



TOPICAL
DIALOGUES

TOPICAL DIALOGUES

N 4

2019

The present electronic bulletin “Topical Dialogues – 2019” was issued with the support of Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation (a project by the G. Marshall Fund). Opinions expressed in this bulletin do not necessarily represent those of the Black Sea Trust or its partners.



B | S | T The Black Sea Trust
for Regional Cooperation
A PROJECT OF THE GERMAN MARSHALL FUND

Content

One topic - four interviews

ANUSH SHAHVERDYAN (Armenia) Possibilities of Getting Secondary and Higher Education in Armenia-----	5
ETIBAR ALIEV (Azerbaijan) The Education System Needs Improvement-----	9
SEROB KHACHATRYAN (Armenia) Education is the Counter Effect to Various Influences-----	12
NUSHABA SADYHLY (Azerbaijan) Education in Azerbaijan is at Extremely Low Level-----	15

One topic - Four Interviews

This is a series of interviews with Armenian and Azerbaijani specialists on issues that concern every single one of us: that is, the right to defense and access to courts, the right to property, the situation in healthcare and education sectors. Every expert shares the situation in his/her country.

The materials were prepared within the framework of the “Public Dialogues for Communication between Armenian and Azerbaijani Specialists” project, implemented by the “Region” Research Center.

The project is supported by the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation (BST).

The project partner is the Institute for Peace and Democracy (the Netherlands).

The "Public Dialogues" website (www.publicdialogues.info) was created in 2012 by the “Region” Research Center and the Institute for Peace and Democracy which operated in Azerbaijan at the time.



ANUSH SHAHVERDYAN,
Education Expert

Possibilities of Getting Secondary and Higher Education in Armenia

- Describe the system of secondary and higher education presently operating in the country (How many years does the education in schools and higher education institutions last? Are there secondary specialized educational institutions? And how popular are they among the population?)

Preschool education is not compulsory in Armenia. Education becomes compulsory only starting from the age of 6 when a child starts school. School education in our country lasts 12 years and consists of primary, secondary and high schools. Armenia adopted the system of high schools in 2010 as a result of the reform in the field of general education which led to the emergence of a separate 3-year educational program. Since 2017, high school has become compulsory. However, many aspects and issues related to the quality and financing of education at high schools have not been taken into account. Students must complete full general education either by attending a high school or receiving compulsory TVET education. Nevertheless, students are supposed to study at colleges for only 4 years. The duration of education in higher education institutions is 4 years for BA program and 2 years for MA program.

There is a greater interest in TVET education which mainly proceeds from the process of re-equipment with modern specialized technologies and with the provision and availability of equipment needed for the development of practical competences among the students. It is highly necessary to strengthen the link not only between TVET institutions, but also between higher education institutions and employers. The establishment of such a link will enable future graduates to meet the requirements of employers.

- When did the latest reforms in the sphere of education occur? What was the reason for it? What are the main problems in the system of education in the country?

The system of education in Armenia is constantly being reformed. At the current stage school education from grades 1-12 is particularly subject to reformation. In terms of this process, school curriculum is under review. The main program of general education at school is expected to be fully revised within a year. Whereupon, it is planned to launch the revision of textbooks, undertake a large-scale retraining for the teachers, aimed at the organization of the educational process in accordance with the new programs and new textbooks.

The reforms are driven by the transition of our country to the system of inclusive education, ensuring appropriate conditions, access to education and an educational program for people with various intellectual abilities and competences.

One of the main problems in the education system is the gap, the absence of cooperation between higher education institutions and the labour market. To identify ways in which it would be possible to bring the two enormous structures onto a single plane, I have conducted some research. The main role and mission for higher education institutions is believed to be teaching, consequently, the higher education institutions insist on the acceptance of their superiority by the labour market. The representatives of the labour market, in their turn, expect to have a dialogue with the higher education institutions for the implementation of the educational programs in accordance with their own demands and requirements, moreover, they expect it to be initiated by higher education institutions. Thus, the gap between the labour market and the higher education institutions is apparent, and today there are many propositions for filling it. In particular, it is believed that we need the transformation of the internship program from a formality into real practical work. Today many students attend different institutions, which tend to be near their places of residence, the required documents are filled in there, and the internship is actually over. Students do not realize the importance of those 2-3 months, consequently, they waste their precious time. Students should have a very deep understanding of the kind of knowledge they obtained during the internship, what they have developed personally, what activity they have taken part in, consequently, what they have gained as a result. Employers, in turn, do not even have the description of the work to be carried out and accomplished by the interns. They do not know how to work with the students. Unfortunately, literally nothing but the rhetoric and the programs of higher education institutions have changed in this field in the last years. It comes out that we prepare future specialists for international organizations, we contribute to the emigration of the youth in quest of practice and jobs.

- Is there statistics on the number of students currently enrolled in higher education institutions? What percentage of school leavers study in higher education institutions? To what extent does the system of education answer the requirements

of the country? What specialties are more popular now? What specialties used to be popular in the past?

According to the recent figures of the National Statistical Committee, in 2017 more than 18 thousand pupils left schools of general education, only 10 thousand of them entered higher education or TVET institutions **(1)**. It is quite a good indicator, as compared even with that of many developed countries. The quality of education, the level of knowledge and competences they gain are the other side of the shield. We have specialists with diplomas, however, whose entry into the labour market triggers huge problems. Graduates of the type have a certain level of knowledge, they are well informed, nonetheless, they are not ready for operating in the labour market. They are incapable of implementing their knowledge in the working process on account of the absence of practice in their educational process. Subsequently, it is of great importance to ascribe practical character to our current educational programs. Hence, we are to state that our education system does not meet the requirements of the country's employers and the requirements of the 21st century. Everything is quite outdated, and the process of updating the educational programs is so far cosmetic by nature.

As for the more demanded specialties, according to the recent official statistics **(2)**, in 2017-18 academic year the sphere of social and behavioral sciences was highly popular with the graduates (more than 2000 students). We can spot the field of education as second, to be followed by law, business and administration, and architecture. These are the most demanded specialties as of the date. For example, chemistry and social work are not attractive at all; journalism is relatively less demanded. In the past, there was a time when medicine, law and economics were the most demanded specialties. And every child from a decent family was obliged to become either a doctor, or a lawyer, or an economist. It was a decision that was based on traditions, was a legacy passed down to the generations and was, hence, compulsory. Today's students are more interested in STEM-education (Science-technology-engineering-mathematics). That sphere includes Nature Sciences and Physics, Mathematics and Architecture. It involves Information Technologies as well. Thus, we have to state that though slowly, education is starting to respond to market demands. People are increasingly aware of the priorities and the future of contemporary education. In this respect, it should be mentioned that starting from this autumn all 104 high schools in Armenia will be provided with laboratory equipment for practical courses of Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Geography. It is meant for boosting the interest of students towards their future specialties.

- What are the possibilities of receiving education in the motherland and abroad? Are there any state or private projects for assisting the youth?

There are possibilities, especially for children from disadvantaged families. Children from such families have unequal possibilities from the very beginning if compared with the children from wealthy families as they have lack of funds for getting private tutorship to enter higher education institutions. However, in case the child from such families overcomes that threshold and enters the higher education institution, the government

offers them a multitude of supporting programs, especially to students with good performance. Agreements between the Ministries of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science provide some programs that support students from various disadvantaged groups. There are programs for receiving higher education abroad. Unfortunately, they are not very many, consequently, the competition is overly high. However, there are also programs which are implemented through intergovernmental agreements between Armenia and other countries. Such programs enable our students to study in Romania, Bulgaria, China, Russia and other countries. Calls for such competitions are regularly shared onto the website of the Ministry of Education and Science.

1. https://www.armstat.am/file/article/soc_vich_2017_2.pdf, Social Situation of RA in 2017 (Armenian)
2. https://www.armstat.am/file/article/soc_vich_2017_6.pdf, Social Situation of RA in 2017 (Armenian)



**ETIBAR ALIEV,
Education Expert, Doctor of Philosophy**

The Education System Needs Improvement

- Please describe the current system of secondary and higher education in the country (how many years do students study at schools and higher education institutions, are there TVET institutions and how popular are they among the population?).

In Azerbaijan, secondary education consists of 11-year long studies in the secondary school: 4 years is primary school, 5 years is general secondary education and 2 years is full secondary education. The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan provides for compulsory education in the form of 9-year education.

In 2005, Azerbaijan signed the Bologna Declaration, which provides for 3-tier degree-awarding higher education: bachelor's, master's and doctorate. There are also TVET institutions in the country. In order to develop TVET education, the "Agency for TVET Education" has been established.

TVET education is not very popular in Azerbaijan. Only 13-18 per cent of students graduating from secondary schools apply to these education institutions.

- When did the latest reforms in the sphere of education take place, what were they connected with, what are the main problems in the education system in the country?

For the acceptance of diplomas of higher education institutions of Azerbaijan on the international level, the country joined the Bologna Declaration in 2005. Nevertheless, our diplomas are still not accepted in most countries.

The President signed a document titled "State Strategy on the Development of Education", and it should be regarded as one of the positive reforms. The creation of an Olympiad Center for students should also be regarded as a reform. High schools apply a specialization streaming approach, i.e. a focus on this or that discipline; lyceums with various focuses are established.

A transition to 12-year secondary education was planned for the regions of Azerbaijan. However, it was impossible to carry out.

Admission of local and international Student Olympiads into universities without exams and the opportunity for college graduates to continue education in higher education institutions can also be regarded as reforms in the sphere of education.

The main problem in the system of education, in my opinion, is the disruption of continuity of education. That is, absence of connection between degrees of education.

The second crucial problem consists in the indispensably widespread tutor services and the unaffordability of higher education fees. Those students, who have financial means, can afford tutors' services, and those, who don't have such means in most cases settle with whatever the teacher instructs during classes. The teacher, in his/her turn, getting low salary, may not always conduct classes scrupulously.

In present, most students of high classes take private tutorship in order to enter higher education institutions. Of course, there may be talented students from the regions or Baku, who can enter a higher education institution by getting high grades without tutors' help. But only a few applicants possess such capability.

The lowest tuition is 1000 manats (\$1=1.7 manats), the average salary in the country amounts to 557.2 manats, based on the data of 2019. This means that in order to pay for education in a higher education institution, the income of the student's family should be at least 2000 manats. For this reason, particularly those, admitted to paid departments, quit education, as they cannot afford to continue it.

The applicants, who could not enter higher education institutions and who plan to enter next year, need financial means in order to prepare for the next round of exams. That is why many young people, who finish secondary schools, start to work in various spheres, more frequently in the service sector.

- Is there any statistics on the students in higher education institutions at the moment: what per cent of the youth study at university after school and how much does the education system meet the requirements of the country? Which professions are more popular today, and which were popular before?

Every year approximately 120 thousand graduates finish schools in the country. Nearly 35 per cent of these graduates enter higher education institutions.

The number of students (BA and MA) at higher education institutions (private and state) amounts to about 150 thousand. This number indicates the fact that our country occupies one of the last places by the number of students per 10.000 people in the post-Soviet area.

Many spheres in the country are not developing; for this reason, particularly a series of disciplines, as well as faculties in higher education institutions do not enjoy popularity among people. Youth think about their potential occupation after graduating from education institutions. Many of them get education in economics-related disciplines in

order to work in the banking sphere or in some foreign company, where salaries are quite high by local standards.

The education system often lags behind real life. It needs to be improved and modernized. Teachers do not always have information about the latest achievements in science and modern technologies.

Sometimes we see how children in the first grade lose interest in their studies. The main objective of the teachers at schools and higher education institutions should be the students' interest. If a child is interested in school, s/he will enjoy attending classes, in spite of any difficulties. If not, even a capable and talented pupil may lag behind in education. The same refers to students.

The specializations of jurisdiction, medicine, computer technology and economy are the most popular among the Azerbaijani population. In higher grades, pupils think that if they graduate from the above-mentioned faculties of higher education institutions, they will find jobs by their specialty and will get high salary. However, most graduates of higher education institutions cannot find jobs by their specialties and are forced to work in a sphere, which may bring them some profit. Mostly it is the service sector; they work as sales assistants, waiters, hairdressers, taxi drivers, phone and computer technicians, and so on.

Such specializations as engineers and chemists were popular in the past; besides, many people were interested in scientific work and research. Now these spheres do not enjoy popularity among people, and scientific activity is in stagnation as a whole.

- What are the chances for the population to get education in the motherland and abroad? Are there state or private projects assisting the youth?

In 2007-2015 there was a "State Program for Education Abroad" for the citizens of Azerbaijan. However, now this program is suspended. Nowadays students leave for Eastern European countries with support from the Government budget.

Those, who pay for education by themselves, go mainly to Russia, Ukraine and Turkey. However, in order to acknowledge their diplomas in the country, the Ministry of Education established a very strict convalidation (*Edit.* - convalidation is a procedure of recognizing educational documents of foreign states, i.e. agreement of respective bodies of the government on the legal force of these documents in the territory of the given country).



SEROB KHACHATRYAN,
Education Expert, lecturer at
Yerevan State University

Education is the Counter Effect to Various Influences

- How is the situation on the ground like in school and higher education sectors in general and in the provinces of the republic in particular?

In general, we have many problems in the sector education both in Yerevan and in the provinces of the country. One of the main reasons is the extension of school education duration from 10 to 12 years (*Editor* – Armenia started to gradually pass to 12-year general-education system in 2007. Since 2017, the 12-year education has become compulsory. However, at the beginning of April, 2019, the Minister of Education of the RA claimed the necessity of returning to 10-year education). The second reason lies in the fact that our students have started to work more often parallel to their education - for example, they are not ashamed anymore to work as waiters, which is good, in general. Anyway this leads to problems with attendance and performance of working students and affects the education process as a whole.

Applicants enter the university after 12 years of education at school and are quite tired. In that sense, today a peculiar compression happened if not of time limits but of the education process in our higher education institutions. Moreover, I feel sorry to note that education in the 11th and 12th grades at schools did not lead to an increase of the level and quality of general education. There are problems with the number of students. After the collapse of the USSR, of course, the number of students in Armenia increased. However, in the past two years as a whole, a general decrease of applicants has been noted. One of the reasons is admission to foreign higher education institutions. Another reason is the decrease of demand for higher education in favor of TVET education.

As far as regional higher education institutions are concerned, they are very important, in my opinion. Higher education in Armenia is mostly paid. And students from regions have to pay also for living in Yerevan. Flat rent is much more expensive for students from regions than monthly payment for education in the university. Accordingly, regional higher education institutions are very important for the layers of population, not having the opportunity to support their student children in Yerevan. It is also very important for the development of the labor market in the regions of the country. Unfortunately, most

students from regions, having graduated from higher education institutions in Yerevan, do not go back. In this light, I attach great importance to the development of higher education institutions in the regions of the country. The process, undoubtedly, needs to be encouraged, up to the necessity of lecturing in those universities by the best professors from Yerevan. I am certain that in provincial universities there are many smart and intelligent students, and the quality of education does not differ much from that in Yerevan.

- In your opinion what are the main problems in the education system in the country? What is being done by the state for their solution? And in general, are any reforms necessary in that sphere?

Reforms are an imperative necessity. In general, the sphere of education today faces quite serious challenges of global character. Today we live in a world, where the owners of Google, Facebook and other social networks view a person as an object of their business, as commodity. They also try to turn a person into raw material. Ideologies: Communism, Fascism and Liberalism collapsed and, as a result, manipulation of a person takes place, populism is developing in the world, and Armenia is not an exception here. And here the education system faces a serious problem. Particularly by means of education we can develop awareness and thinking in a person to a degree that allows them to resist all those manipulations. Personally for me education is, first and foremost, the counter effect to various influences. I am certain that it is one of the underlying problems of our education. And if we can't present it correctly and outline ways of solution, our education will not correspond to modern requirements. Accordingly, the formula of reforming education system is very simple – it is necessary to work with our children. Not to just develop education programs and teach sciences, but also to teach children not to fall prey to manipulation. We – teachers at schools and universities need to be intelligent and interesting for our audience, in order for them to be interested in listening to us and not search answers to their questions on the Internet. Education at schools and universities has alternatives today, which were inexistent before. And we have to take it into consideration. At first sight, it sounds primitive, but in reality we deal with a very delicate problem.

As far as the action of the government for solving the existing problems are concerned, currently Armenia is completely changing its general-education programs. Development of new criteria for education has begun, based on which course books and conditions of teacher preparation will be changed essentially, as well as other related issues will be solved. In other words, after revolution Armenia is trying to formulate a new general-education agenda, with the aim of developing a more democratic system of education. For example, a system in which critical thinking of learners will be encouraged. I really hope that all these goals will be achieved, for all that is happening is in our own interest.

At the moment in the sphere of higher education the Law on Higher Education is being revised, which is presumed to be merged with the Law on Science. It is done with the aim of making the presence of research components and scientific activity in the sphere of higher education stronger. I hope that amendments in legislation and scientific councils will give higher education institutions more independence from the state and, accordingly, from

political powers. In any case, the movement of Armenia towards a freer system of education is one of our crucial achievements over the past months.

- Can we say that today education in the universities of Armenia is the guarantee of not only getting a good job, but also a decent life and remuneration? What professions are more popular in the country today?

Our studies show, that people with higher education earn more, have more opportunities and, accordingly, live better than people without higher education. However, today there are citizens in Armenia still thinking that it is possible to live just fine without higher education. The profession of a software engineer is the most popular in our country today, which is conditioned by the growth of IT sphere, technologies and, accordingly, high salaries, received by the representatives of the given profession. The flow of applicants to faculties of law and international relations continues to increase. The number of applicants striving to get education in economics is increasing, too. As the tourism business in Armenia is developing, the number of applicants in universities teaching service is also growing. Tour agencies need professional guides, and hotels and restaurants need managers. Accordingly, demand generates supply. As far as guarantees on getting a decent and highly paid job are concerned, in my opinion, higher education really provides them. The very fact of attending university, communication with professors, reading literature and the whole university environment inevitably broaden the horizons and, accordingly, opportunities and pursuits of young people. And this happens regardless of their academic grades and achievements. However, we still have a long way ahead in providing people with decent jobs. The state is already trying to collaborate with employers, in order for the education system to create professional staff, meeting employers' needs. I hope that these efforts will be successful, since the given direction is also crucial.

- What are the chances for the population to get education in the motherland and abroad? Are there state or private youth assistance projects?

In general, the capacity of the state to promote our students entering the 50 best universities of the world are quite limited. The foundation "My Step" is trying to promote such students particularly. There are also other foundations, supporting students who enter local universities. The state provides for certain benefits, for example, to families with more than one student, to students, who have children, to students having taken part in military actions. As far as opportunities are concerned, in general the situation is pretty good. However, taking into consideration the fact that there are countries in the world, where 70-80% of population has higher education, the reinforcement of such opportunities presents itself as necessary. In Armenia 35-40% of the population has higher education. Although compared with 20-25% of the USSR era, this, of course, is a good indicator. Unfortunately, poverty is not yet eradicated in Armenia, and it is directly projected at the opportunities of our children to get higher education.



**NUSHABA SADYHLY,
World Literature lecturer at
Baku State University**

Education in Azerbaijan is at Extremely Low Level

- What are the opportunities of receiving secondary education for children living in the provinces of the republic? Do they all attend school: both girls and boys? In the period of the USSR in Azerbaijan there was a 100% general secondary education, i. e., almost everyone graduated from ten-year secondary school. What is the status quo now?

At all times, education should be the strategic axis of state policy. In the governments of all countries are composed of highly educated people. It is not by accident that in 1918 those who created the Republic of Azerbaijan, as a democratic state, had received higher education in various European countries. It was due to this education that they were able to create the first democratic state in the East.

Today, education in Azerbaijan is in an abhorrent state, at an extremely low level. If we are talking about provinces, the situation there is severe. Due to the difficult economic conditions of the people, they are unable to ensure good education for their children. Look, the SOS emergency distress signal has already rung the alarm from the provinces of Azerbaijan several times, particularly from the southern zone. Underage girls are married off, the economic condition of their families is burdensome, and children are not able to continue their education in secondary schools. By marrying off underage girls, parents try to improve their financial situation. As for boys, they mostly go abroad to earn money and help their families.

To answer the second part of the question, I would note that during the USSR, secondary education in Azerbaijan was more accessible. Currently, I am very concerned that the number of students with national language instruction in national schools is decreasing every year. That is, preference is given to instruction in European languages, as well as Russian-language and Turkic-language schools. Unfortunately, the number of Azerbaijani-language classes in elementary school decreases. This adversely affects our national identity.

There is a saying: "One thinks in the language he was educated in." This means that there are fewer and fewer people who think in Azerbaijani, who love the Azerbaijani language. I'm very sorry about it.

I believe that the Ministry of Education should do a lot in this direction. Much needs to be done to ensure that this trend stops to develop at the current pace. The Ministry of Education should analyze the situation and take certain steps in this area.

The education system must be formed in such a way that everyone has the opportunity and interest to receive education. In Azerbaijan, they are now trying to increase the number of schools with instruction in European languages and reduce the number of schools with instruction in the national language. If this process continues in this vein, it will be impossible to solve the problems in the field of education.

Every now and then they say that the level of education in schools with foreign language instruction is higher than in the schools with instruction in the national language. In this regard, I would like to stress that those who graduated from high schools in the Azerbaijani language during the USSR, also spoke Russian, English, French and would read classical literature in foreign languages. We have a lot of specialists in this field. It should not be about the language of instruction in one's education. It should be about what level of education provided in secondary schools.

- What are the main, to your mind, problems in the education system in the country? What is being done by the state to solve them? And in general, are there any currently imperative reforms in this area?

Since I teach at the university, I can speak about the problems in the field of higher education. In all countries economy plays a key role in the development of education. Economy is omnipresent: in the sphere of politics, in the sphere of culture, in everyday life. In countries with robust economy, there is development in all those areas that I have mentioned above, including the field of education.

Look at the salaries of secondary school teachers. With the exception of a small part of teachers who prefer moral values to material ones, all the others, receiving low salaries, practically do not conduct classes. Because they are interested in pupils attending extra-curricular activities, which are additionally paid by the parents of the children, so that teachers increase their monthly income.

One has a financial capacity to gain knowledge by attending additional lessons and paying the teacher, but that does not work for everyone. For this reason, the situation is complicated. As I said, there are exceptions among teachers who conscientiously teach school subjects, while receiving low salaries. There are students who study on their own, without private home tutoring, and can enter universities. However, their number is small.

When entering a university, young people face new challenges. Coming to Baku from provinces, students need a place to stay, need money to pay for education at universities.

Many cannot afford it, cannot find jobs in Baku, and families do not have the financial means to help the students. This is the reason why so many places remain vacant.

The most that families can do is to sell a cow or sheep to pay for a student's needs for a short period. A major university – Baku State University (BSU) has no student dormitory. If the university does not have a dormitory, then students from the provinces should live in rented apartments and pay for the latter. This factor is also of paramount importance for the level of education.

In the Soviet times, there was such a condition: a student who graduated from a higher education institution would get a job in their profession. Graduates of universities were provided with a job by the state. Now there is no such thing. Recently I was buying shoes and accidentally found out that the shop assistant is a graduate of the Law Faculty of Baku State University. However, because he has not been provided with occupation, he is forced to earn his living by selling shoes.

Several times in various restaurants I met my students, graduates of the University, who are forced to work as waiters. People do not have faith in the future, so they become estranged from education. Many students wonder, "Now we have come to get higher education, but what will happen when we graduate?"

I would suggest this option: those students who received high scores are provided with work in accordance with the topic of their thesis paper. Students should have confidence that at the end of the university education they will be able to work somewhere by their specialty, they will be able to support themselves and their families, build a career.

I believe that in the field of education we have a myriad of problems that need to be solved. Otherwise, the level of education will collapse year after year.

I remember when I was a student, my scholarship was at a high salary level. Now the scholarships that students receive are not enough even for food. I know many very talented students from the provinces who study with great pleasure. But their families, for the most part, cannot provide for their living in the capital. Students are forced to live in the capital only on their meagre scholarship. They do not even have the opportunity to buy the necessary books for themselves.

Education is not merely inside the university auditorium walls; students should have an outlook shaped. They must attend theaters, museums, exhibitions, watch movies. All this requires additional costs. A low-level worldview is usually limited. Yes, now there are Internet resources, but most of the students from the regions do not speak Russian or English, so they cannot fully make use of the former. In this regard, I think that students studying in their native language should learn foreign languages, too. The more languages they know, the easier they develop and adapt to the Internet space. Children graduating from school must speak foreign languages. Unfortunately, in schools and even in universities, foreign languages are taught at a very low level. Even graduates of the University of Foreign Languages for the most part do not speak the languages that they

studied at the university. Many of them hire tutors and additionally learn languages, which also requires material costs.

In order to normalize and improve the education system, the economy must be robust, the standard of living of the population must be high enough. The teachers' salaries must be so high that they do not think about additional earnings and, entering the audience, feel responsibility and teach at the highest level possible.

- Is it possible to say today that education in universities of Azerbaijan is a guarantee not only for getting a good job, but also decent salary and standard of living? What professions are most popular in the country today?

As I said, the country is currently facing a situation that students who have received higher education cannot find jobs by specialty. People with higher education are forced to work in the service sector, as waiters, hairdressers, taxi drivers, sales agents or engage in small businesses.

Considering the fact that no field of science is developing in the country, students do not engage in scientific activities. The remuneration in the sector matters, too.

At present, young people are mainly engaged in small business and computer technology. Many of them open channels on the Internet, upload videos, do editing, thereby earning a living.

It is known that in the recent years many international competitions and events have been held in the country. Young people are trying to get into these areas. Some do volunteer work, with a hope of getting a job in the future.

As a result of the construction boom that began in the country several years ago, many students are engaged in the construction industry. However, as I said above, the majority of young people are engaged in trade and small business. This applies both to private trade and to trade on the Internet, which is currently very popular, because it does not require large material costs and brings maximum profit.

- What are the educational opportunities of the population in the country and abroad? Are there any government or private youth assistance projects?

Regarding youth assistance projects for receiving education abroad, we had government programs for students who wanted to study abroad. Such projects were carried out by SOCAR (State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic). SOCAR entered into contracts with those who wanted to get an education; students were allocated a certain amount of money, in return for which any property belonging to the student or his close relatives was pledged. After passing the exams, the student went abroad (mainly to the United States or the United Kingdom). However, later many of them faced problems. The problems mainly consisted in the absence of any guarantees in event of student's illness, a visa, etc. There was one case where a person who wanted to get higher education in London could not pass the exam due to a serious illness (he had all the medical documents in his hands and

the doctor's recommendation, who strictly prescribed him to bed). Because of his illness, he was expelled from the course, was forced to return to Azerbaijan, and SOCAR went to court with a claim for the confiscation of mortgaged property. It was a small house in Balakan where the student's parents lived. A young man in private meetings with the representatives of the Oil Company offered them this option: he works for their company, and his salary is used to pay off the expenses that were made to send him abroad. Unfortunately, the company did not agree to this and insisted on confiscating the house. I also heard that the British School functioning in Baku is also engaged in sending students abroad for education. But the amounts spent on this range from 15 thousand to 30 thousand euros. In addition, students themselves must pay for accommodation and meals in European countries. Only privileged students whose families have large financial capacity can afford this option.