to realize that they are public servants, and they should comply with the law in the first place.

In 2011, our Committee for the Protection of Oil Workers' Rights filed 45 lawsuits to protect the violated rights of the workers in the oil sector. Of these, only 23 lawsuits won and the decisions were in favor of the workers in the industry. In the first 10 months of 2012 we have initiated 50 lawsuits and only 20 of those claims have been satisfied, while the others are under investigation.

Full versions of the interviews: <http://www.publicdialogues.info/en/node/348>

JOINT INTERNET PRESS CONFERENCES FOR ARMENIAN AND AZERBAIJANI MASS MEDIA



*From the internet press conference of the minister of georgia for reintegration
Paata Zakareishvili for armenian and azerbaijani mass media
october 30, 2012*

- I do not think that it is only Georgia who loses because of the absence of a dialogue between Georgia and Russia. I think that the new government of Georgia is a chance for Russia to normalize its relations with Georgia. And a lot depends on the steps Russia will take now. Russia announced that it would not talk to Saakashvili. It would be interesting to see how Russia will be speaking to Georgia now, when Saakashvili is no longer in power.
- It is necessary to take small steps to restore the confidence of the Abkhazian and Ossetian people, so that they do not feel fear, are devoid of the sense of threat posed by Georgia. Georgia must become a state, which never resorts to aggression. We should not start with political action in order to restore confidence in Georgia. Those can be economic projects, projects in medicine, culture and sports. One can solve a lot of issues and this will build up confidence in the Abkhaz and Ossetian societies that Georgia has actually changed, and that the power is actually different from that of Saakashvili.
- I do not think that we have lost Abkhazia and Ossetia, but the responsibility for the fact that Russia recognized their independence lies with Saakashvili. The recognition, however, does not mean that all is lost for us, it will be difficult, but we must move forward.

- The national minorities in Georgia have normally always voted for the incumbent power. If you look at the results in the Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli, you will see that the representatives of the National Movement won there, that is to say this phenomenon made itself evident once again. But the large percentage of votes won by the opposition as it was in these elections was unprecedented in Georgia. Both Armenians and Azerbaijanis believed in the opposition, and they cast their votes for the opposition. This is a good sign, I am glad to see that the wind of freedom and democracy has begun to penetrate into these places, too, and I hope that during the next election the citizens living in these areas, too, will realize that their destiny is in their hands.
- Abkhazians and Ossetians are not interested in rapprochement with Georgia, they are interested in peace, security, development and prosperity. I am not sure that Russia is the right country to meet their basic needs of the kind. Georgia can do it better, because Georgia has successfully embarked on the track of democracy. Georgian democracy is democracy for all, we cannot live in a situation where the democracy in Georgia will be only for Georgians, while it will not be there for Abkhazians and Ossetians.

*In the press conference of Paata Zakareishvili participated journalists **from Armenia** (news agency "Arminfo" - www.arminfo.am, news agency "News Armenia"- www.newsarmenia.am, Public Radio of Armenia, online newspaper "Hetq"- www.hetq.am, news agency "Regnum" - www.regnum.ru) and **from Azerbaijan** (news agency "Turan" - www.contact.az, newspaper "Bizim Yol" - www.bizimyol.az, newspaper "Zerkalo" - www.zerkalo.az, newspaper Novoye Vremy - www.novoye-vremya.com).*

Full version of the interview: <http://www.publicdialogues.info/en/node/347>