



TOPICAL
DIALOGUES

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N 1

2018

The present electronic bulletin “Topical Dialogues – 2018”
was issued with the support of Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation
(a project by the G. Marshall Fund).

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On May 22-23 an online conference "The Karabakh Conflict in the Context of Political Processes in Armenia and Azerbaijan - 2018" was held on the Public Dialogues website.

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

The project partner is the Institute for Peace and Democracy (the Netherlands). The "Public Dialogues" website was created in 2012 by the Region Research Center and the Institute for Peace and Democracy which operated in Azerbaijan at the time.

The project is supported by the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, German Marshall Fund.

The conference was attended by:

Manvel Sargsyan (Armenia) - Director of Scientific Programmes of the Armenian Center for Strategic and National Studies (ACSNS)

Arif Yunusov (Azerbaijan) – Conflict studies specialist at the Institute for Peace and Democracy

Gela Vasadze (Georgia) - analyst at Caucasus Institute for Strategic Studies

Sergey Markedonov (Russia) - Associate Professor at Russian State University for Humanities (RSUH)

The conference was moderated by Laura Baghdasaryan (Armenia) - Director of Region Research Center

THE KARABAKH CONFLICT IN THE CONTEXT OF POLITICAL PROCESSES IN ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN - 2018

Excerpts from online conference materials (May 22-23, 2018).

(The complete texts of conference materials are available at

<http://www.publicdialogues.info/node/774>)

On how the events will develop after the statements made by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, on the necessity for Nagorno-Karabakh to participate in the negotiations as a party to the conflict, and on the point that no meaningful negotiations can be pursued unless Azerbaijan puts an end to its bellicose rhetoric and trust is built by the parties.



Gela Vasadze

I do not think that the initiative of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia is aimed at the reaction of Azerbaijani authorities or any other external players such as members of the OSCE Minsk Group, for example. It was more like a statement intended for the internal audience as a certain signal to the Armenian society that the actions of the ex-authorities undertaken even for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution were, from the perspective of the interests of Armenia, far from being ideal. The fact that no active hostilities are now conducted in Nagorno-Karabakh does not mean there is no war. The tactics of Baku in this war is quite clear. The changes in the military and political atmosphere, which due to the recent deformity towards exacerbations is an instrument for waging a war.



Sergey Markedonov

That is why I do not think that Pashinyan's idea will be welcomed in Moscow, Paris and Washington, we are not talking about Baku since the matters here are more or less obvious. Meanwhile, his idea about the involvement of Nagorno-Karabakh has stirred up discussions within Armenian circles. Ex-Minister of Defense (and formerly Ex-Chief of the RA President's Staff) Vigen Sargsyan, the first and second Presidents of the Republic of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan and Robert Kocharyan have already "come into the spotlight" in these discussions. An important detail to note here is that they argue about who is a greater patriot of Armenia, who defended national interests and the cause of Karabakh in a better, more qualitative and honest manner. And this internal discussion is of utmost interest. It shows how narrow the corridor of opportunities to find compromises is. In my opinion, there are even fewer opportunities to negotiate compromises, "deals" and so on in Azerbaijan due to the peculiarities of socio-political developments in this country.



Arif Yunusov

I agree with the idea that the involvement of Karabakh, at least at this stage of the negotiation process, is undesirable for the present Azerbaijani authorities. A negative response has already been given. For official Baku and, first of all, for Ilham Aliyev backsliding is a sign of weakness. He will not do it. On the other hand, I agree that Pashinyan's speech was more intended for the internal audience and, in many respects, it is a continuation of his struggle against former authorities. And as it happens quite often in such cases, things said during an internal struggle can be significantly transformed in the future.

It seems we may expect more from the point of potential trust-building measures on both sides in the future. However, I remain pessimistic about this and do not really

believe in such prospects in the near future. For the official Baku everything has been decided long ago and it will take something similar to what happened in Armenia for any serious change. Meanwhile, it is not worth waiting for a serious breakthrough in “national diplomacy” and trust-building while Aliyev is at rule. Efforts on the part of Azerbaijan will continue in using propaganda more intensively, looking for Armenians in the countries of CIS and the Diaspora in order to invite them to Baku and present them as peace supporters who have come to share the position of Azerbaijan.



Laura Baghdasaryan

True, the statement about the involvement of Karabakh in the negotiations along with Armenia absolutely contradicts the formula Azerbaijan has been following all these years. Namely, Armenia and Azerbaijan conflict because of Karabakh. According to the Armenian party, Armenia is a guarantor of Karabakh while the conflict is being fought between Azerbaijan and Karabakh. It seems that until now the non-participation of Karabakh in negotiations suited international mediators well, at least ensuring no further aggravation of the already difficult situation, having some dialogue and organizing some meetings. My remark is to your idea that Pashinyan's statement is more likely to be a continuation of revolutionary rhetoric directed, first of all, against the former authorities. Although, this statement, as everyone knows, caused serious tensions among the representatives of all former leaders of Armenia. Apparently, the discussion about what is more correct - the state of things as it was until now, or how it should be - also took place among Armenians. However, by and large, no one has yet opposed the idea of Karabakh being a party to the conflict de jure, too.



Manvel Sargsyan

I agree with Laura's statement that the change of power in Armenia created an intrigue in the Karabakh issue. Take, for example, the fact that for the first time ever Armenia has a new leader whose authority is not connected in any way with the Karabakh issue. All the three former presidents of Armenia defined their power by the mission to resolve this problem. Even Serzh Sargsyan who was trying to run for the third term justified his step by the necessity of resolving the Karabakh problem. The situation has changed now: Nikol Pashinyan did not give any promises to the revolutionary-minded society in this regard. This is a very important circumstance. So, his statement about himself speaking only on behalf of Armenia must be taken seriously. Time will show how this will be put into practice.



Sergey Markedonov

Manvel Sargsyan's idea about "Karabakh factor" being the cause for three former Presidents of Armenia to stay in power is interesting. Literally, immediately after the voting in the Parliament he left for Karabakh to "double up his celebrations of victory", a discussion was held on the topics of new possible changes. On May 19, the new Foreign Minister Mnatsakanyan left for Stepanakert and held talks with Masis Mailyan (minister of foreign affairs NKR - editor). It is obvious that Pashinyan is ready to play in this field and play actively. I do not think that any distancing from the topic is possible. It is a different matter how long the search for the new ways will take. I do not think it will take long. By the way, despite his dislike for Kocharyan and Sargsyan, Pashinyan with his visit to Karabakh on May 9th continued a certain symbolic line. Thus, getting above internal political controversies.



Manvel Sargsyan



Sergey Markedonov



Manvel Sargsyan



Gela Vasadze

I think that there is an imperative to specify the rights and responsibilities of the parties to the conflict - who is responsible for what in this conflict? In particular: are the Madrid principles applicable to Armenia? I am convinced that it is the core of the issue. Bringing complete clarity to this matter can change a lot.

Defining the responsibilities of the two Armenian republics is important. But it is important to do it within societies in Armenia and NKR, it is important to do it among politicians. How much will it be of interest to the mediators? From an analytical perspective, it will most likely be of interest to them. They will study and take note of it. Will they change anything? Probably not.

The Madrid principles, in their essence, are the program of differentiating the rights and responsibilities of the two conflicting parties - the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Artsakh as actual successors of the former Azerbaijan SSR. This concerns both the problems of territorial division and status determination. Armenia, in fact, is responsible for its role as guarantor of the security of the people of Artsakh. Armenia does not need to discuss the Madrid principles program: it is more useful to discuss security issues with Azerbaijan. This simple situation is difficult to reject.

It depends for who is the one to reject, because for Azerbaijan that is now fully preparing for the use-of-force scenario it is very simple and easy to do so. From a practical point of view, the Madrid principles in this situation are nothing more than a declaration. The question is not about what the parties will do, but how they will speak about it.



Laura Baghdasaryan

I want to draw your attention to Gela Vasadze's statement about the importance of deciding what to speak in this case. I assume, in order to justify future or already implemented actions on the front line. In this regard, I would like to draw a parallel with the actions of Georgia towards Abkhazia. Georgia had never refused direct talks with representatives of Abkhazia until 08.08.08. And even after Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, attempts have been undertaken in Georgia to establish contacts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and there is even a Ministry of Reintegration. Although, for Georgia, Russia still remains an aggressor that has seized two regions. Does not such a discrepancy in the behaviours of Azerbaijan and Georgia imply anything for you?

For example, Azerbaijan categorically refuses to have any contacts with the Karabakh people, and prefers negotiations with Armenia, not only to reinforce its thesis that Armenia is an aggressor, its armed forces are located on the territory of Karabakh, etc., not only because of fear of the legitimization of Karabakh authorities, but also because of the intention to maintain their authoritarian power within the country. It is clear that there will be no possibility of adhering to Azerbaijan's authoritarianism in Karabakh.

Obviously, the model of Azerbaijani authoritarianism can't be attractive for Karabakh. Georgia does not have and has never had such kind of a problem since 2003. What do you think?



Gela Vasadze

Laura raised an interesting question about the differences in the approaches of Georgia and Azerbaijan to direct contacts.

The main thing is that in the Georgian society conflicts in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia - editor) have never been perceived as ethnic, that is, in the perception of the overwhelming majority this was not a conflict between Georgians and Abkhazians, or between Georgians and Ossetians. And until 2008, the existing situation has been perceived as the result of Russia's policy, therefore, ties with Abkhazians and Ossetians were generally welcomed by the society as a way of settlement. The situation has not changed after 2008. Of course, there are skeptics, but the steps taken by the authorities to build trust are largely positively evaluated by both the society and the western partners of Georgia.

Military actions in the conflict zones lasted very short - in 1991-92 in the Tskhinvali region, in 1992-93 in Abkhazia, in 2005 and 2008 in the Tskhinvali region, the rest of the time a truce was established during which the citizens have been travelling across, trade with one another, arrive in Tbilisi for medical treatment. In Karabakh there is a front line, and military operations of low intensity are conducted almost constantly. These two factors have predetermined the impossibility for Baku to adopt the "Georgian" approach.



Arif Yunusov

To a certain extent, I agree with this conclusion of Gela Vasadze. I would add only that in Georgia, although the authorities changed frequently, they did not have the Aliyevs' factor, who have been in power since 1994 and have completely monopolized the Karabakh issue. I mean they did not consider their approach to be the main and decisive one, they did not assure that only they were able to correctly solve the problem. In the end, if the change of power in Georgia was not a hindrance to stop the process of meetings between the parties to the conflict, in Azerbaijan the authorities, especially after Ilham Aliyev came to power, began to perceive these contacts with Armenians as "hostile" and even launched a powerful attack against those actively involved in those contacts. In fact, today this movement is completely suspended. At the same time, I. Aliyev speaks for contacts, but only with "correct Armenians", i.e. who recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. All these factors (the front line, the absence of real contacts, the monopolization of the Karabakh issue by the government) play their roles today.



Sergey Markedonov

When speaking about reconciliation with the reality, I certainly had in mind the entire foreign policy context. Internally, Pashinyan has more opportunities to expand the space for manoeuvres. At least at this stage, while his opponents are disoriented, and his popularity is great. But outside the negotiation process the new Prime Minister has no resources to "break" the existing trends. And in this regard, even if Pashinyan initiates discussions in Armenia and is involved in the negotiations process, he cannot be a revolutionary. As for Russia, its position is in principle clear. Moscow is afraid of changing anything not seeing clear prospects in how this change will work for its benefit. Will it start pedalling the special status of the NKR

in the negotiations? Baku will take its counteractions, and it is a coin toss whether in the interests of Moscow or not. With the loss of influence on Georgia, it will not want to completely lose the resources of influence on Azerbaijan. There is another question belonging to a slightly different, albeit related, sphere. Most likely, issues of military-technical cooperation will be subjected to a certain correction. The experience of 2016 is too fresh, and Moscow's perceptions of it are quite complicated. But this, I repeat myself, is a related topic, not directly connected with the negotiations. In principle, Moscow adheres to the line on the status quo. It is neither good nor bad. But in general, the policy is a reactive one.

How will the improvement of Armenia's reputation affect the understanding of the Armenian positions in the Karabakh conflict? And, in general, do only the countries which are rich with natural resources have the capacity to advance their positions and protect their interests?



Arif Yunusov

Liberal-democratic views are by no means a panacea for radicalism in a conflict situation, many examples from the history of the United States and Western Europe can be cited (recall the reaction of many politicians and experts of very liberal views in England to the Falkland crisis with Argentina back in its time). As for the image and resources, I agree here that not everything is as simple as it may seem. As they say in Europe, "it takes two to tango". And the democratic processes started by one of the parties to the conflict do not mean a change in the public outlook, moreover on a global scale, in its favor.

There are many other factors that play a role in determining the significance of this or that country. Here is the question: what is more important for the West - the democratic processes in Armenia or the role of oil and gas in Azerbaijan? What will outweigh?



Sergey Markedonov

I am convinced that there is no direct connection between the level of democracy and the resolution of the conflict. Imagine competitive elections, transparency, competitiveness. Does this mean an increase in the capacity to manoeuvre on the external arena? Hardly so. The EU, however it may prioritise the idea of multi-vector policy, is not ready to take up many security issues, and Karabakh presents a scenario of primary importance. The argument about political archaism in Azerbaijan has a restricted scope of action. Who shall it target in Baku? Yes, it will be accepted in Armenia and the Diaspora. Suppose even the US and the EU really believe in their policy of "values" and terminate the quite pragmatic cooperation with Azerbaijan. But this will not terminate its status as a part in negotiations! And how will we substantiate it? Through lectures on the dangers of the dictatorship? I'm not sure that will help.



Arif Yunusov

Well, I definitely disagree with this statement by Sergei Markedonov. Though he addresses several aspects at a time. Actually, democracy is linked to conflict resolution. I mean, there are conflicts everywhere, even in Western Europe, including ethnic ones. However, the problem is that democratic regimes are seeking to address these problems through dialogue, trying, to the extent possible, to avoid forceful alternatives. Where, as non-democratic regimes smoothly relapse into forceful resolution. Therefore, we should eliminate the absence of direct correlation. There does exist a correlation. The level of

democracy in the post-Soviet space is another issue. Here, for the time being, we observe rhetoric only and not tangible steps in this direction. In this regard, it is relevant to refer to the previous post by Sergey Markedonov, claiming that a democrat (dissident) who came to power is not always a guarantee of peace and refusal to use brutal force in resolving the conflict. And where do we find these democrats in the western sense of the word? Calling themselves democrats does not mean that they truly are democrats. Furthermore, if we consider a purely theoretical problem, a single case of the democratization process in Armenia is not enough to resolve the conflict. Such a process needs to be launched in Azerbaijan, too. The Karabakh society is obviously far from democratic standards as well, especially when compared to the Western standards. For a quarter-century we have been independent countries outside the former USSR, but we still remain Soviet in essence. Let's consider the following: even the factor of democratization in Armenia is perceived from the perspective of its chances for a victory in the conflict with Azerbaijan. It is not about a settlement based on compromise that addresses the interests of all the parties: the only reason for the victory is because "That's when the West will support us". And that's where Sergey is right: if we proceed from realpolitik, we so very peripheral and of the slightest importance. They are rather interested in two points – geopolitics and energy. And democracy, as well as human rights, only follow these realias.



Laura Baghdasaryan

Yes, in Armenia there was and there still is a very serious social demand for government transparency, efficient use of not very generous human and other resources, and social justice. All these requirements were distinctly exposed after April 2016, when, as Manvel Sargsyan has accurately described, the myth that any mass protests are

undermining stability in Armenia, which in turn is fraught with security threats for both Armenia and Karabakh was destroyed. Whereas Azerbaijan with its oil and gas resources (as Arif Yunusov has already suggested once) and even with its presumptuous authorities, who have appropriated a great deal of capital, still has enough money for the army and a forceful resolution of the Karabakh conflict. We have the same in Russia, a country rich in human and natural resources, but corruption and other non-democratic phenomena do not affect the country's ability to guarantee the security of the country and also promote its interests as a state on the world map.

There is an approach to ensuring security by strengthening only the military component (Azerbaijan, Russia), and there is another approach to the efficient use of one's own resources, including military and political ones (in fact, the revolution in Armenia mainly pursued this goal). And therefore, I think that Sergey Markedonov's statements regarding the current situation in Armenia are somewhat stereotyped.

Well, for some time now, a great deal of issues in Armenia has been defined and measured by the Karabakh conflict. And this is one of the consequences of April 2016. Although, of course, the Armenians are still far from Azerbaijani habit of conditioning everything, and even heavy rain in Baku, with insidious Armenians, the opportunity to put an end to stripping off the resources, social polarization, politicization of education and healthcare systems in other spheres, is seen in Armenia as an opportunity to strengthen the economy, develop the military-industrial complex, suspend migration and the demographic crisis in the country. And all this is seen as a

process that does not run parallel in the situation of the conflict. Therefore, many associate the project of reforming Armenia with the susceptibility of the outside world to the Armenian positions in the conflict.

On the role of lobbying in promoting Armenian and Azerbaijani interests on international platforms



Manvel Sargsyan



Sergey Markedonov

I have never attached any decisive importance to lobbying in influencing the policy of the Powers.

A very important and interesting question about lobbying. And, by the way, very mythologized. In the conflicting countries, the role of the diaspora is greatly overestimated. Especially, of course, in Azerbaijan. Simply because the traditions of the Armenian Diaspora have a longer history. I can remember the first congresses of the Azerbaijanis conducted by the late Heydar Aliyev. They were imbued with the pathos of the necessity to “learn solidarity” from Armenians. In fact, no Political Bureau or Central Committee of the Diaspora exists. And it could hardly exist. During my lectures, I mention that only in Russia the Armenians represent at least 3 countries (Armenia, Russia and Georgia, although there are also citizens coming from Ukraine and Moldova,

who live among us). They have different passports, citizenships, goals, tasks, and social status. And the gap between Ara Abrahamyan and uncle Ashot, the cobbler, is huge. As the gap between the Dashnaks in California and the Union of the Armenians in Russia exists. It is wrongful to consider that this is a unified force. Moreover, the same “Armenian lobbyism” has a counterbalance in the form of an oil lobby, every conventional Abrahamyan is counterbalanced by its own conventional Alekperov. At some points, the lobby could be effective (if we recall, for example, Amendment 907 to the Freedom Support Act). But the context around the origin of any amendment, declaration, and so on should be considered. In the early 1990s the United States perceived Karabakh as an anti-communist and anti-Stalinist protest, and the Azerbaijani authorities during Elchibey's rule were perceived as a nationalist force. In this case, I don't claim that that was true, I mean that it is all about stereotypes and perception. With Heydar Aliyev coming to power, the situation began to change, the “Contract of the Century” appeared in 1994, and many idealistic issues were supplemented by pragmatism. And the very amendment was additionally amended. So I would not overly dramatize or overestimate the stories, connected with lobbyism or the diaspora factor. Let's also not forget that the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis living abroad are often loyal citizens of their countries. And they declare themselves patriots of their countries, remaining true to their national interests. Take, for example, a casus with political scientist Gevorg Mirzayan. There have been so many disputes in Armenia around him, his positions, his amazement, the way an ethnic Armenian argues strongly over such “canonical” plots as the assessment of the events in the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century or in Karabakh today.



Arif Yunusov

An interesting question regarding lobbying. Well, it is difficult to talk about Armenian lobbying. As there are many myths about the role of the Diaspora. But it is clear that the Armenian Diaspora has a long history and the corresponding political structures have long been formed. And there is a connection between Armenians in Armenia and Karabakh and Armenians in the Diaspora. Even during the recent events in Armenia, we happen to read that many Armenians from the Diaspora are coming back to take part in those events. Of course, it was not them that played their part in Sargsyan's resignation, but such information was not surprising. Whereas Azerbaijan has a different position and therefore a different policy. The Diaspora is just emerging. Well, many issues blur here, too. The Azerbaijanis in Russia are mainly law-abiding, but they play no special role in the fate of Russia, and much less in that of their homeland. Yes, there are some rich Azerbaijanis in Russia, there are also sort of political structures, but all this reminds more of phantoms than reality. The current power has very poor position in the Western Diaspora; nowadays the main fighters against the regime are in the Western Diaspora. After all, the authorities shut down and seized control of the media and TV, the opposition in the country has severely weakened. And now, independent media and TV are in Europe, being the site of opposition actions. Therefore, those lobbying the interests of the authorities on many issues are not the representatives of the Azerbaijani Diaspora, but the foreigners. First and foremost, Israel plays the role of lobbyist of the regime, and European and American politicians are simply corrupt. This approach, however, has already led to a huge scandal ("Caviar diplomacy", "laundromat", corruption scandals in PACE). Summing up, the Azerbaijani authorities do not count on their Diaspora, they rely on foreigners on many issues.



Gela Vasadze

Regarding lobbying, I also think that the issue is too hyperbolized in the public mind. This is a good tool for creating background information and sometimes for the adoption of some normative acts, but nothing more.

On the impact of the Russia-West confrontation on the Karabakh conflict



Manvel Sarkisyan

The confrontation between Russia and the West (or rather, the US), in my opinion, doesn't affect the position of the co-chairs regarding Karabakh. The co-chairmanship of the Minsk Group has long been transformed into a strong geostrategic regulatory mechanism in our region. The objectives of this regulation are more relevant to Turkey, Russia and Iran than to the conflicting sides over Karabakh. Armenia and Azerbaijan, most likely, are inscribed into this situation as factors of the regional balance of power. We have never seen the United States and the whole West (represented by NATO) reproach Armenia for having a Russian military base on its territory. There are no special claims from Russia regarding the Western projects of Armenia (co-operation with the EU, NATO). All this makes sense, if you agree with my statements regarding the international roles of our countries and the conflict situation in Karabakh. The complete detachment of Russia from Artsakh, and vice versa, the active interference of the EU in the affairs of Artsakh also speaks volumes. It is not coincidental that the

West more frequently calls for recognizing the independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, and even acts of recognition of states and cities tend to increase. It cannot be denied that the West is looking for some non-standard mechanisms for the formation of a security system in our region.

The status quo is not only a territorial aspect. Recognition of the independence of the NKR is also a method of eliminating the status quo. It is difficult for Azerbaijan to influence such a tendency if it deepens in the policy of the West. Russia, in a way, benefits from this tendency, as Azerbaijan will increasingly seek support from Russia.



Arif Yunusov

Today we are not talking about the role of external players, but about the role of the orientation of Armenia and Azerbaijan and how this affects them both and the Karabakh conflict. Everything is much more complicated in case of Azerbaijan. Availability of resources once made it possible for Azerbaijan to enter into conflict with Russia and abandon Russian gas, and even help their neighboring Georgia on this matter to spite Russia. Let us also recall the support to the Chechens during the wars in the North Caucasus. And much more. That is, initially Azerbaijan had a wider field for maneuvering. But for Azerbaijan, this advantage turned into a disadvantage. In the recent years, Ilham Aliyev has significantly ruined his relationship with Western countries, the orientation in this direction has narrowed considerably. But this does not mean that Azerbaijan has made a major lean towards Russia, as Gela Vasadze mentions above. Yes, many Azerbaijani experts and politicians, especially those close to the authorities, often mention the possibility of Azerbaijan joining the EEU and CSTO. This misleads many living abroad. In fact, all we see is just a game with the West on the part of Aliyev. That is, Azerbaijan has

considered Russia, at least for the last 10 years, as a factor of pressure on the West. As soon as the US and the EU begin to exert pressure on the official Baku, immediately in response, the latter makes a courtesy toward Moscow, intentionally buying something from Russia or supporting Putin's policy in some actions minor for Azerbaijan, but important for the West. But the talks that Azerbaijan will join the EEU, and especially the CSTO cannot be considered serious at least in the near future. The third direction in foreign policy orientation is the Eastern one. Turkey of course comes the first here. It seems pretty straightforward. I will add only that if earlier in the 90s the Turkish model was basically a reference point of the opposition, now we should speak more about the rapprochement of the two ruling elites, primarily Erdogan and Aliyev. They have the same governing style, attitude to many issues and major problems with the West. In general, everything is straightforward here. It's harder with Iran, although from time to time the parties develop economic relations, but still there is some chill. However, there is another factor that has an influence in Azerbaijan. If the elder Soviet generation clearly distanced itself from the Eastern direction and looked and still looks towards the West, now a new generation has emerged that perceives the East and the Islamic world as close to itself. If in the 90s the Islamic Party was a party of marginals and its influence did not extend beyond the village of Nardaran, now the Islamists are popular all over the country. It is no accident that Azerbaijanis are very active among the participants in the fights in the Middle East (Afghanistan and Syria), moreover, they are fighting on both sides in Syria! The authorities began to take this point into account. Especially in their policy with the West. One cannot be constantly intimidated by Russia. Periodically, the authorities speak of Islamic values, in contrast to "unacceptable Western values". It is a dangerous game, of course, but that's what we have got today. Moreover, the

Karabakh conflict took an interesting turn. If earlier it used to be an ethnic conflict for the Azerbaijanis, now they are more often talking about the religious aspect in the conflict and explaining the support the Armenians receive from Russia and the West from the religious perspective.



Sergey Markedonov

Russia does not support the NKR (not only de jure, as in the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia), but also using political and economic methods (as in the case of Transnistria and LDPR). It does not call into question the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. As for Russia, it perceives composedly the role of the West, because here, unlike Georgia and Ukraine, there are no projects of Euro-Atlantic integration, targeting Armenia and Azerbaijan. Baku and Yerevan have relations with NATO and the EU, but they do not line up on a confrontational algorithm in relation to Moscow. However, at the same time, we cannot claim that the interests of Russia and the West in the Karabakh settlement would be identical. The US and its allies are much more critical of the existing status quo. In principle, they would be ready to push the peace process, but they refrain from doing it because of other priorities. Moscow fears the destruction of the fragile status quo, rightly fearing that going beyond it is risky and is not always a guarantee for a successful peaceful resolution.