

TOPICAL DIALOGUES FOR THE ARMENIAN MEDIA

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A “REGION” RESEARCH CENTER PROJECT



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ABOUT THE PROJECT

"TOPICAL DIALOGUES FOR THE ARMENIAN MEDIA"

Since 2002 the activities of Region Center have traditionally been implemented in two directions:

1. Internet press conferences with the specialists from the EU countries, the USA, the post-Soviet space (live or by correspondence) for journalists who will later publish these materials in the issues of their outlets,
2. Internet conferences (two- or three-week closed discussions on our platforms with the participation of specialists from different countries) on topical issues of international politics.

In different periods such (media) contacts in the form of dialogues were organized on a few platforms – in the Caucasus Journalists' Network (www.caucasusjournalists.net) that brought together the representatives of mass media and experts from the South Caucasus countries as well as on the Armenian and Azerbaijani “Public Dialogues” platform (www.publicdialogues.info).

“Public Dialogues” (www.publicdialogues.info) was a website jointly established and managed by “Region” Research Center and the Institute of Peace and Democracy (Azerbaijan).

It was updated by materials simultaneously provided from Armenia and Azerbaijan about Armenians and the Azerbaijanis. For the 18 months of its activity (September 2012 – April 2014) the website managed to seriously establish itself as a stable source of information about professional contacts between Armenian and Azerbaijani specialists, that reliably served as a platform for virtual interaction between the representatives of the conflicting societies.

In April, July and August 2014 three of our partners (spouses Leyla and Arif Yunus, and journalist Rauf Mirkadirov) were arrested in Azerbaijan, with charges of high treason, and our website was alleged anti-Azerbaijani. Since then “Public Dialogues” have been fed by materials only covering the condition of our partners in the investigative isolation ward and other repressive processes in Azerbaijan.

We – “Region” Research Center – will try to ensure access to “Public Dialogues” for all (random or searching) users who will feel interested in the “material evidence” of the “crime” committed by me and Leyla Yunus, i.e. the establishment of contacts between the representatives of the Republic of Armenia and the Azerbaijani Republic.

www.regioncenter.info – is “Region” Research Center’s platform that has been in operation with an updated interface and additional technical capacity since October 2014 due to the support received from the Embassy of Great Britain in Yerevan.

The materials offered to the readers’ attention in this issue of the bulletin, as well as our future content will be published on that platform from now on.

Laura Baghdasaryan

Director

“Region” Research Center



**An Excerpt from the Internet Press Conference with
The State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic
Equality in Georgia PAATA ZAKAREISHVILI
November 5
2014**

The themes of the press conference: the Russian and Abkhazian Treaty 2014

- Mr. Minister, what practical consequences can the Treaty on Cooperation and Integration between Russia and Abkhazia lead to? How will it impact on the normalization process between Russia and Georgia?

- Russia started to feel anxious because the post-Soviet countries - Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova – are striving to distance themselves from the Russian vector, from the Russian gravity. Hence, it is trying to have maximum gain wherever it can. We can see Russia's actions regarding the Crimea issue; in the Eastern Ukraine it has quite a different behavior, and other instruments are being used in Abkhazia, too. The difference between Russians and Abkhazians consists not only in their cultures, but also in the mentalities. Ethnic Russians are but few in Abkhazia, Abkhazians are not Slavs; they are a Caucasian people. That is why the imposture of a treaty on larger integration with Russia is what Russia may rely on and consider in Abkhazia today. I do not think that the Abkhazians are happier about such prospects of closer integration with Russia as compared to what they have now because in the end of the day this treaty is not in favor of Abkhazia, but in favor of Russia. In practice, integration has already happened even without that treaty. In practice, the armed forces of Russia that are considered to be occupants by us, govern Abkhazia even without that treaty, and Russian is the state language of Abkhazia. Russia simply wants to formalize the reality that is already there in Abkhazia by means of this treaty so that the Abkhazians do not have a perception that this reality is only temporary. There is no independence in Abkhazia. The other political message consists in making the movement of Georgia towards the EU as difficult as possible.

This treaty reinforces the occupational activities of Russia and absolutely entails the annexation of the Georgian territories. Russia would, of course, be willing to use soft power but it cannot afford it, it has to open up all its cards and play tougher. Acquiring the Crimea, Russia lost Ukraine. The same will happen to the Caucasus. And in the long-term perspective Russia will not be able to keep the Caucasus to itself either.

- Is Georgia currently ready to differentiate between politics and economy, and make a political decision on opening the Abkhazian section of the railway. Don' t you think that this would be beneficial not only to Georgia, but its neighbors, too?

- You are calling to us to differentiate between politics and economy, however you suggest that we should do it through a political decision. We would like to make an economic decision in this aspect, even though want it or not there is also a lot of politics here. The railway runs through the occupied territories of Georgia. And if nobody plays politics in this matter, we guarantee that there will be no politics brought into the game by us. As I have already mentioned this must be a Georgian and Russian project, without Abkhazia involved as the third party.

The full transcript of the press-conference is available here:

<http://regioncenter.info/Internet-Press-Conference-with-Paata-Zakareishvili-rus-2014>



**An Excerpt from the Internet Press-Conference with
the Director of the European Geopolitical Forum
(EGF), political scientist MARAT TETEROV
(Belgium)
November 14
2014**

The themes of the press conference: A crisis in Ukraine and in the relations between Russia and the West, the politics of Russia in the Karabakh conflict, Armenia's accession to the Eurasian Union: what shall we expect?

- Where is the limit of the current tension between Russia and the West and in which specific issues and directions will the parties be obliged to cooperate in the near future? Is the Karabakh conflict within the range of those issues?

-- The sanctions and the escalation of the political tension between the European and Atlantic block and Russia have not halted and will not halt cooperation between them as states. Many Russians live in the West, and this is a living and vibrant context, processes are impossible to halt by any sanctions. And if there were a war, which the parties – Russia and Europe – are far from, still people-to-people contacts would be retained. This year has been fraught with the most tension not only since the times of the Cold War, but since the period of 1979 – 1980, when the Soviet Union marched into Afghanistan which led to the boycott of the Moscow Olympiad – 80. But even in that case the events of that year did not hinder cooperation.

The tension between Russia and Europe in the field of energy is no news. Europe has been living in these conditions for 8 years already. If you can recall, the first crisis because of the cessation of the transit of the Russian gas to Europe through Ukraine happened back in 2006, and in fact, the Europeans have got used to it. In a word, political tension will not hinder the business relations or the two-way mobility of the people.

Every day Aeroflot flies twice between Moscow and Brussels: there are flights administered by the Brussels Airlines, too.

The sanctions, „Putinization,, the mass media discourse, the European take of Russia are as a whole not as catastrophic, as this was perceived at the initial stage.

- In the West the Kremlin is usually accused of strivings to create USSR-2. What do you think the rationale, the philosophy and the true aims laid in the foundation of the Eurasian Economic Union are? What are the prospects of the EEU Armenia is joining with a whole bunch of its own problems and the half-destructed economy in the light of the sanctions against Russia?

- I think that is project of the EEU would not be there if the European Partnership project of the EU were not there. Russia perceived it as a threat. And the expansion of the EEU to involve more members is also a response to the EU's policy and the NATO's policy to a certain extent.

A definite political narrative (as a means of transferring information) is circulated in Russia, for example, Sunday TV shows broadcast that narrative (“we are in a siege”, “Russia was never the first to go against the West, it was the West – Napoleon, Hitler and so on, that always marched into the East”), and it gives those guys jobs.

But Russia would be eager to have deeper economic and cultural cooperation with Europe; it would like to have a visa free regime with Europe and a merger of economic capacities. The whole of Russia and by the way the Armenian elite, as well as the elite of other post-Soviet countries are in Europe – in Vienna, Paris, and London. They like it here, they feel well here.

I do not deny that the EURASEC that is the legal foundation of the Eurasian Economic Union began to develop before the “Eastern Partnership” and NATO's enlargement policy towards the Baltic States. And that union did have any logic. I am personally for the concept of a lighter version of the Soviet Union.

The full transcript of the press-conference is available here:

<http://regioncenter.info/Internet-press-conference-with-Marat-Terterov-rus-2014>



**An Excerpt from the Internet Press-Conference with
Professor at the Anthropology Department of the
European University in Saint- Petersburg SERGEY
ABASHIN (Russia)
November 19
2014**

The themes of the press conference: Migration in the Post-Soviet space and Russia

- In the last 20 years the migration flows in Russia have led to quite interesting results: the population of the titular ethnic groups has decreased, whereas the number of immigrants has increased. Will this trend persist in the near future, too?

- If we compare the censuses of 1989 and 2010, the Russian population in Russia has truly decreased by about 7%, but at that the general number of the population has decreased too, as a result the share of Russians has been reduced from 81% to only 77%. If we consider foreign citizens, living in Russia, the share of Russians would be 72%. In the near future the share of Russians will most likely decrease, but we should not expect a rapid and considerable change in the proportions, since firstly, many other larger groups (Tatars, the Bashkir, Ukrainians) are decreasing, too, and secondly, there is a small, yet present inflow of the Russians from other countries, and thirdly, Russians have still preserved their assimilating potential, that is to say, the children in the mixed families are more likely to be given Russian nationality.

- If we try to avoid the cliché expressions and pompous statements, what does the real essence and the objective of the state “Compatriots” program consist in? In some post-Soviet countries that are normally in friendly relations with Russia its introduction and implementation brought about quite unambiguous public complaints.

- The state formulates the objective of the program in a very oblique manner: as if it were either a moral obligation before the former Soviet citizens and aimed at the retention of the memory of one state, or it supports expats who have decided to return, or it were an immigration inflow to fill up the demographic decline of Russia. All this brings about arguments in the Russian society and among experts. This very ambiguity is the reason why in my opinion the “Compatriots” program is not very efficient, is not well supported from either the financial or organizational perspectives and why a relatively small number of people became beneficiaries of the program.

- To what extent may the recent political processes in and around Russia (the economic decline, the sanctions and the opposition between Russia and the West, the Ukrainian crisis and the flow of refugees from Ukraine and so on) radically change the situation in terms of migration flows, that involve Russia, too? In other words, may it turn out that the direction of migration changes and people move not into but from Russia?

- The answer to this question depends on how long the crisis will last, how deep it will be and which sectors of the economy it will affect. So far we cannot assess it precisely. But the data of 2014 already show some decline in the remittances from Russia to the countries of Central Asia, and there is also some reduction in the number of migrants (from Uzbekistan, for example, by 10%).

Here truly this is not a matter of only the economic crisis, but also a tougher polity that is pursued by Russia this year in terms of restricting migration.

If the crisis and this policy persist and get even stronger, it is possible to expect more significant outflow of migrants. Even though I do not forecast that a complete reorientation of migrants to other countries will take place, the migrants will most probably be more active in conquering new niches in the Russian economy.

The full transcript of the press-conference is available here:

<http://regioncenter.info/Internet-press-conference-with-Sergey-Abashin-rus-2014>



**An Excerpt from the Online Press-Conference with
the Vice-President of PIR-Center for Policy Studies**

DMITRY POLIKANOV (Russia)

November 25

2014

The themes of the press conference: The new challenges for the countries in the post-Soviet space and Russia

- There is an opinion that ISIS created by Washington some time ago to fight against Bashar Hafez al-Assad has significantly expanded its capacity, becoming a scarecrow for Europe. Do you think this organization can, be involved in the larger opposition between Russia and the West and how?

- It seems to me that ISIS, just like Taliban back in the past, is already well beyond the control of those who created it. That is why it has now become a “pain in the neck” for both the Western countries, and Russia, which has traditionally acted against any forms of Islamic extremism. In the future ISIS (if it really grows into a real and powerful threat, and things are developing in that very direction) could bring Russia and the West together, just as the Somali pirates in the past.

How probable is it that the South Caucasus will become a political bargain between Moscow and the West?

- What is there to bargain for? Now Russia and the West have found a territory to fight over – Ukraine. The South Caucasus might be brought into play if the parties had to face the task of “diverting their attention” from the Ukrainian crisis or to weaken each other by making spread out their resources among several tension points. As a Russian political scientist said in order to shift public opinion in the West from Ukraine, it would be necessary to trigger the “anti-frosting” of other conflicts that have been tied with self-determination issues. But this is rather

from the realm of imaginary, but for now Ukraine totally suffices as a place of political bargain for both Moscow and the West.

- What do the main security challenges consist in for Russia today, and how successfully do you think your country will confront these challenges?

- The main security challenges for Russia are its demography, the vulnerability of its economy, and its insufficient capacity to wage information wars. Obviously, Russia will not have an armed conflict with the Western countries. But the economy of the country needs reforms (and in this regard the sanctions are having a positive effect, because they stimulate this internal self-improvement); the population of the country is evidently insufficient for such a territory (and the positive shifts with the consideration of the demographic waves may end very soon, while the problem will persist, especially in terms of the Siberia and the Far East); the propaganda machine is working, but it still has a hard time to measure itself against the global media, and Russia has been losing in media-wars. That is exactly why it is necessary to intensify activities in all the three directions.

- What do you think the political potential of the EEU is against the background of the processes underway?

- A difficult question. EEU is in essence a political project for Russia, because so far Russia has been investing in it, rather than gaining anything from it. On the other hand, before starting any political integration it will be important to build economic cooperation at an appropriate level. Only after that it could be possible to speak about closer coordination of political positions on various issues on the international agenda. It is necessary to understand that the EEU is not a new USSR; this is primarily a union that has been formed to solve economic problems. As for political coordination, this may be possible in a few years (even though everything will depend on the leaders in power at that time) but it is rather a side effect at this stage.

The full transcript of the press-conference is available here:

<http://regioncenter.info/Online-Press-Conference-with-Dmitry-Polikanov-rus-2014>