

CSIS Caucasus Project Meeting Notes:
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The Caucasus

- The Caucasus region is the “cradle of civilization”
- The Caucasus is a multi-cultural region—but the burden of history always created problems
- Reminds one of Napoleon Bonaparte’s remarks, “happy people do not have history”
- The war on terrorism affects our region—if it is possible to attack the most advanced nation on earth, than surely it is possible to have problems emanating from a region that has been home to ethnic cleansing

Domestic Situation in Armenia

- All Caucasus countries are members of the Council of Europe (CoE)
- From the outset Armenia has received high marks from the CoE
- This gives us strength and hope that with the cooperation of the CoE that we will be able to create a democratic society, one that respects the rights of the individual, freedom of speech, where politicians run for office based on the merits of their platform
- Respect of human rights is poor in the Caucasus—the CoE notes that when compared with Azerbaijan, Armenia allows more freedom of speech
- The accusations of the Azeri delegation in the CoE that Armenia dumps nuclear waste in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) are not accurate—ecology does not have any borders
- In the press there are accusations against Armenia that there are new drug smuggling routes from Iran, through NK to Armenia but these are not true, not based on real facts
- Collaboration among the states is essential to bring about a new vision of the Caucasus
- Last October CoE session of the Committee of Culture, Science, and Education in Yerevan discussed the problem of cultural heritage in Armenia. It was important that Azerbaijan’s CoE delegation and members of the Azeri Majlis came for the session.
- In June Armenia is proposing a meeting on the environmental problems of the Caucasus
- There are also negative developments—we often use slogans or propaganda when approaching serious problems in our relations with our neighbors, and public opinion reacts strongly to such accusations on both sides
- The Minsk group works hard to find a solution to NK, but at the same time Azeri statements advocating a military solution to the problem creates tension in society—it cannot be denied that this kind of rhetoric will influence people.
- In Armenia there are problems that go back to the events of October 27, 2001 when parliament members were assassinated

- Thanks to the efforts of President Robert Kocharian Armenia has overcome the tragedy, and implemented procedures that have made Armenia a predictable and stable society

Security and Peace in the Region

- The Caucasus must be regarded as a single geo-political region
- All outside powers must respect the interests of the Caucasian countries as a whole
- In light of American aid to Georgia and the War on Terrorism there are challenges
 - International terrorism in Georgia is not only about Chechens, there are also other groups
 - The situation of the Armenians living in Javakhetia and the rights of minorities must be discussed within the vision of CoE about self-government or some other means of defending the rights of people
 - The Armenian point of view is to keep the Georgian situation intact, and not to take any actions which would upset the current balance in Javakhetia
- Concerning peace and stability in the Caucasus, relations with Turkey and with Azerbaijan are key

Russian Military Base in Armenia

- The base is absolutely necessary to keep Armenia stable

Iran

- Armenia has good relations with Iran ever since declaration of independence
- Iran helped Armenia in the economic sphere
- Relations with Iran do not contradict relations with any of the other Caucasian countries

Relations with Turkey

- The major issue is that of the Armenian genocide; it simply cannot be avoided
- There must be some sort of a resolution, an acknowledgment from Turkey concerning the genocide
- Dialogue, not just between NGO's and people who are not involved in politics, but direct dialogue between the branches of the government and Members of Parliament can be very helpful
- Based on different discussion in the CoE with the Turkish delegation, it seems that Turkey is willing to discuss this issue on the level of Members of Parliament
- Another tough problem is the economic blockade
- The Turkish government adopted a new policy which has made it easier to cross the border and there is some favorable policy towards Armenian citizens who work in Turkey, and tourism has been promoted, but it is still not a favorable situation

Azerbaijan

- Azerbaijan is Armenia's partner in discussions over NK
- Armenia does not consider the situation good or bad—this is a process, which we believe will be fruitful in the end
- NK will be discussed in the coming months in the CoE. There is an established group of MP's that will go to NK as a monitoring group in April. This is good evidence that the CoE can add something else to the process, without intervening on the mandate of the Minsk group by developing other agendas towards the resolution of the conflict

Domestic Developments and Public Opinion

- There is no evidence or historical record that NK was ever a part of Azerbaijan
- NK is in a transition period now: kids are growing up recognizing their own country and develop a different mentality
- Rights of the people who have already made their choice to be a part of one country and not a part of another must be respected
- Once this principle is accepted, it will be easier to find a solution to the NK problem
- NK never has been and never will be a part of Azerbaijan—this is not the final statement, but it is the sentiment of the Armenia people
- All political groups and parties want to see the future of Armenia as a democratic state.

Armenia's Participation in the War on Terrorism

- Regarding the war on terrorism, Armenia has:
 - Granted planes the right to fly over Armenia's territory, to land, and refuel on Armenian territory
 - Provided expert and legal assistance to the relevant U.S. agencies
 - Provided experts and intelligence information
 - Expressed its readiness to cooperate with relevant U.S. departments in other fields
 - Implemented measures to secure the security of the U.S. embassy in Yerevan
 - Offered medical care to U.S. soldiers in various hospitals
 - In the capacity of the Chairman in Office of the Collective Security Pact made a statement condemning the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and made an appeal to all countries to combat terrorism
 - Through the relevant financial institution implemented UN Security Council Resolution 1373 on freezing the bank accounts of terrorists and their supporters
 - Acceded to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Terrorist Finding, at the CoE 6th anti-terrorist convention
 - Undertaken stricter measures of security at the airports
 - Adopted stricter custom control measures, with an emphasis against arms
 - Initiated the establishment of the special inter-departmental group, which will be responsible for the coordination of anti-terrorist actions by the government and all law-enforcement institutions