

EUROPE'S ENLARGEMENT AND THE SOUTHERN CAUCASUS

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There has been a lot of talk in the international community and mass media lately about a very important topic—the entry of ten Eastern European countries into the European Union. In particular, Azerbaijani political scientists, journalists, and state officials are discussing the prospects opening up for the republic in this respect, and weighing up the pros and cons of this integration.

Whereby entirely polar opinions are being expressed—from gloomy forecasts to enthused cries welcoming this opportunity.

This article is an attempt to look at what Azerbaijan's chances are of joining the EU and carry out a focused analysis of the various vectors of Europe's enlargement in the context of South Caucasian interests, primarily those of our country.

How It Began

It is hard to imagine that the idea of unification of the Old World arose as early as the Renaissance. Later, in the 17th century, people dreamed of uniting all the states of the continent into a single European federal council. The great German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, suggested creating a "Union of Peoples," and French Prime Minister Aristide Briand advocated the idea of "pan-Europe." At different times, similar ideas were promulgated by Napoleon and Winston Churchill.

But in reality, this integration began on the day the famous Shuman Declaration and Paris Treaty were signed, which envisaged the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Sub-

sequently, the final choice of strategy, which led to specific achievements, was made in Rome, where very important documents were signed, primarily the Treaty on a European Economic Community.¹

In those years, Europe, which was recovering from the destruction wrought by World War II, gradually restored its rightful status and geopolitical significance in the world civilization system, joined the forces of the key players, and consistently built up its potential. Today, the countries of the continent face new problems. Ways to oppose hegemony in a coalition, notes Samuel Huntington, were defined even before the end of the Cold War: creating a European Union and introducing a single European currency. Europe's task is to create a counterbalance to U.S. domination in a multi-polar world.²

Vector of Movement

The trends are such that, now, enlargement of the EU to the East may gradually change the world balance in favor of Europe. The European Union currently has twenty-five members. This has made the organization a more integrated structure than a confederation, and in the foreseeable future it could become a European federation.

Here we must not lose sight of the fact that the term "federalism," as Margaret Thatcher noted, has different interpretations in the U.S. and in Europe.³ In America, it meant returning the rights and authorities transferred to the federal government, in spite of the provisions of the Constitution, to the individual states. In Europe, federalism means the practice of the Federative Republic of Germany, that is, of a state with the supreme power of the central government and rather broad, but clearly defined, autonomy at the local level. This kind of federalism means that the pre-eminence of central power and national interests is much more defined than in the American political system.

The Old and New World— A Generation Gap

The leitmotif of the European trend is defined by its vehement desire "to catch up with and surpass America," which is hushed up at the official level and concealed behind a veil of diplomatic compliments, but nevertheless easy to see and very well known to us. To a significant extent, it is caused by tough economic competition, the struggle to gain control over the planet's scanty natural resources, the striving to undermine American hegemony on the world markets, and the skirmishes among overseas financial-industrial monsters and transcontinental corporations of European origin which do not wish to remain on the sidelines. What is more, opposition to American cultural values and propagation of the American mentality and "money-force approach" to resolving urgent problems has never ceased, rather it has reached an unprecedented high level as European institutions gain in significance. Aversion to global Americanization is sometimes even expressed in the rejection of the English language as a means of universal communication.

¹ See: M. Arakh, *Evropeiskii soiuz*, Moscow, 1998, p. 54.

² See: S.P. Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower," *Foreign Affairs*, March-April 1999, p. 45.

³ See: M. Thatcher, *Iskusstvo upravleniia gosudarstvom. Strategia dlia meniaiushchegosia mira (Statecraft. Strategies for a Changing World)*, Moscow, 2003, p. 354.

Western Europe's striving for independence on the international arena is understandable, since it depends much more than the U.S. on the outside world. For example, the EU's trade turnover with non-member countries is approximately 25% higher than that of the U.S., and twice as high as Japan's. The export percentage in Germany's GNP is equal to 25%, whereas in France and England this index is 18%, and in Italy it is 15%.⁴ In this way, creating a European Union, introducing a single currency that can compete with the dollar, and forming a zone of its own influence make it possible to oppose U.S. domination in a multi-polar world.

On the whole, whenever the matter concerns the European economy and whenever Europeans' interests are affected (with respect to the successful functioning of their currency, the independence of industry, the safety of investments, the world level of technology, and the security and expansion of trade flows), Europe is quick to raise national self-defense barriers and unhesitatingly go into battle against any encroachment from overseas.

Europe and the Southern Caucasus— Who Needs This Union?

In the context of this reality, we can understand the EU's interest in expanding cooperation with the post-Soviet countries, including with the South Caucasian states, and among the latter, primarily with Azerbaijan, as the richest of these countries in natural and labor resources, as well as an important republic in terms of its geopolitical significance. The question of security is also vitally important to Europe, the desire to have, even in the distant future, a secular democratic state with all the attributes of a European legal and socioeconomic system in a rapidly developing country with a predominantly Muslim population. This is also confirmed by Europe's New Neighbors program currently being developed for potential members of the European family located in geographical proximity to Europe.

Whereas Europe's interest in us is essentially covered by what was said above, the question "why do we need Europe?" is much more complicated and cannot be given an exhaustive answer, so we will only set forth the main viewpoints here. To avoid any possible confusion (meaning, who is against), it must be stated that unfortunately there are quite a number of adversaries (latent and open) to European integration. Although at the government level there shouldn't really be any resistance, many European standards are nevertheless latently (or openly) given a hostile reception in our society. For example, we will mention the gender question, equality between men and women in the family, and ensuring equal job opportunities and wages for women, invalids, and national minorities, as well as their equal representation in the executive power structures. For the most part, all local "Europeanism" is concentrated only in the capitals of the South Caucasian states, and even then not in all aspects (in this respect the Azerbaijan regional development program adopted recently is extremely important).

Although, on the whole, European legal standards are quite well received in national legislation, there is still a long way to go before they are actually executed on a daily basis. Of course, society and the population's mentality cannot be changed in one fell swoop, but it is obvious that from above the rate at which Azerbaijan is becoming integrated into Europe is quite high, whereas at the grassroots level it is lagging far behind.

Worries are being expressed that entry into the "Christian club of Europe" will erode our national customs, force people to give up their age-old views and traditions, consign customs, approaches to upbringing-

⁴ See: *The World Factbook*, CIA, Wash., 1999; *The World in 2000*; *The National Interest*, Summer 2000, p. 18.

ing, and cultural-moral development to oblivion, and lead to the artificial propagation of alien moral priorities and values. But the main worry is whether entering Europe will help to settle the Nagorny Karabakh problem or, on the contrary, will stop us from restoring territorial integrity by force. In our opinion, these worries are often justified. But the advantages of European integration outweigh the possible risks, which can be avoided if a balanced and well-thought-out policy is pursued, taking into account national traits and the specific situation in the region.

I would like to give a brief description of these advantages, particularly keeping in mind the following: Azerbaijan's access to the world markets, promoting our goods in Europe, gaining access to the latest technology, in particular revamping industrial production and agriculture, attracting investments, creating new jobs, and establishing military-technical cooperation, including with NATO. I will also add to the above the opportunities opening up for more active participation by our republic in the European and world economy, occupying our proper place in world integration and the globalization processes, and maintaining our influence on international relations. What is more, cultivating Azerbaijan's aggregate potential and might will also allow us to settle the Nagorny Karabakh conflict and liberate the occupied land in a peaceful way.

Integration and Regional Conflicts

I do not think that Europe, or the world leaders, or the South Caucasian countries themselves have anything to gain from regional conflicts in areas where the global oil pipeline is being built, where trans-continental transportation routes are being created, and where other immense opportunities are opening up for mutual advantageous economic cooperation. The world is becoming ever more open and interdependent, and leaving the settlement of regional conflicts hanging in the air or putting it off until later is no longer an option either for us, or for the planet as a whole.

According to the author of this article, adequate settlement of the Nagorny-Karabakh and other regional conflicts is one of the prerequisites for the Southern Caucasian countries being accepted into Europe. Our position is based on international law and corresponds to its principal criteria. But Armenia, which is refuting Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, cannot join the EU the way things stand at present, and due to the threat of remaining on the sidelines of world integration processes and the danger of losing the obvious prospects for regional and continental cooperation, it will be forced to give up its cherished dream of retaining militaristic control over part of our republic, a member of the world and European community. (Foreseeing possible analogies with the Cypress question, I will not discuss it in this article, since these are entirely different conflicts in terms of genesis, development, and status.)

What is more, the world trends aimed at joining forces to combat international terrorism, separatism, organized crime, and revision of the current geopolitical structure must be kept in mind. What is more, the efforts to establish a world order and step up control over the safety of human civilizational development can clearly be seen in all spheres: politics, the environment, the economy, and so on. In this respect, the recent speech by Antonio Mario Costa, deputy U.N. Secretary General and head of the U.N. Vienna Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, on 30 April, 2004 in the Vatican entitled "World Threats to World Government"⁵ was no coincidence.⁵ I believe that mankind is ripe for a focused discussion of the idea of world government.

⁵ [www.undc.org].

Is There Another Way to Return Karabakh?

As for forceful methods, Azerbaijan has repeatedly voiced its opinion and been understood: if peaceful means are exhausted, the country will turn to a forceful solution. Someone, throwing quibbles aside, is calling right now for taking up arms. Let us take a brief look at what this would mean. We are opposed by well-armed invaders, with combat experience, who have been fed from the outside and have long lived in an atmosphere of military tyranny, siege psychology, and fear. I have no doubt that the Azerbaijani army is only waiting for an order from the commander-in-chief and is ready to liberate the occupied land, even if the adversary has help from its protectors. I don't see Armenia's partners under the CIS Collective Security Treaty being able to interfere in any military action as serious, since we are not going to attack Armenia's borders, but liberate land that rightly belongs to us. I even believe we "will be permitted" to fight.

Nevertheless, we will have to be ready for full-scale operations, since we have no right to take a risk. Settlement of the conflict by force will entail enormous expenses, early transfer of the economy into military channels, mobilization, limited access to information, the introduction of censorship, electricity cutoffs in the cities (for civil defense purposes), protection of the population from bomb strikes, erecting barriers for entry and exit out of the country, infringement of other human rights, and so on. It is a long process and will mean a drain in investments, essentially all foreign companies leaving the market, the above-mentioned plans to put major pipelines into operation being frozen, and additional expenses to warn of diversions at all vitally important urban and population settlement facilities. And even if we win, not only Nagorny Karabakh, but also other territories, will have to be restored, compensation will have to be paid to those who become invalids, and to the families of those killed, and so on. Such prospects graphically illustrate the difficult consequences of any military action, not only for Azerbaijan, but for Armenia as well.

Does Europe Understand Our Position?

The very fact that recently the position of "European Union special representative for the Southern Caucasus" was instituted speaks volumes. At a meeting with Heikki Talvitie, on 22 March, 2004 in Baku, Azerbaijani President Ilkham Aliev once more stated clearly that the strategic choice of our country was integration into the European structures.⁶ This policy is without a doubt the continuation of the only correct course, taken in 1993-1994 by Heydar Aliev, who headed the republic at that time. The past ten years have clearly shown how farsighted and wise this step was. For finding themselves at the crossroads after the empire disintegrated, several post-Soviet countries chose a different path, and are now feverishly trying to make up for lost time and build bridges to the West.

In this way, Azerbaijan is clearly declaring its "European choice," a desire to integrate into the European structures and become a member of the European Union. There is no doubt that Europe as a whole and most of its institutions have formed a clear understanding of Azerbaijan's position.

⁶ See: *Bakinskii rabochii*, 23 March, 2004.

Do We Understand Europe?

But we must be realistic and understand that our desire alone is not enough, the EU must also be interested in this. Here it is important not to repeat past mistakes, not hang our heads, and not complain that our true desires are not getting the proper response from the European Union. The forthcoming relations with Europe must be treated as a kind of future “marital contract,” with a clear indication of the sides’ rights and obligations, what we are going to give, and what Europe is going to give us. What is more, we must decide what specifically remains to be done in the country itself to facilitate a smooth and painless entry into the general integration processes.

Today one of the main problems for the ideologues of a United Europe is Turkey’s entry into the EU. In the 1960s, the Europeans hastily promised that it would be a member of this structure, only to begin back peddling with all their might, motivating this by the fact that the country had still not achieved the European standards necessary for joining the EU. Incidentally, opinions in Europe itself on this question differed. Some countries believe that the refusal to accept Ankara to the EU can provoke the Turkish radical forces, and this could lead to unpredictable consequences for Europe itself. A possible development of the situation along these lines explains the fact that the EU does not want to promise acceptance of the South Caucasian countries in advance and that it launched the above-mentioned New Neighbors program, the objective of which is to encourage the new states to draw closer to Europe, but at the same time not promise some of them membership in this structure.

It is much more expedient for the EU to create a cooperation zone with an already “established” and economically and politically regionally integrated area, than with each of our countries individually. This, according to many European politicians, could be the basis for strengthening security and stability in the Southern Caucasus.

Is Azerbaijanian Society Ready to Recognize Itself as Part of the European Space?

Consistent integration into the European structures could also be a great stride toward consolidating Azerbaijanian society as a whole. Despite all the difficulties, there are real prerequisites in our country for integration into Europe being not only government policy, as it is now, but also being objectively accepted as a national priority by all strata of society. Taking into account that the republic’s president, Ilkham Aliev, has repeatedly called on all the country’s healthy forces to do this, I think that the ideals of European integration are capable of pushing the disputes and differences splitting our society into the background.

The time has already come for this integration not only to be a clear theoretical task for Azerbaijan as a state (as noted above, the question has already been raised, a conception and strategy exist, and the correct course has been set), but to be carried out in practice based on a dramatic increase in the rate at which European standards are assimilated and made a part of everyday life. And here we can and should arm ourselves with the positive experience accumulated recently by the Eastern European and Baltic countries, which recently joined the EU, as well as by several candidate-states still making preparations for this process.

During the preparations to join, during the so-called reform period, integration ministries were created in many countries, which carried out monitoring of the domestic situation in these states and saw that it was brought into harmony with European standards. What is more, this work was done in several areas at the same time, from creating a legal and normative base to economic and political reforms.

It would also be expedient to form a Ministry of Integration, or corresponding National Commission (as it is called in Moldova), in Azerbaijan for this purpose. We will immediately clarify that this structure in no way replaces the Foreign Ministry, on the contrary, its task is to propagate and introduce, as well as monitor, European standards in all strata of society and in the power structures.

Theoretically the tasks of this structure can be formulated as follows. First, gradual integration into all initiatives and programs related to the EU. Second, active implementation of joint bilateral and regional cooperation projects with member countries which are also integrating into Europe (of course not counting the aggressor country Armenia). Third, becoming the driving force of Europeanization, and taking the necessary measures to bring the country into harmony with the EU's standards. For this purpose it is expedient to draw up a conceptual and subject-related plan of necessary measures and submit it to the Milli Mejlis, then after it has been discussed in parliament and given the status of a law, the government could draw up a program of action based on it for a specific period. Fourth, create special departments in the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Economic Development, and other departments (where there is a need for this). Fifth, duly present the drawn up plan to the EU member countries for signing, and possibly a special European commission on this plan. Sixth, the interests of the EU and Azerbaijan should not clash with the interests of other countries. So it is important to maintain a balanced policy and make our desire to become rapidly integrated into Europe hinge on the situation in neighboring states, for example, in Turkey, Iran, and Russia. Seventh, explain to the republic's entire population in broad and scrupulous terms the advantages of European integration, and inform the people of the specific measures being taken to bring European cultural values into harmony with national traditions and customs. In other words, the people must be prepared for an interpenetration of cultures and for learning how to live in harmony. What is more, the European integration processes must not become the sphere of interests of an exclusively narrow circle of scientists and specialists. Every ordinary person must be included in these processes and conscientiously participate in them.

In this way, the matter essentially concerns creating a kind of headquarters (coordination center), which has the appropriate powers and can help all branches of government and society to correctly understand that "when in Rome do as the Romans do" and set their clocks in time with the Europeans.

World politics is full of unpredictable surprises. I do not think that even the EU ideologists themselves can foresee the current course of European integration. When the map of Common Europe was created, the world had not yet begun its struggle against international terrorism. So it is quite difficult to predict all the future problems the EU will face. But it is very important for Azerbaijan, and other South Caucasian countries I think, to be able to understand the logic and mechanisms of how the European Union functions in order to be able to move forward and lobby their own interests there in the future. And this, in turn, should urge us to use all resources (material and intellectual) to ensure that our ship does not lose its way, but arrives on time at a safe European haven.