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CONTENTS:

EDITORIAL	2
ETHNIC PROVENANCE IN THE GEORGIAN PASSPORT? BY AKAKY GOGICHAISHVILI	3
MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY IN KARABAKH, BY KARINEH OHANIAN	5
ARMENIA, IS IN SEARCH OF EUROPEAN LEVERAGES TO ENSURE NATIONAL SECURITY, BY ARMAN DJILAVYAN	6
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROCESSES IN AZERBAIJAN, BY METIN AFAR OGHLY	10
WHOM DOES THE ARMENIAN MEDIA BELONG AND HOW DOES DEMOCRACY EVOLVE IN MY COUNTRY? BY ARMEN HAKOBIAN	12
COULD HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY UNIFY NATIONS RATHER THAN SEPARATE? BY VLADIMIR GOGIDZE	14
THE INFLUENCE OF THE FACTOR OF HISTORY ON MEDIA AND ETHNIC CONFLICT IN SOUTH CAUCASUS, BY KAKHABER DZEBISASHVILI	17
NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA ON ETHNIC CONFLICTS, BY KAMRAN GASANLY	24
DEMOGRAPHY AS A FACTOR INFLUENCING ETHNIC CONFLICTS, BY VICTOR SOLAKHYAN	26
SOME ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERNET IN ARMENIA, BY ALEXANDER HAKHNAZARYAN	30
THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN ACTIVITIES OF MEDIA IN AZERBAIJAN, BY NURLANA GALIEVA	31
ADJARIA: FIGHT FOR AUTONOMY. BY VICKEN CHETERIAN	32
HALF-TOTALITARIAN AND HALF-SEPARATIST ADJARIA, BY KAMAL ALI	34
THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN TBILISI AND BATUMI COULD TOUGHEN TRANSPORTATION BLOCKADE OF ARMENIA, "SNARK" INFORMATION AGENCY	36
ASLAN ABASHIDZE: "THERE ARE NO SEPARATIST SENTIMENTS IN DJAVAKHK", "SNARK" INFORMATION AGENCY	37
TO WHOM DOES THE GEORGIAN MEDIA BELONG TO AND HOW DOES DEMOCRACY EVOLVE IN MY COUNTRY? BY DAVID PAYCHADZE	38
REGIONAL COOPERATION IN SOUTH CAUCASUS AND ITS POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES FOR ARMENIA, BY HAKOB CHAKRIAN	40
MATERNITY SYSTEM IN GEORGIA, BY GALINA PETRIASHVILI	42
SIX DAYS IN BAKU, BY VICKEN CHETERIAN	46
NEWS	49

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Editor: Vicken Cheterian

28 rue de l'Athénée

1206 Geneva

Switzerland

Tel: 41-22-3461087

E-mail: vicken@mail-box.ch

Coordinator in Tbilisi: Eka Akhalkatsi

Coordinator in Baku: Kemal Ali

Coordinator in Yerevan: Aris Ghazinyan

MEDIA BULLETIN

EDITORIAL

VICKEN CHETERIAN

The Visit of Armenian Journalists to Baku

A group of Armenian journalists spent five days in the Azerbaijani capital, the first ever such visit since the beginning of the Karabakh conflict eleven years ago. The occasion was the 8th conference of the Caucasus Media Support Project (CMSP), which took place in Baku between 28 June and 2 July. The project is funded by the Swiss foreign ministry. The conference discussed the concept of news, Relations between politicians and journalists, Conditions of journalist schools and The economic basis of mass media. Next to six participants from Armenia, there were five journalists from Georgia, six from Azerbaijan, and the project director from Geneva. Next, the journalists had meetings with the leaders of the republic, including with the president Heydar Aliev, foreign minister Tofik Zulfugarov, presidential advisor Vafa Guluzade (who played a key role in organizing the conference), and leader of Musawat party Isa Gambar.

This was the first group of Armenian journalists visiting Azerbaijan since the start of the Karabakh conflict. President Aliev highly appreciated the initiative of the journalists: "The eleven year old conflict has sharpened the emotions of the people. The creation of mutual trust is of the utmost importance. In this context the initiative of the journalists is worth support. I think that journalists can do a lot. Few years back such visits was difficult to imagine, that a group of Armenians could come to Baku, or the opposite. I repeat that you journalists by

realizing such exchanges, serve our strategic aim. I consider this a ring in a chain which leads to peace in the Transcaucasus".

The visit of the Armenian journalists was intensively covered by the local media. The one hour meeting with Aliev was entirely broadcast on the state channel. Other channels invited the journalists to talk-shows, covered their arrival and departure, newspapers published first page articles with large photos. As a result, the journalists were identified by the population in the streets. Their reaction was often mild, sometimes even friendly. No aggression was expressed in relation with the Karabakh conflict. The question that was often repeated by the population was: when will all this end, and we live again as in the past?

The CMSP has twice before organized sensational success in the South Caucasus. In 1997, it organized the first post-war trip of five Azerbaijani journalists to Armenia. In 1998, it organized the first post-war trip of seven Azerbaijani journalists to the capital of the conflict region of Mountainous Karabakh. Now, CMSP organized the trip of six Armenian journalists to Baku. Each trip was succeeded by meetings with local leaders, accompanied by intensive media coverage on both sides. Our project succeeded in translating the idea of free circulation of journalists between the conflict regions from an idea into reality. We are happy to have contributed in re-establishing contacts and dialogue between the two sides of the Karabakh conflict. •

ETHNIC PROVENANCE IN THE GEORGIAN PASSPORT?

BY AKAKY GOGICHAISHVILI, EDITOR OF TV-CHANNEL "RUSTAVI-2", TBILISI

The seventh conference of Azerbaijanian, Armenian and Georgian journalists within the "Transcaucasus Media Support Project" took place in Adjara (in Chakva, 20 km from Batumi) from February 26 to March 1, 1999. This report was prepared by the participant of this conference.

Political Situation in Georgia Within the Context of Expediency of Introducing the "Nationality" (ethnicity) Provision in the Passports.

Georgia today is in the process of transition to the market economy, but so far, market relationships are being firmly entrenched in the politics. The driving principle of the market economy-demand creates supply-becomes a form of interaction between political parties and the electorate. Representatives of political parties are not concerned much with the development of political, social and economic strategies. In majority of cases, politicians are trying to win elections on populist slogans.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Empire, political parties have swindled the electorate with nationalistic slogans of self-determination and self-affirmation relevant for that time. Later on, when these slogans brought civic war and economic crisis, and self-preservation became more topical than self-determination, parties began to distribute food for free and promise millions of jobs to win elections. These political games contributed to coming to power, but problems of unemployment remained and free food hardly lasted till the end of the election campaign.

This fall, in view of forthcoming Parliamentary elections, parties compete in their search for themes that could be instrumental for populist speculations.

For example the Labor party with its social orientation, took an advantage of the energy crisis and ganged against the only serious investor in the sector, an American

businessman, demanding his expulsion from Georgia. Anti-privatization campaign however, was not supported by the population, as the people of Georgia knows best how the state management has driven the energy sector into a severe crisis.

But Laborists, along with socialists who won at the elections to the local governance bodies called Sakrebulo, successfully played the "free Ambulance" card. They presented the free Ambulance service as an act of mercy winning the favor of the people. Meanwhile no one remembered that this service will be paid for by the population itself and not by charitable contributions of Sakrebulo members.

The majority in the Parliament used a similar trick on the eve of parliamentary elections. Recently they declared an information war to the private telephone company which introduced tariffs for local phone calls. The slogan of the campaign read: "Give our people a chance to talk about their problems by the phone without limitations". However, the same political parties did not do anything to prevent that very company from illegally conquering the phone market. In all this development, the pro-social opposition was standing aside for - God forbid - not to be associated with the Parliament majority. Deleting the nationality (ethnicity) provision from passports has also become an issue for political games.

According to the decision of the Parliament of Georgia, the "nationality" provision should have been deleted from passports already in 1996, and from the birth certificates - last fall. Despite the fact that both decisions were unanimously approved by the Parliament and no one was against them for the last two years, a significant part of the opposition parties - socialists, nationalists, laborists, communists and parliamentarians from Batumi, required on the eve of elections, to repeal those two laws. Guram Sharadze, the leader of the revisionist movement, claimed that the "nationality" provision had been deleted from ID documents by the Masons, who came to

power and pursue an aim to annihilate the Georgian nation and change the name of the country. The same Sharadze had voted for both of these laws only two years ago, but being aware that Georgians have a historic fear of annihilation, the statement was used to cause great repercussions to his full advantage.

During discussions on the issue, revisionists are trying to play on the national pride of the people, presenting themselves as national heroes. Meanwhile, the truth is that nowhere in the world, besides the former Soviet Republics, people are identified and divided on the basis of their ethnicity. Russia and Georgia refused this Soviet rudiment, laying grounds for the formation of a united civic society. The rising tide of populism in Georgia could bring that process to a halt. In the Soviet empire nationalities were naturally aspiring autonomy and wanted to have as much national requisites as possible. The "nationality" provision in the passport of citizens was one of those identities.

Today, the post-Soviet countries have their own political boundaries and obviously there is no need for additional identities. Differentiation of people within the country according to ethnicity could become an obstacle on the way of formation of the civic society with state thinking. Ethnic minorities separated from the majority on the basis of ethnicity could hardly feel themselves as full-fledge citizens of the country.

The presence of "nationality" provision causes a subconscious fear among the representatives of ethnic minorities, a fear of being considered second class citizens and being subjected to oppressions. Facts of ethnic minorities changing their names and taking Georgian names speak in favor of this argument, and also contribute to the corruption in the Georgian passport system. On the other hand, nationality, as religion and sexual orientation, is a matter of personal choice. The family name of a father is obviously insufficient for classifying people on the ethnic basis. But this is not the point. In a country where representatives of all nationalities have equal rights, introduction of the "nationality" provision for reasons of objective identification is quite dubious- it is sufficient to have a photo, date of birth, first and second names. Giving up to the pressure of revisionists, President of Georgia stated that he had made a mistake approving those two laws, and he should have rather used his right to veto it.

There were rumors about the rift between the President and his parliamentary majority even before, but intense debates over the "nationality" provision made it obvious. Union of Citizens of Georgia, which is also called the party of the president, voted against the revision, and hence against the presidential position. Caught between two fires, the President made a double concession and stated that the decision to delete the "nationality" provision from the passports was right, but it should be restored in birth-certificates. The draft law introduced by the President should have been considered last week but its consideration has been postponed, and it seems like for a long time. Apparently, Union of Citizens of Georgia of course cannot afford the luxury of refusal of President's suggestion. Meanwhile revisionists realized that they have a big chance to lose debates in the Parliament. That is why both sides today claim that the issue requires a further studying and an opinion of the people has to be taken into consideration in making the final decision. The fuss around the "nationality" provision once more demonstrated the ability of political parties of Georgia to sacrifice state interests for the sake of populist slogans-if only those slogans can secure necessary votes.

Regardless of what party wins in the games of politicians, people are always the loser. (As early as yesterday, a new political party was born in Tbilisi. It has unified nationalists of all stripes and has declared the restoration of the "nationality" column in identification documents as it's main mission.). It is not surprising that a negative attitude toward political parties is formed today in Georgia, causing the concern of political scientists.

Today, few months before elections in Georgia, it is still unclear who will hold the ace card i.e. President Shevardnadze, who plays this role for already the seventh year. His name at the top of a party list ensures a victory in the elections. The Union of Citizens of Georgia has started to have numerous competitors in this regard-an increasing number of political blocks claim to "have" the President. Prognoses favor the newly founded Christian-Democratic Union headed by the former minister of national security and advisor of Shevardnadze on economics issues. The ranks of the party are growing rapidly. All the masses know about this organization is that it might most probably become the party of the President at the forthcoming presidential elections. •

MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY IN MOUNTAINOUS KARABAKH

BY KARINEH OHANIAN, TV OF ARTSAKH

Existence of an independent media is the most obvious yardstick of existence of democracy in any country. Regrettably, today virtually all media in Karabagh are state-run. The main cause is the impossibility of a financial independence owing to the low purchasing power of the population and the absence of the advertising market. Starting of the Voice of Justice radio station by several Karabaghi businessmen is the first step on the way of establishment of independent media. The radio station broadcasts in Azerbaijani language. This is the first attempt to establish a direct information outreach with Azerbaijani. Russian and English language broadcasts are expected soon.

The desire of journalists to somehow compensate the lack of free press has led to establishment of non-governmental journalistic organizations. As a result the Union of Journalists was brought back to life, and Stepanakert

Press Club was founded last summer. Tasks of these organizations include protection of rights of journalists, freedom of speech as well as regional and international cooperation of journalists. Department of press and information of Karabagh jointly with the Stepanakert Press Club have developed a draft law On Mass Media which has been submitted for consideration to the National Assembly. The NKR leadership encourages democratization of the state-run press assuming that a meaningful critique increases the work efficiency of state structures and contributes eventually to the improvement of the society.

Certainly critical materials do not constitute a majority in the contents of press publications and TV programs since for our journalists it is difficult to get rid of complexes caused by restrictions of the war time. •

ARMENIA IN SEARCH OF EUROPEAN LEVERAGES FOR ENSURING ITS NATIONAL SECURITY

BY ARMAN DJILAVIAN,
DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF "SNARK" INFORMATION AGENCY, YEREVAN

The foreign policy pursued by the second president of Armenia, Robert Kocharian, can be unequivocally considered as a proactive one. In this regard it stands in sharp contrast to the preventive foreign policy conducted by the former president Levon Ter-Petrossian. Furthermore, the current foreign policy pursued by the official Yerevan is based on clear principles, the very existence of which is an innovation in the foreign policy of independent Armenia. The complementary and balanced foreign policy is fundamental for the functioning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, headed by Vardan Oskanian.

It is beyond any doubt that at present, as well as throughout the whole period of independence of Armenia, the Karabagh problem - an issue of crucial importance for the Armenian statehood and its national security - remains in the center of activities of the foreign ministry. It has a direct influence on foreign policy of Armenia on bilateral, regional and international levels. First and foremost these are relations with regional countries like Georgia, Iran and Russia - the main strategic partner of Armenia. Then the relations with the countries of Western Europe, European structures, the United States, countries of Arab world and Persian Gulf, countries of Eastern Europe and China. Official Yerevan attaches a great importance to relations with all these countries and tries to balance its foreign policy on all these directions, relying again on the principles of complementary strategy.

The period of 1998-1999 was marked by an increased Armenian-Russian military cooperation and expansion of the geography of foreign-policy activities of official Yerevan. Last year Vazgen Sargissyan, the Minister of Defense of Armenia visited China. Terms of his visit coincided with the visit to Beijing of the Defense Minister of Russia.

In 1998, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia visited Israel, and already at the beginning of 1999 he paid a visit to Egypt and countries of Arab world and the Persian Gulf.

The present intensive activities are aimed at strengthening the partnership and cooperation with Eastern European countries and foundations of enhanced political and economic cooperation with the Baltic states are being laid down. Armenia strengthens its ties with the countries of South America. The first official visit of the Armenian Foreign Minister to China is in the stage of planning.

The current proactive foreign policy was set up in Europe. The European orientation of Armenian foreign policy has been and remains one of priorities.

This article will try to analyze the main direction of the European policy of Armenia for the last year. Loss of the image of a democratic state as a result of forged presidential election in 1996, unscrupulous policy over the settlement

of the Karabagh conflict, change of leadership at the beginning of 1998 and rising to power of the "tough" Karabagh leader, at first further deteriorated the shaky stance of Armenia on the international arena. No one, especially in Europe, is willing to deal with the "poor" and "extremist" Armenia, which is regarded by the international community as a "country of one problem" - the problem of Nagorno Karabagh. But already then Armenia's foreign policy started the improvement of its international image.

Extraordinary presidential elections in Armenia became an evidence of adherence of the country to its Constitution an evidence of adherence to its Constitution and indicated a successive nature of authority in a country with a seven-year history of independence. This fact moved Armenia to the ranks of countries which can be trusted. However, this fact did not immediately catalyze a dialogue between Armenia and the international community.

Well, as the proverb goes, "if the mountain does not go to Muhamed, then Muhamed goes to the mountain."

The head of the Foreign ministry of the new Armenian administration makes his first official visit to Germany. He travels not empty-handed but presents to the Federal Republic several valuable German manuscripts which were kept in Yerevan after the World War II. While in Bonn, the Foreign Minister for the first time presents Armenia's precise position on the number of issues including the Karabakh problem. Here, for the first time he makes public his formula of the settlement of the Karabagh conflict - neither independence nor autonomy. As demonstrated by the further developments, this formula is

perceived by the international community with comprehension. Armenia starts to be perceived not as an extremist state, but rather as a side to the conflict adhering to clear principles and having a well-grounded stance.

Having laid a solid corner stone of its foreign policy in the capital of the leading Western country, Armenia intensifies its diplomatic activities on the international arena. Europe and European structures remain the main vector of Armenian foreign policy-Strasbourg, Rome, Vienna, Paris, Moscow, Bern, Oslo.... Armenia becomes not only a country knocking at the doors of the Old World but also a factor in the European politics.

The National Assembly of France adopts a resolution recognizing the Genocide of Armenians. Ankara reacts by imposing an embargo on the economic cooperation with France, especially on the purchases of weaponry. France shows its unwillingness to stay alone in its opposition to Turkey. The Euro-ally - Italy lends a helping hand. Italian society actively discusses the possibility of recognition of the first crime against humanity of the 20th century. Reaction of Turkey is swift. Official Rome is forced to change the Armenian card with the Kurdish one. Italian authorities allow the Kurdish parliament in exile to hold a session in Rome. Nevertheless the Armenian card does not lose its topicality. Armenia expresses its discontent over Turkey's suggestion to hold the next summit of OSCE in Istanbul. Official Yerevan explains its decision not so much by the existing difficulties in bilateral Turkish-Armenian relations, but by the grave violations of human rights in Turkey - a truth, which cannot be overlooked by the international democratic community. Armenia succeeds to win Cyprus over its side. The

International community starts to look for alternatives to Istanbul with Oslo and Vienna as the most probable candidates.

Meanwhile Armenia expresses willingness to become an active participant in the regional cooperation programs. Prime Minister of Armenia takes part in the TRACEA conference in Baku. The plan, developed by Heidar Aliev and aimed at the international isolation of Armenia shows the first cracks. Even the reservation introduced by Aliev in the Concluding Statement in violation of all internationally accepted norms does not save the situation. The international community unanimously welcomes the visit of the Armenian delegation, particularly suggestions on expanding the transport communications of TRACECA.

Putting an end to all discussions about the international isolation of Armenia, Yerevan begins to induce the European Union. On December 17, Francois Lamoreux, the deputy head of the European Commission announces in Yerevan, that "...based on the suggestion presented by the Armenian delegation at the TRACECA conference in Baku, European Union has prepared a special project on rehabilitation of the railroad connecting Armenia, Nakhijevan and Azerbaijan." Hence, Armenia no longer looks like a country of one problem. It becomes a partner and independent player in lots of issues.

Nonetheless the Karabagh problem, as an issue of vital importance for the security of Armenian state, remains the top priority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

An almost six-month period of "silence" by the co-chairmen of the Minsk group of OSCE, were used by Yerevan for stepping up its diplomatic activities. The point of view of Armenia on the necessity

to search for non-conventional, non-standard ways of settlement of the Karabagh crisis finds support of the international community.

Armenia proves the reasonability of its approach at different international forums, putting the accent on the possible global dividends upon fulfillment of these ideas.

The Karabagh crisis is presented within the general spectrum of Pan-European security policy and in the context of an assumption already acknowledged by everybody that "Armenia as an integral part of pan-European architecture." At present, the efforts of the Armenian diplomacy are aimed at fulfilling its number one objective - to consign to oblivion the Lisbon statement of the acting OSCE Chairman in 1996, and not to allow these principles to rise again in new suggestions of mediators.

A number of external factors serve Armenia's purpose. "Oil leverages" in the foreign policy of Azerbaijan increasingly weaken. Oil prices tumbled, oil consortiums are reluctant to finance Azerbaijan's top project Baku - Cejhan, the dictatorship of illegitimate president Aliev becomes unbearable even for the State Department...

Co-chairmen of OSCE have broken the silence. The statement submitted to the sides of the conflict is based on clear unconventionality of principles: "package solution" and a "common state."

The visit of Mediators to the region is followed by Bronislav Geremek, the acting chairman of OSCE. The roles of Armenia and Azerbaijan have changed: Armenia and Karabagh express their content with the suggestions of mediators, whereas Azerbaijan flatly refuses these suggestions. On the eve of the Meeting of OSCE

Foreign ministers in Oslo Armenia makes another strategic step. Emphasizing its constructive approach and considering the wishes of the international community, official Yerevan lifts its veto on convening the OSCE Summit in Istanbul only ten-hours before the expiring of the deadline. The move of Armenian authorities was accepted with gratitude, while Turkey finds itself in a rather ambiguous situation. Now everybody expects Ankara to be constructive.

The Meeting of OSCE Foreign ministers in Oslo sums up achievements of Armenian diplomacy in 1998. Few days later, the Armenian press blamed the Armenian diplomacy in not being aggressive enough and not turning Oslo into a "Lisbon" for Azerbaijan. While in Azerbaijan the general mood is that of a fiasco of the Azerbaijani diplomacy because of the Foreign Ministry or the third countries. In fact, during the Meeting in Oslo, the Lisbon statement was not even mentioned, while only two years ago it was supported by the leaders of 53 countries.

Another blow to Azerbaijan was the decision of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to hold hearings on the Karabagh problem without the participation of one of the three conflict parties - Azerbaijani side refused to send its delegation to Paris. Official Baku failed again to play an old "card" of involvement of the fourth side to the conflict - "the Azeri community of Nagorno Karabagh." The verdict of the

Council of Europe was "those absent are always wrong." The Council of Europe has begun to realize the inappropriateness of linking Armenia's membership to the Council of Europe with the settlement of Karabagh conflict, although it is still unwilling to drag the solution of the Karabaghi-Azerbaijani conflict and relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan on its scene.

But Europe is not willing to play a role of an inert observer either. On March 11, the European Parliament in Strasbourg adopted a resolution on the Nagorno Karabagh. It displays a clear support to the recent plan of co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk group on the settlement of Karabaghi-Azerbaijani conflict, based on of the principles of "common state." Apparently it was the result of the persistent statements of the Foreign Minister of Armenia on inadmissibility of deviation from the compromise - the "golden medium" plan proposed by the OSCE Co-chairmen themselves. EC. Besides, the adopted resolution, which underscores basic elements of democracy and human rights, reduces chances of Azerbaijan to pursue a military option, which it is still unwilling to renounce. This fact in particular i.e. the stance of official Baku, is an evidence of existence of a real threat to the national security of Armenia and Nagorno Karabagh. To strengthen it, quoting ancient Greeks, three components are needed: BREAD, WEAPON and TRUST. Not a single state or government can endure without this. •

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROCESSES IN AZERBAIJAN

BY METIN AFAR OGHLY, ZERKALO WEEKLY, BAKU

For an objective evaluation of social and political processes in the Azerbaijanian republic, it is necessary to consider these processes from a point of security of the Caucasus region as a whole. It is an undeniable fact that Azerbaijan plays a crucial role in the politics of big powers, whose interests clash in our region.

Let's try to substantiate that assertion by concrete examples:

Construction of the main Baku-Cejhan pipeline and enabling of the alternative pipe-line to Novorosiysk through Chechnya, are a manifestation of the balanced political approach, aimed at ensuring interests of the region as a whole.

Regrettably, the "hot" spots causing a great concern hinder the realization of common ideas and plans which are in common interests.

No in-depth analysis is required to make a conclusion that potential armed conflicts on the territories of Georgia, Chechnya and other Caucasus countries serve as leverages of influence on our region. We, journalists have to consistently reveal the very nature of these conflicts and show that they do not benefit any side to the conflict. That idea should become our main goal and mission. Today the old Soviet social atmosphere in Azerbaijan is eliminated and replaced by a new system of political relations. There are 40 political parties and public organizations representing all the social groups, some 600 papers and magazines

which demonstrates the new system of relations in the society. And no matter how new the notions of the authority and the opposition are for public consciousness, previous psychological climate has come to end. As everywhere in the CIS countries, we want to discuss and share thoughts about the common problems of the opposition and leading opposition parties.

One of peculiarities of the opposition in Azerbaijan is a big number of its leaders. Regardless of quantitative and qualitative terms, and lacking a specific social basis, these leaders struggle for leadership. This in its turn lays grounds for the syndrome of intolerance in the society.

Although an issue of dialogue between the opposition and authorities has been largely discussed in the country, it still remains unrealized. Some leaders claim that the topic of dialogue has been chosen wrong. One of the main factors contributing to the tensions in the society is the non-recognition of legitimacy of President Aliev by the opposition parties, even though both the authorities and the opposition claim that they tolerate the existence of each other. Generally, the problem of legitimacy is one of the most important ones on the agenda. It is worth mentioning that international monitors at the presidential elections concluded that even though the accepted standards were not fully met, elections were held in democratic conditions.

Members of the ruling New Azerbaijan party have repeatedly stated that some members of the government are corrupt.

There is a struggle against corruption but it is too early to talk about results. There is a tendency towards integration in the opposition camp and attempts to join forces.

Centrist parties aside, the bulk of others are concentrated in the Movement for the Election Reform and Democratic Elections, and Movement for Democracy. However, it does not imply that parties involved have the same course and mutual understanding. Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, co-chaired by the former Speaker of the Parliament Rasul Guliev, prefers to gain political capital by exploiting radical tendencies in the society. Another major wing of opposition consisting of Musavat, People's Front of Azerbaijan, and National Independence of Azerbaijan parties, have adopted liberal-nationalistic values and pursue a centrist policy. Together with the prevailing integration processes, there are also some disintegration processes.

Unlike Russia, communists in Azerbaijan are rather weak, since they are not united and are uncoordinated.

The lowest age threshold for political leaders in Azerbaijan is 28 years. We even have a 23-year-old leader of the political party. Perhaps for this reason journalists sometimes get into trouble: young politicians use papers to send sensitive

and sharp remarks to each other, and often finding themselves in a difficult situation, claim that they in fact had nothing to do with those remarks and the papers have distorted their thoughts. Papers are left with no choice but to print refutations and thus avoid costly lawsuits. The recent health problems of the President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliev caused a certain stir in the country and abroad. Frankly speaking, the illness of the rival

under the present conditions, does not serve to the interest of the opposition: first, they cannot agree and come up with a single candidate, second, none of them is sure that them alone could withstand the pressure from abroad. Hence,

the retirement of Aliev now is undesirable. Azerbaijan does not want a new chaos. After the recovery of President Aliev, that problem has been solved.

At present Azerbaijan that is considered the most important factor in the Caucasus, perhaps lives through the most difficult but at the same time a glorious period of its history. In this responsible period, we would like to keep moving with all the forces constituting the basis of the concept of the All-Caucasus house. •

TO WHOM DOES THE ARMENIAN MEDIA BELONG TO?

BY ARMEN HAKOBIAN, CORRESPONDENT OF HAYOTS ASHKHAR DAILY, YEREVAN.

Before we turn to the essence of the matter, we should consider several circumstances. First, the way the questions are put requires a delicate approach since the topic is rather sensitive. Besides, the verb “belong” is not the best definition of the topic- the term “who has an influence on media” is more appropriate. Second, a partisan bias in revealing the “truth” is also possible.

Traditions of independent journalism in modern Armenian press have started to appear only recently. The reason is quite obvious. Lets turn to the first part of the question. Today even a superficial glance reveals the domination of official and political media in Armenia. The state controls two leading TV channels of the National Television of Armenia, and together with the National Radio they constitute an inalienable part of the state propaganda machine. Besides, the Parliament of Armenia is formally considered a cofounder (in fact it is a founder) of two dailies: Armenian language Haystani Hanrapetutyun (Republic of Armenia) and Russian language Respublica Armenia. There is also the State Information Agency Armenpress, which competes with independent information agencies like Noyan Tapan, Snark and Arka.

3- 4 years ago each ministry and department were striving to start their own newspaper, but fortunately this is over now. However, the “02” weekly of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and State Security which publishes mainly criminal newsreel has a demand. The high circulation of the weekly runs counter to the common sense, since the reader is usually interested in real facts rather than the official interpretation of the events. Nonetheless, “02” has an obvious success. Curiously enough and

considering this popularity, no one has tried to start a similar independent paper.

This week fact reveals a peculiar detail - establishing of a monopoly over a certain kind of information.

Summing up, we can state that the state in Armenia controls as before, a large number of media, which is by and large is an abnormal phenomenon and runs counter to the proclaimed state policy of support of democratic reforms.

Political parties can be considered as a second force influencing the media, and this also reminds the recent past. Generally, it is hard to define genuine causes of media’s party affiliation. Perhaps it is a reflection of the previous psychology in the new realities. Or perhaps it is a natural counteract to the state propaganda machine.

And there is a reason to that. The first alternative press appeared already during the last years of the Soviet regime: Ankakhutyun of the National Self-Determination Union, Hayk of the Armenian National Movement and Urvat. Two of these papers were purely party organs, while the third one did not conceal its adherence to ideas of National Liberation Movement - Haydat. Briefly, the present reality was conceived already at the dusk of democratic reforms.

The overall media landscape looks as the following:

Almost all more or less influential political parties deem it necessary to have their official press organ. These are Azg of of Ramkavar Azatakan Party; Yerkir of Dashnaktsusyun Party; Ayzhm of National Democratic Union, Hayk weekly which belongs to Armenian National Movement, Hayastani Communist of the Communist party of Armenia, Orinats

Erkir of the party Orinats Erkir and Iravunk of the Constitutional Right party.

Publishing a newspaper is an expensive business and Armenia is not an exception there are almost no self-sufficient papers. Printing paper is expensive, so are the printing services, rent etc.etc.

It is said that independence first of all means an not being dependent on financial-economic terms. Of course a total independence of media in the modern world sounds as a nonsense. As for Armenia, papers like Golos Armenii, Aravot,

Hayots Ashkhar and Novoe Vremya could be considered as independent ones. Certainly it would have not been possible to publish these papers without the financial support of the sponsors. As a result these papers fall under the influence of certain political movements and even individuals. But taking a closer look and analyzing these publications it is easy to see who is who. There are numerous examples of similar cause and consequence situations - population has a low purchasing power with an average price of a paper around 80 -100 drams, which in its turn is stipulated

by high publishing and other expenses. It is not surprising that the total circulation of all papers does not exceed 50 -60 thousand copies, thus the media are not as "mass" as they were supposed to be. The overall picture is quite clear but it would be incomplete without mentioning the independent TV channels AR, (which belongs to the Parliament deputy Meruzhan Ter-Gulianian); A1+ and Mayr Hayrenik. Having a limited audience they nevertheless create a favorable influence on the overall situation by creating an alternative information field.

Generally, it is hard to name any country where media can be considered absolutely independent-everything is relative. However this fact can hardly console representatives of Armenian journalism. The current state of affairs does not correspond to the norms and traditions accepted in developed, democratic countries.

The situation, when part of the media are controlled by the state agencies, others by the

political parties and the remaining small part is relatively independent cannot be considered as normal. An analysis of the situation reveals that this proportion should change, though it is not a sheer mechanical process: it needs an impetus, more precisely a favorable field for the creation and development of independent media.

It is strange that until now we have not developed a precise concept of the media and particularly what kind of press we would like to have. My theoretic assumption is that the situation is not any different in our neighboring countries-if true then this is a rather distressing than consoling tendency. As for the establishment of favorable conditions for media it is necessary to take the following steps:

- a) Put an end to the monopoly of Tigran Mets publishing house by favoring the creation of an alternative publishing house.
- b) Put an end to the other monopoly - Haymamul press distributing agency.
- c) Establish favorable tax environment for media and its infrastructure.

It could sound paradoxical, but despite the unfavorable general situation, one of the main democratic norms - the freedom of speech is protected in Armenia.

The majority of papers, especially independent ones, offer quite elaborate comments on ongoing events, freely make even the most unpleasant comments on the authorities, political parties and any public figure.

Sometimes this freedom is abused , although that is perhaps a change for better. The described situation does not represent a threat for the establishment of democracy and further reforms. The question is how to make the existing media more progressive and corresponding to the principles accepted in the developed countries. Today it might sound a bit early, but tomorrow it will become a necessity. Democratic processes in our country are irreversible, but it is impossible to imagine these processes without a fully developed fourth power. •

COULD HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY UNIFY RATHER THAN SEPARATE?

BY VLADIMIR GOGIDZE, EDITOR AND COLUMNIST
OF THE PAPER "BANKS +", TBILISI

Throughout the last three thousand years, the Caucasus-an isthmus lying between the Black and Caspian seas, has been and remains on big crossroads, an arena of internecine strives and clashes of interests of neighboring and world powers. Hundreds of tribes and peoples, indigenous or newcomers, took part in the ethnogenesis of the nations inhabiting this territory today. Continuous incursions of nomads from Central, Minor and East Asia (Khetians, Assyrians, Arabs, Turks, Mongols and Huns), the Northern part of Black Sea (Kimmerians, Scythians, Sarmats, Khazars) and Europe (Goths) were permanently throwing back the economic development of the region, partly contributing to the cultural exchange among the nations.

So many events took place over the three millennia, that historians serving the politicians today, can "substantiate" any claim of any ethnic group or nation. The history also has hundreds of examples of joint struggle of Caucasian nations against invading conquerors.

There were always wars in the region. Every possible combination of wars of all against all: we against aliens, aliens against aliens with our involvement, we against ourselves with the involvement of aliens etc. The short periods of stability in the region that lasted up to 100-150 years, have always been associated with the dominance of a strong regional country or two or three neighboring giants. In different periods those were Iran, Greece, Rome, Byzantine, Turkey, Russia. The 19th and 20th centuries were marked by the overwhelming influence of Russia. That is why Russian is the working language of this conference. If the conference was in the 4th century, participants would have been talking Greek, if in the 5th century- in Persian, in the 8th century in Arabic, in the 12th century in

Georgian and in the 14th century-in Turkic language.

The Western countries first began interested in the Caucasus at the end of the 19th beginning of 20th centuries with the discovery and the beginning of development of oil fields in Baku. After the collapse of Tsarist regime and the Bolshevik Revolution in Petrograd, the executive power in the Transcaucasus was the so-called Transcaucasian Commissariat, which organized elections to the first common representational body - the Transcaucasian Seim. On April 10(22), 1918 the Transcaucasian Seim proclaimed the establishment of the independent Transcaucasus Federal Democratic Republic. The republic lasted only 35 days, up to May 26, 1918. A more lasting federation of Transcaucasian republics was formed by Bolsheviks after the annexation of Transcaucasus in 1921. The Transcaucasus Socialist Federation of Soviet Republics existed 15 years - from March 12, 1922 up to December 5, 1936.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the issue of integration of Transcaucasian republics has not been raised or discussed seriously, nor did any politician make a statement on such a possibility. There were talks about creation of a system of a collective security and development of interstate political-economic regional cooperation. In that context, in the beginning of 90's ex-president of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia came up with the idea of a Common Caucasian House, that implied a union of all Caucasus nations to counterbalance the influence of imperialistic Russia. It was natural, since all national-liberation movements in late 80's were manifesting slogans of establishing of national states.

Under the present conditions, when no political solution has been found so far neither for the settlement of Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict over Nagorno- Karabagh, nor for the settlement of Georgian-Abkhazian-Russian conflict, it would be groundless to speak about a new voluntary federation of Transcaucasian republics.

It seems even more unlikely, given that unlike the Western Europe, where political or economic unions do not imply any intervention of national entities into the local- territorial affairs, the Azerbaijanis, Armenians and Georgians brought up on the oriental values, think that the central government will continue a policy of meddling in their affairs, or as it was recently expressed by the President of Abkhazia Vladislav Ardzinba "appointing of janitors."

The dominating idea in development of regional cooperation is the union of Transcaucasian countries through the Eurasian Transportation corridor. Neighboring countries and big powers are invited to take part in that project. However, it seems that Russia and Armenia have assumed a somehow aloof stance towards this project (at least that is the impression). How could this position be explained?

First of all by economic and geopolitical interests of Russia interested in having all the main transportation arteries of CIS countries pass through its territory. Being tied to Russia politically more than other neighboring countries, Armenia is compelled to take into consideration Russia's interests.

The implementation of the project of such proportions requires large investments. Western industrialized countries have the money, but they also have certain geostrategic interests in the region. It is not only the control over the oil and gas fields of the Caspian region and Central Asia, but also the markets of both regions.

How does the people of the three Transcaucasus countries perceive foreigners? Polls conducted upon the request of the Berlin-based Klingeman institute by the Georgian

Gorby Sociological Association in Tbilisi in December 1997, reveal the following picture: Armenians are the most tolerant, with 20% stating that everybody is welcome (18% of Azerbaijanis and 15,6% of Georgians also share this view).

48,1 % of Armenians, 56,9 % of Azerbaijanis and 51,8 % of Georgians agree with a pre-condition of having a job before coming.

9,3 % of Armenians, 16,3 % of Azerbaijanis and 21,7% of Georgians think that the immigration should be strictly limited and 9,3 %, 4,5 % and 8,9 % in respective countries think that foreigners should be banned from entering their countries at all.

4,9 %, 4,3% and 2% respectively had nothing to say about the foreigners in their countries.

Another poll with similar questions was conducted in January 1999 in the same countries, but including also Nagorno Karabagh (South Osetia and Abkhazia were not included again). We cannot cite exact results of the poll since they are classified, but sociologists claim that significant changes occurred in the attitudes of large sections of public. The portion of radical xenophobes has shrunk, but so has the number of those who were ready to take in everybody. A more balanced position of accepting foreigners if they have a serious business in the country, is becoming more popular in all of the three countries.

We have no exact data on the attitude towards the foreigners and foreign countries, but we have the results of a poll conducted in December 1998 by the State Chancellery of Georgia, on the priorities of the foreign policy of Georgia. According to the poll, 47 % of residents of Tbilisi consider that Europe and European structures as a top priority for the foreign policy Georgia, 25 % consider the US to be a top priority, 7 % - Russia; 5 % - countries of Black Sea region, 4 % the CIS countries excluding Russia (the most popular of CIS countries are Ukraine and Azerbaijan); 2 % - the Near East and Central Asia (Turkey, Israel and Iran); 1 % - Japan;

1 % - China and 1 % does not have any particular opinion.

As for the political elite of Georgia, for now everything depends on the will of President Shevardnadze. Of course he has to consider the geopolitical realities, public opinion and the preferences of leaders of political parties. The Union of Citizens of Georgia has a majority in the Parliament and is one of the most pro-Western political organizations in the country. Unlike the clearly pro-Western Union of Citizens of Georgia, the Leyborists, who are increasingly popular declared through their leader Shalva Natelashvili , that “ ...Georgia should remain neutral and declare that it will never get into any military or political unions. This is the best guaranty of our security.”

But is this possible considering the historical record of the region?

The only political force openly and clearly oriented towards Russia, the Communist Party of Russian federation and the restoration of USSR is the leader of the United Communist Party of Georgia Panteleymon Georgadze. It is difficult to judge about the real influence of this party. It failed to get the minimum of 5% of votes to pass to the Parliament. The number of pro-Russian voters is declining but time will show how things will evolve. It is also hard to talk about political affinity of leaders of South Osetia and especially Abkhazia. There is a kind of information vacuum on that issue. According to available scarce information, Ludwig Chibirov, the President of South Osetian Republic has the most realistic position on the prospects of development of his people. Perhaps, this is the only region in the Transcaucasus which has seriously advanced towards the overcoming of consequences of the bloody conflict.

By and large the political elite of Georgia suffers from a syndrome which can be called an “Oriental infantilism” : - leaders of political parties and the higher bureaucracy think that they can be idle and embezzle public funds,

whereas the sponsors like the rich Western countries and international organizations, International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the Council of Europe should bear the responsibility for the future of Georgia. These illusions were best of all expressed by the most simple-minded politician of Georgia, Irakli Tsereteli of the Party for National Independence of Georgia. Talking to President Shevardandze at a Parliament session he said: “ We brought you here to find a patron for our country”

Similar attitude is typical for both the majority of political elite and the public.

Not so long ago, the main criteria for public presentation of any leader of any department in charge of economic issues, was the size of received credits.

The last example: recent administrative budget cuts on all hierarchical levels, including the presidential, are explained not by the necessity to save and become self-sufficient, but by the need to meet the requirements of IMF and get more credits....

Many Georgians still think that they can drink wine, sing and dance while someone else will work for them, and the money will flow into their pockets only because three highways and four big pipes are passing through their territory.

Replying to the question put in a tittle of this article, I would like to note that history and geography can unify as well as separate peoples and there is nothing surprising in that. More important is how to find common priorities (mainly economic interests) that would enable nations of our regions to live in peace for the first time over three millennia of history, and not under a threat of big truncheon of the mighty neighbor. It is equally important, whether the mighty neighbors would want to build their relations with the people of the Caucasus not from the position of strength but as equal partners. Will it be possible after so many centuries of incursions and internecine strifes ? •

THE FACTOR OF HISTORY IN THE MASS MEDIA AND CONFLICTS IN THE CAUCASUS

BY **KAKHABER DZEBISASHVILI**, CAUCASUS EXPERT OF THE NEW 7 DAYS DAILY,
CONSULTANT OF THE STATE BUREAU OF GEORGIA ON CIS AND THE PEACEFUL CAUCASUS

Conflicts on the post-Soviet territory are objective consequences of the post-perestroika period, when the forcibly suppressed, long-standing ethnic and political conflicts came out of the direct control of the “center.” Clashing interests of various national movements then, should have inevitably aggravated the situation in the areas of potential ethnic conflicts.

If certain military and political circles of Russia would have not been striving to reinstate a new empire on the ex-Soviet territory, we would have not had the so-called “belt of instability” along the borders of Russia with the former Soviet republics: border conflict with Estonia, the problem of Crimea, Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region in Georgia, Ossetian-Ingush dilemma and Russia’s adventure in Chechnya, the Lezgin issue on the borders of Russia and Azerbaijan, tense inter-ethnic relations within Daghestan etc.

Along with the involvement of “the mighty third side” to the conflict, uncompromising stances of the conflicting sides themselves have played an important, and sometimes even a decisive role in aggravating and developing of ethnic conflicts. The reluctance of the sides to the conflict to understand each other and consider mutual basic requirements (not demands) has exacerbated the situation. If in some other places mutual claims were limited to more or less civilized discussions, in the Caucasus, virtually all territorial and political conflicts after a short period of maturing ended up in armed clashes. This was caused by the specifics of argumentation of the parties, proving their case in appealing to

the history, the past and the negative historical heritage embodied in the historical memory. Such a development of ethnic and political processes in the Caucasus and confluence of various destructive elements alone, could have not contributed to the rapid conflict-generating ability of the region. Another factor of huge influence on the aggravation of the situation in the region was the mass media. Whether electronic or printed, it has an enormous impact on the political and public life of countries, republics and peoples of the Caucasus.

Mass media helps to immediately and widely distribute negative, inaccurate and inadequate information. This in response, creates a negative mood and a counter-reaction of the society to the irritant, which in this case is already not the raised problem or the information itself, but the objects directly or indirectly depicted in the information as the Enemy No. 1 of that society.

The resulting effect is amplified by the specifics of the mass media in the Caucasus. If the South Caucasus has a well developed broadcast and printed media, the North Caucasian media market is far from being saturated. In Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, information is being disseminated through a wide variety newspapers, radio and TV channels, and information agencies, ensuring public awareness and its adequate reaction. As for the Northern Caucasus, the lack of independent and unofficial media is compensated by the prevalence of few local printed media and the mainstream Russian papers and TV-channels. Hence, the public opinion is rapidly formed mainly by the Russian media. Thus, in the South Caucasus region this is achieved through a big number

of media, whereas in the Northern Caucasus and conflict zones, it is achieved through several publications and programs which are read or watched because of the absence of any other choice.

It appears that the situation and peculiarities of the South Caucasian and Northern Caucasian media significantly differ from each other. Accordingly, the role played by the media in inciting or defusing potential conflicts is also different. If in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan the reader can double-check the received information through a number of alternative sources, in the republics of the Northern Caucasus there is a big possibility of manipulating the public opinion through the central printed or broadcast media.

The massive and underdeveloped character of the local media, coupled with the accessibility of Russian media, generally make the mass media the most powerful leverage of control of public and political lives in that sub-region.

The mass media of conflict zones such as Abkhazia, Tskhinvali region of Georgia, Karabagh and Chechnya is a special category. There are five-six names of printed media in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region. Papers of Armenia make the biggest part of printed media of Karabagh. Armenian television programs are broadcast there too. The spectrum of the local press in Chechnya is rather wide, significant part of which consists of organs of various political parties and public organizations. It refers mainly to political parties and figures opposing President Maskhadov and using the media as an effective instrument against the official power. Upon fulfilling their political aims or exhausting financial resources, these papers usually cease to exist.

Despite the sharp differences of conditions of media in the Caucasus, all they remain a powerful instrument of shaping of the public opinion, especially with respect to inter-ethnic conflicts. The polarization of opinions of the

conflicting sides almost always occurs with the "blessing" of the national media and, as always, the principal catalyst of the conflict is the historical past and the difference of perception of history by the conflicting sides. Quite often the history acquires a second layer depending on its interpretation by the sides, their goals and wishes. Helped by the media, it becomes the main basis monopolizing the consciousness of the society and the individual, and leaving the conflict situation doomed to intensification and development into a bloody skirmish.

History and Historic Memory as Crucial Factors of Escalation of Conflicts in the Region

The factor of historic past, always plays a crucial role in generating and developing of ethno-political conflicts. It is especially true for the Caucasus region, where peoples living side by side for thousands of years, preserve principal events of ancient times in their historic memory. Some peoples keep records in form of legends, others in form of manuscripts and written historic chronicles. When the conflict begins to evolve, the standard practice considers a search of historic analogues in relations of the conflicting sides. And even if no convincing additional argument will be found to substantiate the "historic antagonism" and prove the impossibility of the settlement of disagreements, the history would remain a key factor influencing relations of peoples and countries of the Caucasus at least for the nearest future.

Using the example of several conflict zones in the region, it is possible to clearly trace the influence of the factor of history on the ethnic and political relations in the region, and the efficiency of media in aggravating the conflicts. The negative role of media was a result of several specific factors. In some cases the aggravation of the conflict was caused by premeditated actions of the local and influential Russian media. This was the case with the South Caucasus, where the role of the Russian media in inciting the conflicts is

hard to underestimate. The mass media was given the role of the principal leverage of promotion of Russia's own "truth" on the international arena.

Besides, the confronting sides were receiving information about each other mainly through the Russian media which was making them dependent on the information policy of Moscow and allowing it to manipulate sides to the conflict on its own discretion.

In other cases, journalists consciously identifying themselves with this or that community, objectively fell under its influence, considering its normal and fair to protect radical claims of their community. Besides, numerous books, pamphlets and scientific works on the history and development of the conflict served as a special kind of media, and had a significant impact on shaping a negative, inadequate public opinion exactly because of the serious, academic nature of these publications.

The Karabagh problem and relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan first appeared in the media in 1988. Right from the beginning discussions on this issue got detached from the reality, changed direction, and instead of a meaningful dialogue on the settlement of the emerged problem acquired a nature of a "historic competition" and a "battle for history" through the mass media. Automatically, the fact of genocide of Armenians by Turkey and the ethnic kinship of Azerbaijanis and Turks amplified the negative feeling towards the neighboring nation. The vast majority of Armenian media got effected by a phenomenon of an immanent and artificial taboo on certain topics. This censorship can be divided in to two groups:

1. The "Editorial censorship" - when editors prohibit publications of articles not corresponding to their views.

2. "Self-censorship"- when journalists themselves avoid certain topics for the national security reasons or because of national

interests. (Mark Grigorian, "Mass Media in Armenia: Why They Do Not Become a Fourth Power", Bulletin of the conference on "The Post-Communist Changes and Geopolitics in the South Caucasus" 17- 18 October, 1997).

These censorship particularly refer to an "inadequate" discussion of the situation in Karabagh, the national unity of Armenians and others, since any article touching upon these issues is "perceived as a factor weakening the Armenian position in a fight with Azerbaijan." (See the aforementioned bulletin). Military victories are perceived a restoration and confirmation of the historic fairness of Karabagh belonging to Armenian people.

The Azerbaijani media also appealed to historic argumentation without any delay. The fact of political dominance of Turkic and Islamic elements in Karabagh starting from a certain historic period, which later led to the formation of the khanate of Karabagh, were perceived by the Azerbaijani society as arguments proving their case. Participation of Armenian revolutionaries in the anti-governmental rallies in democratic Azerbaijan in 1918-1920, and mass eviction of Azerbaijani people from Armenia at the beginning of the conflict in 1988, has put them against Armenians and predisposed for the continuation of the confrontation and revenge.

The example of the Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation shows how the conflicting sides detached from the real vision of the problem and became hostages to their historic past. It could halve the trouble, if media on both sides was not involved in the conflict. Up till now one could not see or hear even a theoretical assumption of giving up Karabagh to Azerbaijan. The recent political crisis in Armenia, when publication of the more or less liberal vision of President Ter-Petrosian on the prospects of settlement of the Karabagh

conflict, ensued a negative reaction of virtually all the strata of the society and military-political establishment, forcing the President to resign in February 1998, is a vivid example of the sentiments dominating the Armenian society. In Azerbaijan the historic aspect is gradually losing the ground giving way to new approaches on the settlement of the conflict.

In Georgia the problem of inter-ethnic relations was evolving according to the scenario similar to that of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Here too, the media (local, Soviet, and then Russian) played a key role in inciting the conflict. The Georgian media used the factor of history as its principal argument for its position towards the Abkhazian and Ossetian separatism. It is interesting, that the establishment of the new statehood was perceived by the society not as a chance given to all people of Georgia, but first and foremost to ethnic Georgians. Appeals to history were made largely in an inappropriate manner and during the period of ruling of Gamsakhurdia acquired a nature of relations between hosts and guests. Hosts and masters were naturally Georgians, who were responsible for the construction of the statehood. The rest of nationalities were guests and had to help Georgians in their task.

This specifics were prevailing in relations between Georgians and Ossetians since the beginning of the brewing and the actual start of the conflict in Tskhinvali region.

A big number of historic research proving that the migration and first settlements of Ossetians in the northern mountainous part of central Georgia appeared only at the end of XVII- XVIII centuries, where considered by the Georgian society as an undeniable argument for blaming and punishing Ossetian irredentism. The Georgian media came up with attempts of historic analogies going back to the times of King Georgi the "Resplendent" (1314-1336). It is known that back then, the Ossetian military groups fought against the Georgian king who was at war against

Mongols, and even took the Gori fortress, but the "Resplendent" crushed them.

The anti-governmental actions of Ossetian revolutionaries during 1918-1920 period of the Georgian Democratic Republic and their support for Russian troops that annexed Georgia in February-March 1921 were also not forgotten.

The Ossetian side replied by developing its own theory of "Scythian - Alan - Ossetian" succession line and delved into meaningless scholarly disputes that lead only to the exacerbation of the conflict and intensified the negative impact on public psychology.

The local media "restored" the events of 1918-1921, when punitive actions of Georgian national guard against the Ossetian bolsheviks were rather cruel. Events of 1990-1992 were presented as acts of aggression of Georgian "fascists and nationalists" against the autonomous South Ossetia that did not want to stay in "chauvinistic Georgia."

Compared to Georgian-Ossetian confrontation, the historic factor played a far less important role in Abkhazian -Georgian conflict. The attitude of the Georgian society to Abkhazian people has never been defined by a negative historic past. There was simply no negative historic heritage in the Georgian -Abkhazian relations up to the time of abolition of the independence of the Georgian monarchy in 1801 by Tzarist Russia and its forcible Sovietization by the Communist Russia. Since the XI century, the titles of Georgian monarchs had the following beginning: "The King of Abkhaz, Kartvels,..." and this words had become deeply engraved in the Georgian mentality. Disputes were held mainly about the ethnic origins of the Abkhaz people rather than the timing of their residence in the North-West of Georgia. There is a wide spread opinion in the Georgian society that the Abkhaz are ethnically Georgian as they have similar cultural and social life with Mingrels - the Western Georgians. It concerns

particularly the so-called Eastern or “Ochamchirian” group of Abkhaz, who also speak a Mingrel dialect and bear surnames mainly similar to the Georgian ones.

The only historic period depicted in the mass-media was the Soviet period, when, according to the Georgian side, many Georgians were registered as Abkhaz. This fact caused perplexity and confusion for some part of the society in regard to Abkhazian separatism, with media devoting much space to proving the Abkhaz genetic kinship with Georgians. Up till now, this specifics has hindered the development of a radically hostile attitude towards the Abkhaz in the Georgian society and the emergence of the image of the enemy.

Whereas the Abkhazian side was emphasizing its different ethnicity and its blood ties with the Cherkess and Adygh peoples of the Northern Caucasus, proving the destructive effect of Georgians on the future of the Abkhaz people. Desire to dissociate from Georgians is vividly expressed in the words of some Abkhaz leaders, who said: “It is better to be a drop in a sea (meaning Russia) than a tiny brook in a river (meaning Georgia).” The period of ruling of the “Grey Cardinal” Lavrenty Beriya (Georgian from Abkhazia, Chief of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs-NKVD during the rule of Stalin) when the Abkhaz were covertly turned into Georgians was also recalled.

Both the Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhazian conflicts were nourished by historic contradictions thoroughly boosted by the media of the conflicting sides. Today, the Georgian media, particularly in the conflict zones, gradually changes along with the

changes in the society and loses its ultra rightist and nationalistic tonality. Increasing professionalism and improvement of Georgian media strengthens and raises the level its influence on the society. Accordingly, the probability of artificial promotion of destabilization by a deliberate dissemination of false information is reduced.

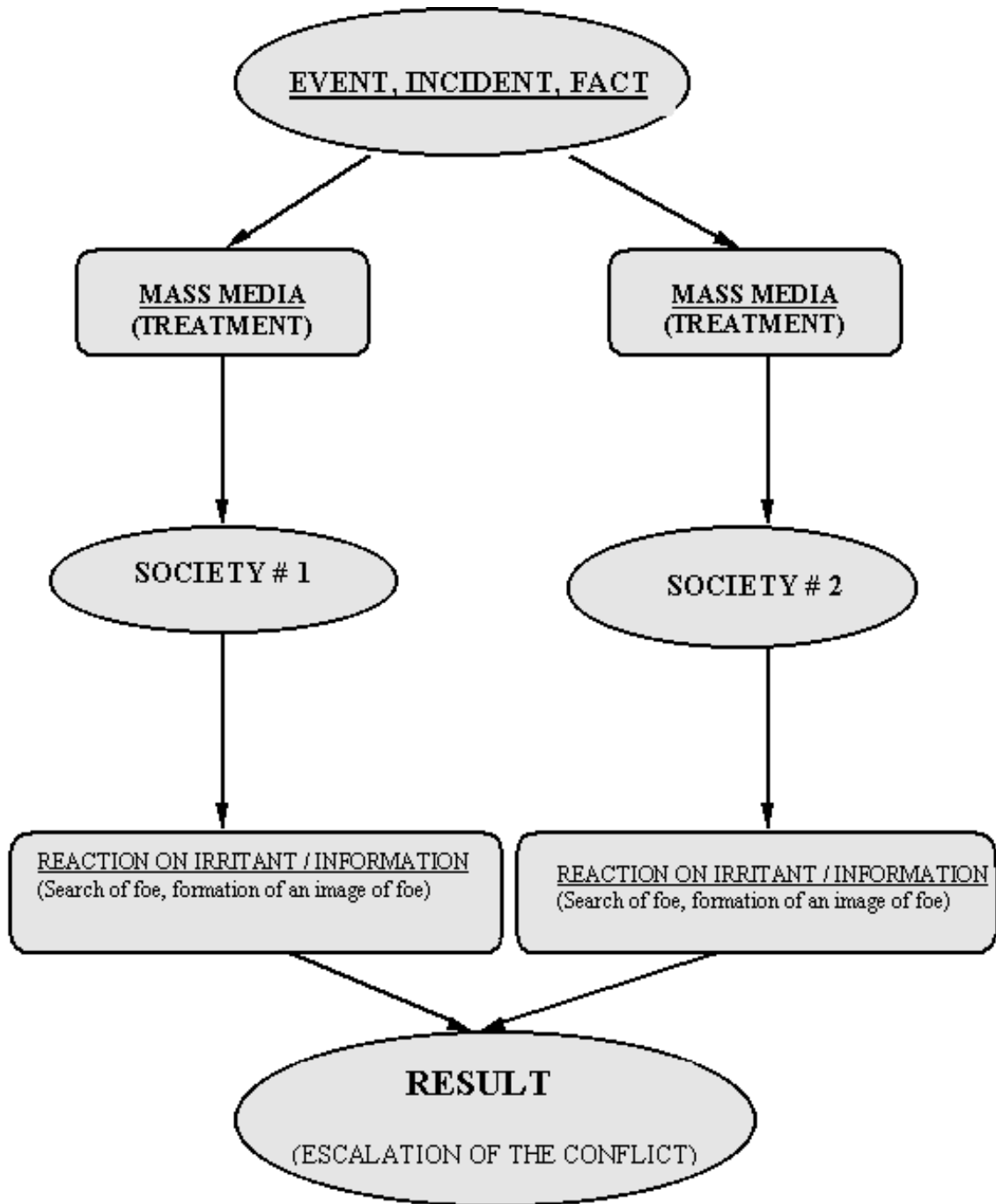
Ongoing conflicts are viewed not as unsolvable dilemmas, but as existing problems requiring a sober and reasonable approach and mutually acceptable decisions. Although provocative publication still appear from time to time.

The situation in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region is different. The small size of the society makes it more vulnerable and dependent on local media. Besides, unlike Georgians, both Abkhazians and Ossetians in their totality, were directly or indirectly involved in military operations—a fact that inevitably affected their mentality and their desire to make contacts with Georgians. That is why the positive role of media in these two societies is more important than in Georgia which is less affected by the post-conflict stress.

Considering all the specificity of the influence of media on the development of processes in the conflict zones, we can conclude that the less the media appeals to the history and the more it is professional, the smaller are the chances for the escalation of the situation. But even appealing to the history and relations between peoples in the past, the media could effectively exercise a positive influence on the public opinion by highlighting positive examples of cooperation in the past which outnumber contradictions. •

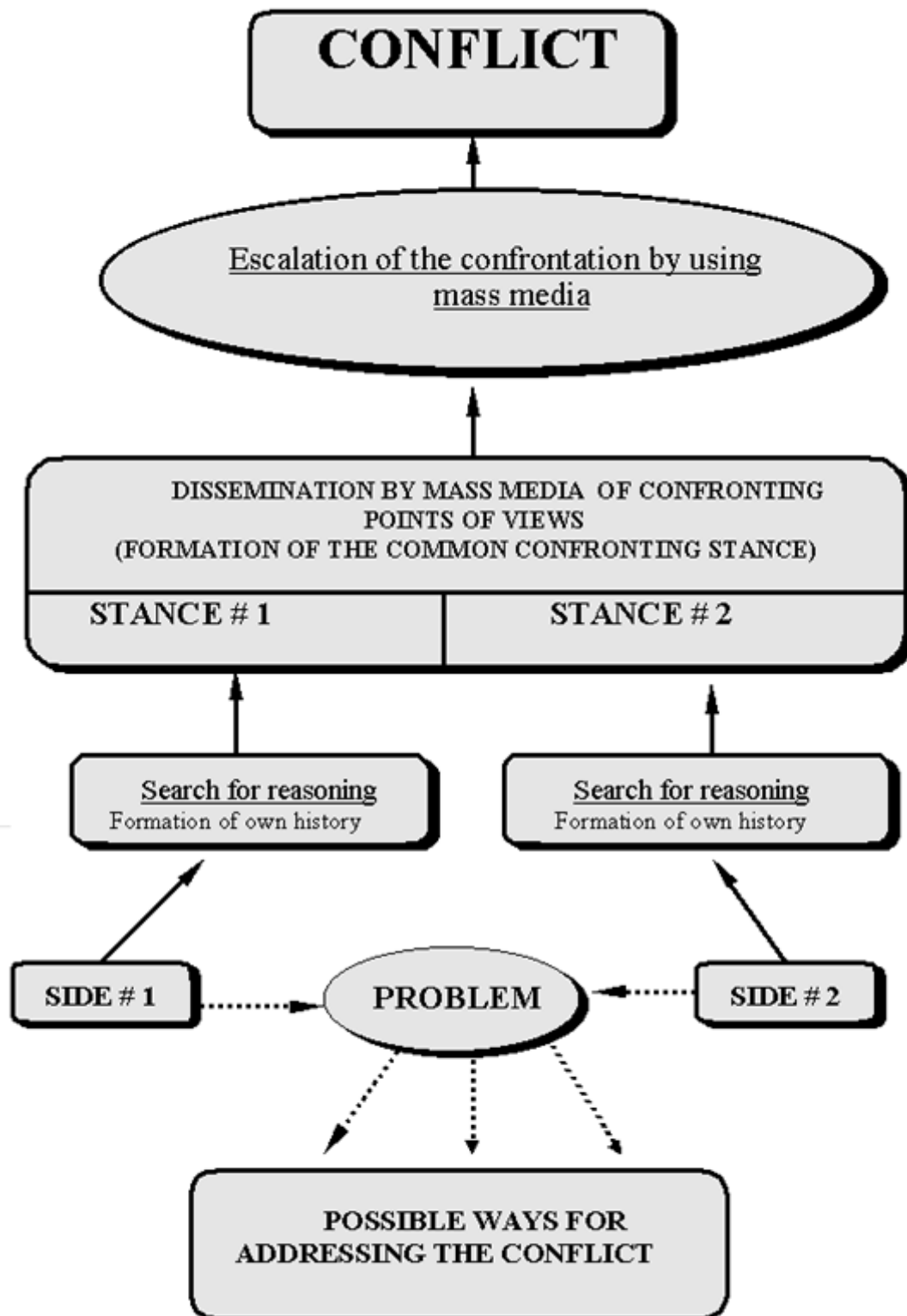
THE FACTOR OF HISTORY IN THE MASS MEDIA AND CONFLICTS IN THE CAUCASUS

CHART 1



THE FACTOR OF HISTORY IN THE MASS MEDIA AND CONFLICTS IN THE CAUCASUS

CHART 2



NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA ON THE CONFLICTS

BY KYAMRAN GASANLI, THE 525TH NEWSPAPER, BAKU

It is sad to accept, but the mass media in the contemporary society quite often plays a major, and in some cases a decisive role in inciting of ethnic dissension.

Is it a deliberate provocation of this or that journalist or paper, or does media become a dangerous toy in the global political games? At any case it is obvious that in all the ethnic conflicts on the territory of the former USSR, the biggest part of blame lies with journalists.

History knows many examples, when an article, TV or radio program, or even a small sketch lead to unprecedented cataclysms and turned around destinies of peoples.

We remember very well how the conflict started in Nagorno Karabagh. Before our eyes, an interview of academician Aghanbekyan to Humanite Magazine sparked a big and protracted war. Publications of Zory Balayan and Silva Kaputikyan followed shortly after. The Azerbaijani writers started to threaten in response. The so called war of publications thus began. The hardest and most disappointing in all that, was the fact that articles were signed not by the beginners or students of journalism, but by eminent and respected public figures. So how should this be taken - a provocation or an irresponsible and imprudent behavior of the journalists? It appears that we deal with both. However, the most dreadful thing is that quite often those were well thought articles, subjective opinions of a journalists who

“served” their nations and wanted to do their best. Certainly, exactly those journalists created an atmosphere of impunity.

Of course it is possible to search and even “find” reasons for the appearance of these articles and the new pseudo-journalists. It could also be stated that the representatives of the “fourth power” that were used to political censorship during Soviet era, failed to duly understand the situation in the era of Glasnost. One of the main reasons of the negative role of the press and television in inciting interethnic conflicts, was that journalists themselves were not ready for such developments. This is easily explained considering that officially there was no sex, crime and ethnic problems in the happy home called the USSR. The Soviet school of journalism did not pay proper attention to ethnic problems.

As a result we, journalists, participated in “making the trouble” and should promote the settlement of these conflicts by all means. The first thing needed from a journalist in this situation is honesty and impartiality. But can we demand impartiality from Azerbaijani, Armenian, Georgian, Abkhazian and Osetian journalists covering conflicts in the Caucasus? Are journalists themselves and the public opinion for this?

A journalist undertaking to write an article which won't be accepted by the majority of public, needs a huge courage and risks a lot. For this reason many journalists do not dare to do so. This in

turn creates a dangerous tendency: the media whose main mission is to influence and shape the public opinion, becomes a hostage of an already shaped public opinion and is forced to take it as a starting point.

Just one example: In 1992, during the successful military offensive of the Azerbaijani army, co-chairmen of Social Democratic Party and eminent journalist Zardusht Alizade, urged authorities to stop the military operation. He explained his demand by the impossibility of the military solution of this problem. Part of the society which could have supported him kept silent, while those who favored military option drastically opposed the proposal of Alizade. It turned out that our society was not ready for such ideas. Neither was the Armenian society, which did not “forgive” former president Levon Ter-Petrosyan for his rational approach to the settlement of the Karabagh conflict.

Another reason of this situation is the wrong approach to the issue by the media itself. From the very beginning of the Karabagh conflict the press did not consider the issue in a rational way, did not search for methods to solve the crisis, did not try to reveal the political and economic causes of the conflict. Instead, the historic

factor was taken as a basis. Both sides to the conflict were dismissing historical arguments of the “rival.” The press started to “process” the history and present it in the variety of forms. The most surprising thing was that even if sides agreed with the facts presented by the opponent, conclusions drawn from those facts were completely different. Publications of Zory Balayan and other “historian-publicists” calling for the “liberation of historical lands” had their analogies in Azerbaijan. Publications where telling about the events of the beginning of the century, when in 1905 and 1918 these disagreements ended in war. These publications were preparing for future clashes and psychologically the society was doomed to war.

Strangely enough, little has changed since that time. Both Azerbaijan and Armenia are in fact preparing for war. The only thing able to stop this is the media.

Journalists appeared to be the only people who could seat and discuss the situation. Meetings of Armenian, Azerbaijani Georgian and Abkhaz journalists have become regular, proving that not all the possibilities are exhausted. More precisely we do not want to exhaust everything. •

DEMOGRAPHY AS A FACTOR AFFECTING ETHNIC CONFLICTS

BY VICTOR SOLAKHYAN, EXPERT OF THE DEPARTMENT FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRATION, VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE "CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC SOCIETY", YEREVAN

For the first time for many centuries (except the eighty years of the Soviet rule), the nations of the region are given a historic chance to build a statehood on their own and to become masters of their own destiny. But instead of building this statehood peacefully and revealing the huge potential of our nations, instead of expected blooming of the Caucasus, the region is full of conflicts and blockades which throw its development away for many years.

What are the causes of this situation? Would our nations ever be able to build their lives independently and in a civilized manner?

Our conflicts have historic roots and are a result of the geopolitics of the region. From the time immemorial, our region was and is located on the crossroads of civilizations. Throughout its multi-millennial history it was invaded from the East, South Invasions were causing mass migrations of population, and as a result territories which were previously inhabited by one nation, today are inhabited by another one or has become a region with the mixed population. These were the mines planted in our region that started to explode when we were left alone: Karabagh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia - are only the three of those detonated mines, and unless we show restraint and wisdom will not be the last ones.

The world does not have clear recipes defining the statehood of a territory

previously inhabited by one nation and presently inhabited by another nation.

According to Abkhazians, the territory of Abkhazia is a historic habitat of Abkhazian ethnicity, but at the time of the beginning of the conflict, the demographic situation there was in favor of Georgians. South Ossetia on the contrary is a historic Georgian land but at present the majority of population are Ossetians. Hence, the grounds for conflicts were laid long before they started.

Within the context of this report I consider two cases of demographic developments referring to the Armenian ethnicity. These two cases are opposite poles in political terms, two different modifications: Karabagh and Djavakhketi. In case of Karabagh historic and demographic factors have always been identical, i.e. 1000, 100 and 10 years ago, as well as now, the overwhelming majority of population of Karabagh were and are Armenian. But eighty years ago, when Soviet Union was taking shape, despite the history, demography and against the will of the population Karabagh, by the decision of an illegitimate body - the Transcaucas Bureau of Communist party- Karabagh was integrated into the territory of Azerbaijanian SSR as an autonomous oblast (region). According to recommendation of an advisor to the Peoples Commissariat on Nationalities comrade Skachkov, this decision was supposed to revolutionize the Moslem

world and speed up the world revolution. This unfair decision of 20s, later prompted the leaders of Azerbaijani SSR to pursue a policy of ousting Armenians from Karabagh. The numbers will show how far they succeeded:

According to the census of 1926, the density of population in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Karabagh were equal, whereas the census of 1979 reveals that the density of population in Karabagh was twice as low as in Azerbaijan and three times as low as in Armenia. This striking disproportion could hardly be explained by an epidemics of infertility, but rather by the fact that within that period about half of the population of Karabagh was forced to abandon their motherland.

People of Karabagh were naturally afraid that such a policy of ousting, covertly carried out by the Azerbaijani authorities even during the existence of a unified Soviet state and general subordination to Moscow, could assume an open and decisive nature in independent Azerbaijan. That is why upon the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Karabagh, in strict compliance with all the formalities (decision of regional Supreme Soviet, referendum etc.) left the Azerbaijanian SSR. Azerbaijani authorities tried to forcibly reverse the decision and seized a significant part of the territory of Karabagh starting the war. People of Karabagh took up arms to defend its decision. As a result of this war, a smaller part of the territory of Karabagh came under control of Azerbaijan, whereas a larger part of the territory of Azerbaijan came under the control of Karabagh. Although a cease-fire holds for already 5 years, wounds of war will not be healed soon.

This meaningless war killed thousands of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, turned hundreds of thousands into refugees and damaged fragile economies of both countries. The worst, is that there is still a danger of resumption of war, as both sides failed to come to accord. Azerbaijan insists on direct subordination of Karabagh that the latter cannot agree with. The last proposals of the Minsk Group (a common state - kind of a confederation), instill a hope for the future success. But this can be achieved through concrete negotiations, and only the public opinion of both countries could force the sides to negotiate. Media play a big role in shaping of this very public opinion.

Thus, it is necessary that media do not inflame passions out of political and campaign considerations, but instead explain to the public, that resumption of war would not solve the problem, but on the contrary will aggravate the situation bringing new sufferings to our peoples and new victims. Whereas a peaceful settlement with a reasonable mutual compromise, would enable hundreds of thousands of refugees to return to their homes and join their people in peaceful building and development of economies of both countries.

The mine planted seven decades ago exploded 10 years ago, causing much suffering to both of the peoples. This explosion was a result of an illegitimate decision of a party body, emanating not from the mutual interests of Azerbaijani and Armenian people, but from momentary political calculations. We failed to avert that explosion, but lets try to prevent the fire from burning everything around, lets extinguish it. Lets prevent the hatred from reaching an

irreversible, fatal threshold as we and our children are going to live here in the South Caucasus.

Another region where Armenian population is dominating is the Djavakheti region in South Georgia. About 100 thousand Armenians that make 91 % of population live in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda regions, are all together in Samtskhe-Djavakheti province there are about 130 thousand Armenians that make 54 % of population. Despite certain inter-ethnic tensions, fortunately it has not grown into a conflict. To some extent it could be attributed to the lack of antagonistic sentiments in relationships between Armenians and Georgians and the absence of historic mutual animosity. However, certain circles of the Georgians establishment, are concerned with the seemingly separatist sentiments of Armenians living in Djavakhketi. Georgians suspect that those sentiments are stirred up from Yerevan. However, mutual suspicion does not contribute to defusing the tension but could rather exacerbate the situation.

To prevent a tension from growing into a conflict, it is necessary to attentively listen to the social, economic, cultural and legal requirements of local residents. Residents of these two regions complain, that for decades the infrastructure of the region remained underdeveloped, lack of roads prevents villagers from taking their farm products out to the market. On the other hand they are unhappy with the fact, that although Armenians make 54 % of the population, whereas Georgians make only 39 %, Armenians are virtually not represented in the governing bodies of the province. To stave off separatist

sentiments of the Armenians population, it is necessary to make them feel as regular citizens of Georgia, and each of them should be sure that respective professional qualifications will make them eligible for any position and will allow a normal professional career. Only then the tension will defuse and dissolve gradually by itself.

The stand of the media in this pre-conflict situation is of crucial importance.

If media are going to embark on stirring up passions, they could easily explode the already fragile, unstable situation. But if media are going to focus on the meaningful solution of problems of Armenians of Djavakhketi, settlement of their social, economic, cultural, and legal issues, they could help us avoid another conflict in the South Caucasus, that will be a catastrophe for both of our nations and countries.

All the efforts have to be undertaken to make the region a pattern of a civilized settlement of pre-conflict situations.

It is not the fault of South Caucasian peoples that they got intermixed owing to numerous invasions of occupiers for many centuries. The policy of infringement of rights and ousting of national minorities is a grievous heritage of the Communist period. The leaderships of all three Transcaucasian Soviet republics have to some extent pursued a policy of ousting of aliens from their republics. Nevertheless the leadership of Soviet Armenia had pursued a more loyal policy towards the ethnic minorities - a fact that can be proved by the last two general censuses of population.

In Soviet Armenia, there was a positive growth of both the Azerbaijani and

Russian population, whereas in Soviet Azerbaijan and Georgia, Russian and Armenian populations were declining. (See table attached). And this was happening even if Armenian got the smallest territory after the “partition” in 20-s, and lost more than a million of lives and the territory of Western Armenia as a result of the Genocide.

Now when our countries regained their independence, it is important not to slip to the path of mutual hatred, especially because in some cases we have already

stepped on that slippery path. We have to clearly understand that none of our countries can succeed alone. Only together can we advance by integrating our means, efforts and coordinating our steps. To achieve this we must eliminate mutual distrust, and media plays a crucial role in that.

Our region is located on the important crossroads between East and West, North and South. It must become a crossroads uniting these civilizations and not dividing them, crossroads of friendship but not of animosity. •

Republics	Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic	Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic	Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic
Area (sq. km)	86.600	69.700	29.800
Population density (1979)	69.6	71.6	101.9
Population Title (main) ethnicity	+ 932.000	+ 302.000	+ 517.000
Population Increment Ethnic minorities	Russians: - 35.000 Armenians: - 9.000	Russians: - 25.000 Armenians: - 4.000 Azerbaijanis: +38.000	Russians: + 4.000 Azerbaijanis: + 13.000

As reveals information presented in the table, although Armenia has the highest population density and the smallest territory, ethnic minorities residing in Armenia have had positive increment of population.

SOME ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNET IN ARMENIA

BY ALEXANDER HAKHNAZARYAN, COLLABORATOR OF THE TACIS PROJECT ON "ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF INTER-INSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION NETWORK", YEREVAN.

Our region as a whole, and Armenia in particular, could not stand aloof from the invasive influence of information revolution and the Internet. Transition to market economy prompted new patterns of economic relations in different industries, and particularly on the telecommunications market. According to the decree of the Government of Armenia, the ArmenTel joint venture, owned by the Greek company OTE, was granted a 15 year monopoly on the telecommunications services in Armenia. Hence, ArmenTel became a monopolist and the main provider of Internet services, leading to any absence of competition - the main driving force of the market economy. At present ArmenTel has offered licenses to Arminco, Infocom and the Yerevan Institute of Physics, allowing them to become sub-providers.

The Monopoly of ArmenTel, absence of competition and a low interest in developing the Internet have lead to the situation, when ArmenTel bothers to lease only low capacity satellite communication channels of 128 Kb per second, whereas the real need is 2 Mb per second. This deprives users of access to some parts of Internet. Services like tele- video conferencing in a real time, distant education, training etc. are inaccessible for Armenian users today.

Another bottleneck is the low capacity of telephone lines. The capacity of analogue telephone lines is 14,4 - 28,8 Kb per second, while the capacity of digital lines is 50-60 Kb per second. The small consumer market and high prices of sub-providers are the main reasons hindering the development of Internet in Armenia.

This all is a result of monopoly of ArmenTel on the telecommunications market, which in turn drastically reduces possibilities for information exchange both inside and outside the country.

Lets recall, that in 1996, for the first time in the CIS, the press -conference of then President of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan was disseminated through the Internet and remote users were offered a possibility to ask questions to the President.

Because of high prices of providers, the press cannot afford to be present in electronic format. Only Aravot daily has its electronic version. (<http://www.aravot.am>).

The site of the National Assembly features a database of all laws adopted by the Parliament and the site of the Central Electoral Commission widely covered Presidential elections of 1998 and the Parliamentary elections of 1999. The Government of Armenia prepares to launch its own site. Information agencies Noyan Tapan and Armenpress also have their web sites.

UNDP and the Centre of Education of Information Technologies are of great help to the development of Internet. They offer free Internet access and classes for everybody. Several Internet cafes in Yerevan charge 3-4 USD per hour.

Currently the Government of Armenia and the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications work on limiting and lifting the monopoly of ArmenTel.

Hope that this will spur up competition, bring down prices, increase number of users, and intensify the growth of information technologies in Armenia. •

THE ROLE OF INTERNET IN THE MEDIA OF AZERBAIJAN

BY NURLANA GULIEVA, AL-VER NEWSPAPER, BAKU

It is already three years that people of Azerbaijan have a chance to communicate with any place in the world sitting in front of their computers.

As of today 15 thousand users, individual or corporate, have offered themselves such a possibility. Five Internet providers operate in Baku today: Intrans, AIS, Azerun, Artel, and ANS. Besides, there is a state provider which offers services to state agencies. Special classes organised in Baku, offer courses on use of Internet.

CR - a US-based information agency, sponsored and assisted by AITB of the Open Society Institute of Azerbaijan, (Soros fund) operates 4 classes for free. 20 companies offer paid Internet access.

The Internet is most of all used by the media. Today, almost 90 % of papers have an access to it and use information, materials and photos for their publications.

What did Internet give to journalists of Azerbaijan? First of all an ocean of information, a possibility to look through daily information bulletins of the leading information agencies, read foreign papers and magazines sitting in their working place.

Three Azerbaijani papers - Zerkalo, Yejednevnie Novosti and Azadlygh, and two information agencies - Turan and Trend, together with ANS and Space TV channels, are presented on the Internet. Considering that today there are more than 100 newspapers and 15 information agencies, these figures could hardly be considered satisfactory. The problem is that the majority of our media lack financial resources to spent on something, which is assumed not to bring any substantial profit.

The absence of Azerbaijani fonts also plays a negative role. As Zerkalo is published in two languages, this problem touched also the most

popular paper of Azerbaijan. As a way out of that situation, the weekly uses Latin fonts for the electronic version and Cyrillic fonts for the printed version. But even in that case some problems remained. The Azerbaijani alphabet contains several specific letters, that do not exist in Latin or Cyrillic alphabets. Hence, we are forced to replace those specific letters with the existing ones, distort our language and cause inconveniences for our readers. According to the available information, Microsoft is going to include Azerbaijani fonts in its coming software. I think with such a development the problem will be solved.

Talking about problems of Azerbaijani papers in using the Internet, we can not forget the problem of storage of archives on the net. At present, papers do not have a possibility of putting big volumes of information on their home pages, and are able to present only the current issue. However, a year of experience Zerkalo reveals, that there is a demand for not only the current issue, but also for archives-we get e-mail messages from all around the world, asking for information published in previous issues. But even the financially secure Zerkalo cannot afford to have a software and computer specialists, which are in big demand and cost a lot in Azerbaijan.

Besides the above mentioned problems, there are also problems which are common for any Internet user in Azerbaijan. These are: the low speed as a result of the low quality of communication lines, overload of lines and unscrupulous services of some Internet Service Providers.

Despite all these problems the utility of introduction of the Internet in media cannot be underestimated. As for the problems, lets hope that with the development of the global network they will be eliminated in Azerbaijan. •

AJARIA'S FIGHT FOR AUTONOMY

VICKEN CHETERIAN, BATUMI, END OF FEBRUARY

Driving from Tbilisi to Batumi - the biggest Georgian sea port - one has to cross a strange kind of border. At the entrance of the "Ajar Autonomous Republic" one is faced by concrete blocks placed in a defensive manner to block the road in case of a tank invasion. Behind them armed and uniformed men check cars and passports, while a customs check levies taxes on trucks transporting merchandise. Opposite, no one stands, as if this is a one-sided border. In fact, Ajaria is part of Georgia, but a part that insists on its autonomy.

The westernmost region on Georgia's Black Sea coast, the 3'000 square km province has a strategic importance for the whole Caucasus. Batumi is the main port for commerce for the land-locked regions of the Caucasus, and even for the Central Asian states. Through its frontier with Turkey passes both the highway and railroad that connects the Transcaucasus with Turkey. This region covered by tea plantations and orange grooves is populated by Georgian's of Muslim faith, distinguishing themselves from the rest of the Orthodox Georgians. Ajaria's status is decided under international law, with the Turkish-Soviet treaty of Kars signed in 1921.

One man holds all the power in Ajaria, Aslan Abashidze the chairman of the local parliament. His followers call him "Aslan Bek" using the old Ottoman title; Abashidze traces his origins to local aristocratic roots back to the middle ages. He rules in Ajaria without contest, and

dissident ideas are not tolerated. US State Department human rights country report of 1998 criticizes elections practices, and adds: "the most serious violations noted during the 1995 [parliamentary] elections occurred in Ajara". the Abashidze boasts to have achieved two things that the rest of Georgia does not have: in the early 90'ies while the country plunged into civil-war and inter-ethnic violence, Ajaria enjoyed peace and stability. And moreover the standard of living in Ajaria is better compared to the rest of the country, thanks to the transit business.

The short and bald Abashidze is a shrewd politician. He received us with a group of visiting journalists two days after he had rejected to join the Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze on an official visit to Turkey, officially for illness. He wanted to show that his problem with Shevardnadze was purely political. In fact, Abashidze visits more often neighboring Turkey, where he has excellent relations and direct contacts. Abashidze has equally good relations with Moscow, and more particularly with the Russian military base in Ajaria. Most of the servicemen at this base are locally recruited, and are a source of income for a region hard-hit by the post-Soviet collapse. Moreover, the military base provides the necessary protection for Ajaria, in case of any attempts by the central government into forcing them. In 1991, when then Georgian defense minister Tengiz Kitovani tried to send his forces to Ajaria, their attempt was frustrated by the Russian military.

The autonomous policy of Ajaria does not please Tbilisi. Many fear that at the right moment, Abashidze will declare the separation of Ajaria from Georgia. Such a vision is influenced by the traumatic experiences of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, where after military confrontations Tbilisi lost control over these regions. The suspicion in Tbilisi is further increased by the good relations between the Ajar leadership and the local Russian military. The predominant idea in Georgia is that the Russian military is the cause of both secessionist rebellions, and they fear Russia is able to repeat the same in Ajaria. Moreover, some Georgians fear that in the future Ajars could succeed in dominating over Georgia. They say that 4-6 million Muslim Georgians live in Turkey, and in case of double nationality (which is not permitted actually) these people might get access to Georgian citizenship and be mobilized to vote for Abashidze.

Abashidze, on the contrary, considers that the problem is because politicians in Tbilisi want to curb the autonomy regions like Ajaria enjoy. He complained that

while in Ajaria is the most important participant among the regions for the national budget, the ventral authorities discourage foreign investors and international donors from working with Ajaria. Moreover, Ajaria is being boycotted by Tbilisi in an attempt to circumscribe this autonomous republic. For example, the new pipeline that is being built to pump Caspian oil to the Black Sea end at the Supsa terminal, a dozen kilometer from Ajaria, while an older one ended near Batumi. The Georgian authorities are using European Union TRASECA project investments to develop the Poti sea port, to reduce the importance of Batumi. Moreover, new projects are being develop to link Georgian railway and highway systems with Turkey at places controlled by the Georgian government. In few years, Ajaria risks to lose both its strategic significance and the lucrative income of transit business. A number of politicians in Tbilisi have recently aroused the anger of Ajaria by insisting that there was no point of having Ajaria with an "autonomous" status, and proposed to revise it...•

HALF TOTALITARIAN HALF SEPARATIST ADJARIA

BY KAMAL ALI, ZERKALO WEEKLY, BAKU

Georgia is perhaps the most unlucky with separatism. In addition to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the country is beset by active destructive processes in Djavakheti, an Armenian populated region, and in Adjara strangely enough populated by Georgians. Through this land which was called Kolkhida in ancient times, are passing the Great Silk Route, TRASECA and the roads from Azerbaijan to Turkey.

Adjara got an autonomous status in the first years of the Soviet rule. Soviet authorities took into consideration the fact that this land of plenty was a part of Ottoman empire not long ago, and part of its population are Georgian Moslems. The present constitution of Georgia does not touch upon issues of autonomy (they are waiting for the settlement of Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts) but Adjarians, more precisely the rulers of the region, consider themselves autonomous and independent. Aslan Abashidze, who is called here the "Head of Autonomous Republic of Adjara" told me that according to Moscow and Kars treaties, Adjara is considered as a subject of international law, and international agreements wield supremacy over constitutions. He went on to say, that Adjara is a member of the Assembly of European Regions and he himself is a member of Bureau of that Assembly. In the promotional booklets distributed to visitors this fact is interpreted as an international recognition of independence of Adjara.

Tbilisi, or "central authorities" (according to terminology of Abashidze) treats Adjara with caution, blaming them in regional separatism, forming political blocks with the left-wing opposition and playing up to Armenians of

Djavakheti. The central authorities have offended Adjarians by not allocating a single penny from the financial aid rendered to Georgia by the international community. But they do not risk to go any further than a financial discrimination considering obvious merits of Abashidze - Adjara today is the only region of Georgia that contributes more than its estimated share to the state budget of Georgia.

Abashidze calls himself a statesman and an advocate of Georgia's integrity, but with an autonomous Adjara. He does not push with Adjara's autonomy, and as he put "I have to decide whether I should first stabilize the situation in Georgia and then determine the political structure of the country, or vice versa?" Still another nuance of that statesman - Abashidze is perhaps the only eminent political figure in Georgia that favors presence of Russian military bases in Georgia. The reasoning seems quite normal - "They protected us from "Mkhedrionians" and other robbers that plundered Georgia. For now only Russian border guards can protect our borders, and besides these border guards are no one else but our guys whom I collected from streets. " As we passed the border checkpoint near Sarpi, the guard standing there was still a Russian with the national tricolor flag on his uniform.

The internal political situation in Adjara could be described as "fifty -fifty." Virtually all Georgian parties have their branches here, but the "Union of Democratic Revival" headed by Abashidze holds a sway. The three deputies representing that union in the Parliament of Georgia, are boycotting sessions of the

Parliament displaying their discontent over the imperial policy of the deputies of ruling party.

About democracy. There are no portraits of the Head on the streets as in some other countries, but the cult of Abashidze family in Adjara is obvious. Talking about him, people usually lower their voice. Press secretary of the Head Giorgi Targamadze, was telling about historic merits of Abashidze's grandfather pointing at grandpa's statue in the center of Batumi.

Giorgi Targamadze, just as Abashidze himself, is a member of the City Council of Batumi. It seems Adjarians will not have problems with a successor- 22 year old son of Abashidze, a successful businessman, is already a member of the City Council himself. His company "Agordzineba-M" which was built through the finances of Germans, is the only enterprise in the NIS to produce plastic bricks, doors and windows. We visited an architectural and medical masterpiece-the Maternity Hospital in Batumi built by the fund headed by Abashidze's wife.

Another joint -venture with Turkey "Agorzineba- N" produces stylish cutters from plastics.

Lucrative sea port, three oil-berths, the Marine Stock Bank of Georgia - the hand and the name of the Head of the Autonomy is omnipresent everywhere. Perhaps, this is the major reason for which, the local political elite is struggling to preserve this not-typical non-national autonomy, .

Neighboring Turks consider that region their historic motherland and intensively develop Adjara, building new enterprises, expanding hotels, restoring the mosque. National Democrats in Tbilisi do not like these developments and suspect Abashidze in rapprochement with Turkey. But the worries of the center seem to be in vain - Soviet atheists and local Christians have succeeded in their policy and there are only very few, and mostly elderly Georgian Muslims in Adjara today. Adjara for Turkey is only of political and economic interest and is viewed as a spring board for furthering Turkish political and financial interests in Georgia. All conditions to achieve this are present in Adjara-the internal situation is stable, people live better than in the rest of Georgia judging from their groomed faces, clothes and clean streets.

Adjara skillfully exploits its geographical position. Freight trains with oil from Kazakhstan were passing several times a day under the windows of our wonderful hotel. 40 % of custom profits remain in the local budget, whereas one-third of passenger and freight transportation going through Adjara comes from Azerbaijan.

There are political stability and relative prosperity in Adjara. It is undoubtedly the merit of Aslan Abashidze, the creator of the half-separatist and half-totalitarian regime, so hated in Tbilisi and so advantageous for Azerbaijan. •

THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN TBILISI AND BATUMI COULD TOUGHEN THE TRANSPORTATION BLOCKADE OF ARMENIA

SNARK INFORMATION AGENCY, BATUMI

The Conformation between Tbilisi and Batumi, i.e. between the administration of the President of Georgia Edward Shevardnadze and the Chairman of Supreme Council of Adjarian Autonomous Republic Aslan Abashidze, threatens, in fact, to toughen the transportation blockade of Armenia.

According to the head of Batumi branch of Georgian railways Nugzar Varshamidze, the official Tbilisi, which in this case is represented by the Minister of Transportation of Georgia Merab Adeishvili, blocks the transportation of Armenian perlites to Batumi railroad ferry for its further shipment to western importers through Ilyichevsk or Varna. According to Varshamidze, the central government of Georgia is trying to force Armenia to make its shipments through the port of Poti, which has much lower capacities compared to the port of Batumi with its deep-water and high-capacity equipment. Besides, according to inter-governmental agreements reached between Armenia and Georgia, Armenian freight cars loaded on a ferry in the port of Batumi are linked to Logistic-Express train.

Armenia is not the only country involved in confrontation between official Batumi and Tbilisi to a certain extent. According to Vice-chairman of Supreme Council of Adjaria and representative of Adjaria in Tbilisi Vakhtang Ramzadze, the minister of transportation of Georgia Merab Adeishvili has also made an official request to Kiev, asking to re-route shipments from port Ilychevsk to Poti instead of Batumu. Ramzadze thinks that Tbilisi is

not interested in development of the port of Batumi and particularly in the development of Batumi Free Economic Zone. He notes, that this position is a result of not only internal political considerations, but also certain external factors such as the relationship between Tbilisi and Ankara. The Free Economic Zone in Batumi could have a strong effect on the activities of the Free Economic Zone in Trabzon, Turkey, and become a serious competitor.

The leader of Adjaria Aslan Abashidze, addressing participants of the seventh conference within the Transcaucasus Media Support Project, expressed a sharp indignation over the stance of the Shevardnadze administration. According to Abashidze, despite the fact that only a meager 1 % of the revenues generated by the Batumi port (that makes some 2 million USD out of 200 million USD per year) is allocated for Adjaria, the central government of Georgia stated that it will not permit a single railway car from Batumi port to disembark on the Georgian railway. “

According to the head of Adjarian railways Mr. Varshamidze, the way out of this situation can be found on the basis of agreements reached in Riga and signed by the heads of railways of CIS countries, Baltic states and Bulgaria. According to the agreement, the Batumi railway ferry has been officially registered in the capital of Adjaria. The Minister of Georgia Merab Adeishvili did not participate in this convention. •

ASLAN ABASHIDZE: “ THERE IS NO SEPARATISM IN DJAVAKHK”

SNARK INFORMATION AGENCY

“There is no and there has never been any separatism in Djavakhk. There are a great deal of grave social and economic problems piled up for many years” stated the Chairman of the Supreme Council of Adjara Aslan Abashidze at the press-conference for the participants of the seventh regional conference of journalists from Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and South Ossetia, within the Transcaucasus Media Support Project.

The leader of Adjara reiterated his readiness to include the Armenian populated region of Georgia - Samtskhe-Djavakheti into the Adjarian Autonomous Republic. According to him, that decision has been reached during recent negotiations with the President of Georgia Edward Shevardnadze in Batumi. At these negotiations, President Shverdnadze proposed the leadership of Adjara to include one of the regions of Georgia into Adjara. Taking into consideration the fact, that Djavakhk has already been a part of Adjara before, and by the consent of the leaders of Djavakhk, Aslan Abashidze proposed the President of Georgia to keep his promise and include Samtskhe- Djavakheti region into Adjarian Autonomous Republic. “ We are ready to settle social and economic problems

of that region,” stated Abashidze, noting that, “Declarations of representatives of official Tbilisi that the idea of including Djavakhk into Adjara was inspired by Armenia, Russia and Batumi itself are totally groundless.”

In this regard Aslan Abashidze reminded, that the decision to hold a referendum in Djavakhk in 1995, was made by the ruling party “Civic Union” under the leadership of Edward Shevardnadze, and the decree on referendum was signed by the representatives of this party. Moreover, according to Abashidze, Armenia has detained on its territory one of the leaders of Djavakhk and handed him over to the law-enforcing agencies of Georgia.

“Detention and arrest of this person were totally illegal”, stated the leader of Adjara.

Talking about negotiations with the leaders of Djavakhk, Abashidze told, that a high-ranking official of the Political Directorate of the Council of Europe took part in one of these negotiations. After the representative of Djavakhk drank a toast for “ The united and strong Georgia” , the European guest said: “I would like to drink for such separatists that you have in Adjara and Djavakhk”. •

TO WHOM DOES THE GEORGIAN MEDIA BELONG TO ?

BY DAVID PAYCHADZE, JOURNALIST OF RADIO LIBERTY, TBILISI.

To begin with we have to turn to the legal aspect of the question: to whom does the Georgian media belong and how can its redistribution influence democratic reforms in the country? According to the law, state and public organizations, political parties and citizens of Georgia over 18 years old, have a right to start a media entity.

These organizations and individuals can publish several newspaper, magazines and start independent TV channels. The law forbids the monopolization of the media, and the share of one legal entity can not exceed 25 percent of the total shares. In practice nobody pays attention to that limit.

The right to property is regulated by the Civic Code and the Law on Entrepreneurs, according to which individuals and legal entities alike can establish any kind of enterprise (according to the Law on Press and Other Media, the Mass Media are enterprises). According to the new Civic Code not a separate enterprise, but only the State as a whole can be considered as a legal entity.

Meanwhile according to the Law on Privatization only the Ministry of State Property is entitled to manage shares (stocks) in commercial enterprises on behalf of the State.

This innovation is introduced to restrain propagandistic activities of state agencies by depriving them of possibility to have their own media. However, in practice this regulation has only a declarative rather than practical meaning, and state

organizations, as well as local governments have shares in various businesses, including the media. The Law on Property stipulates that any foreign individual or legal entity is allowed to acquire mass media as a personal property. Financially the Georgian media are rather weak. Under the conditions of an underdeveloped advertising market, retail sales revenues remain the main source of income. As a result prices for papers are high when compared with the income of the people. Financial weakness of the printed media calls into question its real independence - financial groups closely connected with political circles can acquire certain papers. What already have occurred in Russia we might as well witness in Georgia.

At present the information market is more or less stable, with the non-official press dominating the market. Profit gained through increasing sales volume is the only way of survival of the Georgian printed media. Some periodical media have gained a solid ground and have even become profitable. Papers like Rezonansi, Aliya, Akhakli Taoba, Assaval Dassavali, 7 Dghe, Akhali Shvididghe can be considered as independent; although from time to time some of them publish materials beyond the expectations of the readers which are used to clear-cut policy of this or that

paper. For instance, in spring of 1998, paper Akahli Taoba started publishing series of very positive articles about Aslan Abashidze, the leader of Supreme Council of the Adjara Autonomous Republic. However, shortly after that, a newcomer

on the media market-the paper Akhali Khartuli Gazeti ("New Georgian Paper") monopolized on the positive image of Abashidze to a degree, which did not leave any doubts that the financial base of that rich (by Georgian standards) paper is not in the city where it is being published. This paper became an alternative to Sakartvelos Gazeti daily (Paper of Georgia) which is loyal to the values of progressive wing of the ruling Union of Citizens of Georgia party. It is hard to trace down relations between the financial sources and the dependence they create, but of course there is a certain level of that very dependence. Both papers are the cheapest among dailies, and made others to bring down prices to survive.

Whereas non-governmental press dominates in Tbilisi, situation in regions is quite the opposite. Twelve provinces and over 60 regional administrations publish their own papers. The clue to their ownership is more than evident. The portion of an independent press in regions is too small.

Transition of the broadcast media to democratic principles goes rather painfully. Authorities are reluctant to give up their monopoly.

The new, private TV channels are put under harsh financial conditions. The cause is the same - low economic activity

in the country and as a result the absence of the advertising market. Sometimes the owners of these channels are forced to get under the "roof" of the local administration to survive, paying for that with their own independence. Over the period of 1997 -1998, several TV channels financially supported by influential state bureaucrats were created in Tbilisi. The former minister of Telecommunications Mr. Indjiya has a large portion of shares in Iberia TV company and the minister of Agriculture Mr. Gulua is considered an informal founder of TV-7 company. Even more-it was founded with the leftover portion of TACIS loan.

Meanwhile the state still controls the licensing and provision of frequencies for electronic media, which on the one hand leaves loopholes for corruption and on the other hand can be used for ideological pressure. Recently the Government adopted a political decision on establishing of an independent agency for issuing frequency licenses.

The process of redistribution of the press as a property is not dangerous itself, if it is backed by a proper legal basis ensuring non-interference, or a total ban on the financing of media by the state. The information market should remain open for foreign investments and no one should have a right to monopolize it. •

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN SOUTH CAUCASUS AND ITS POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES FOR ARMENIA

BY HAKOB CHAKRIAN, POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT OF "AZG" DAILY, YEREVAN

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the West, led by the US revised its policy towards the East. Its eastern policy focused on the economic integration with the countries of former Warsaw Pact and involving them into the sphere of the Western influence. In order to achieve this goal, the attention of Russians was to be distracted from the Eastern Europe and focused towards the South. This in turn, could have been achieved by posing a threat to Russian vital interests in the Transcaucasus, Central Asia and adjacent regions.

In this regard, the emergence of regional competition between Iran and Turkey, the aggravation of military and political situation in the hot spots like Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia and Chechnya in the Caucasus and Tajikistan in the Central Asia, does not seem to be a coincidence at all. The activation of Islamic extremists - Talibs and the growing influence of Afghani factor in the stability of Tajikistan could not be incidental as well.

The ethno-cultural ties of Turks with turkic nations in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia, their proximity to the sphere of interests of Russia and the fact that Turkey represents American interests in the region to distract Moscow's attention from Eastern Europe, underscored the significance of Turkey.

In its turn the role of South Caucasus as a bridge between Russia and the Near East underscored the importance of the Transcaucasus. For its part Azerbaijan itself represented a trampoline for penetration into Central Asia, which led to the growth of its significance for the West. Thus, along with the elimination of Russian influence in the Eastern Europe, the aim of the West was to protect South Caucasus and Central Asia from

the same influence by strengthening the Turkish factor.

An efficient utilization of the Turkish factor was considering a respective role for Ankara, which was finalized after the fall of the USSR under the title "From the Adriatic to the Chinese Sea." Although Turkey failed to completely prevent the South Caucasus and Central Asia from the Russian influence, it should not be forgotten that since mid 1992 Russia focused its attention mainly on the so-called near abroad. Already in 1993 Russia significantly toughened its foreign policy. Under these new conditions, Turkey found itself in an extremely complicated triple problem: to protect interests of Azerbaijan on the international arena, assume its mission in the Balkans, South Caucasus and Central Asia by getting into rivalry with Russia not ignoring the possibility of a dialogue with Armenia.

It must be emphasized again that the above mentioned role was given to Turkey by the West, in order to direct the military-political ambitions of Moscow southward distracting it from Eastern Europe. Admission of Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary to NATO proved that the distracting mission of Turkey has, to a large extent, served its purpose. It is expected that Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Baltic countries will join NATO as well.

Parallel to these processes, Azerbaijan which considers Russia as a country increasing tensions in the region, appealed to the US to oust Russia from Transcaucasus and Georgia believes that without the involvement of Western countries, Russia cannot settle any conflicts in the Caucasus. This appeal found a respective response in the West, particularly in Washington. The reaction was swift. In July 1997, the Caucasus and Central Asia were

declared a zone of vital US interests. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott officially appealed to President Clinton urging to “take measures to restrain the destabilizing influence of Russia and Iran in the regions of Caucasus and Central Asia.”

Thus, the Russian interests, which were already hurt by the cooperation of Turkey with Georgia and Azerbaijan in political and military spheres, were moved further into a danger.

At the beginning of the disintegration of USSR, the Russian interests were infringed by Turkey, but with the expansion of NATO the US got directly involved in ousting of Russia from Caucasus and Central Asia. This is done by the creation of a variety of regional cooperations and oil projects. It seems thought, that the Caucasian conflicts do certainly make the oil companies cautious. Even if they showed an interest in these Caucasian projects, (in particular to Baku-Ceyhan project) they refrained from making concrete steps towards their realization.

In this regard the Turkish press is in dismay, noting that President Aliyev offers only verbal commitments to the transportation of oil through the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline.

It is obvious that without the settlement of conflicts in the Caucasus there will hardly be any concrete steps towards the implementation of these projects, and the creation of regional cooperations will largely depend on the readiness of the Transcaucasian republics to integrate. According to Senior foreign policy advisor to the President of Azerbaijan Vafa Guluzade, his country considers Russia as its biggest enemy, an obstacle on the way to full independence, and shows a growing interest towards the integration process. The US strongly supports Azerbaijan's integration in the Transcaucasus and the European security structures, including NATO's “Partnership for Peace” program. In its turn President of Georgia stated that, “It is not important in what direction NATO expands, more important is to make sure that this expansion moves in the

direction of peace. “Agreements on strategic partnership signed in 1997 between Azerbaijan and Georgia, clearly demonstrate in what direction this partnership moves. Both sides concluded that “First through Georgia, then through Azerbaijan, NATO enters the Caucasus and gets favorable conditions for a further expansion Eastward.”

As far as Armenia is concerned, it faces a choice: to join the regional cooperation, and through integration with other Transcaucasus countries, assist in ousting Russia from the region. This will create conditions for NATO's entry into the region. Or try to hamper the creation of such cooperations. The assumption that in case of refusal to participate in regional cooperation Armenia will find itself in international isolation is not convincing. On the contrary, if Armenia decides to enter a regional cooperation where Turkey holds key positions in military and strategic issues, and with Azerbaijan and Georgia willingly cooperating with Turkey, Armenia will yield not only its positions in the region but will also find itself in isolation.

All these run counter to the agreement “On friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance” signed between Russia and Armenia, and call into question its strategic interests. It is not a secret that Turkey backed by the US carries out an openly anti-Armenian policy. Turkey not only refuses to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia and imposes a blockade, but has also deployed a whole army corps, simultaneously supplying Nakhijevan with weapons.

Interests of Armenia require a continued military and political partnership with Russia and further strengthening of ties with Iran. Such a policy of counterbalance to growing influence of the US and its close regional ally Turkey, is not an obstacle for the normalization of relations not only with the neighboring Transcaucasian countries, but also with the Western alliance. On the contrary, such a policy will strengthen the position of Armenia in the Transcaucasus. •

MATERNITY SYSTEM IN GEORGIA

BY GALINA PETRIASHVILI, CORRESPONDENT OF "FREE GEORGIA", TBILISI.

There is no free lunch.

(As a Russian proverb goes, "Stork won't bring a baby for free").

"On the eight month of pregnancy physicians diagnosed antenatal death of the fetus. The following two days were filled with doubts, still another two days physicians tried to stimulate delivery. At that time I realized that it is all over. In maternity hospital in Tbilisi, where I have been sent from the regional maternity house, I have been treated in a rather unwelcome way. Physicians and nurses did not try to alleviate my sufferings. To top it off, physicians have demanded to pay for all manipulations they have done with me. I blame no one but the time and place where I have tried to deliver a baby".

This is the story of Marina G. from Akhaltsikhe region. She is 38 years old suffers from anemia, nephropathology and hypertension. Those complications are dangerous but not fatal, nowadays medicine can offer a number of effective preventing measures, e.g. continuous professional monitoring of expectant mother, ensuring peace of mind and nourishing diet. All these factors were unattainable for Marina, since the time and place were post-socialist Georgia living through the fourth year of reformation of the Health Care system.

The rescue of drowning men is concerns of theirs.

Sweeping reformation of Health Care system of Georgia was launched in August 1999. At the time when country experienced total shortage in supply of virtually all kind of goods. The state budget, being undermined by calamities had befallen Georgia, failed to allocate even a meager funding for the Health Care system. Here in Georgia hardly anyone could forget the times when total cuts of power and heat supply, rusty and destroyed water supply system, worn through sewage system where endemic throughout the country, and a kerosene heaters in maternity wards and operating rooms could serve a token of then irreparable situation.

A parturient, coming to maternity hospital was obliged to care of herself as of she was going to deliver a baby not in hospital but in wilderness. She was compelled to care about everything, including bedclothes, baby clothes, medicines, dressings not to mention food. Under these conditions, the decree of the Ministry Health Care was the only reasonable

call made from the dangerously careened health care system - rescue on your own.

Let's illustrate the situation on the example of Tbilisi maternity hospital # 4. This 220-bed maternity hospital, headed by David Koridze is considered rather large. Mr. Koridze assumed the position of head physician in 1992. He is worldly-wise man having vast experience in that field, experienced well being of the socialistic stagnation and disarray of the recent times. Today he gladly reports on success achieved over the last three years. He succeed in providing the hospital with twenty-four-hour power supply, installed a separate power line from Ortachala Hydropower Plant, furthermore he acquired power generator, used in case of power failure, re-commissioned a boiler-house, equipped wash-house, renewed water supply system and stocked up with medicines. Perhaps his colleagues from Western countries can hardly perceive the matter in discussion. But in our reality normal functioning of the hospital begins with acquiring of water pipes and power cables. It is no a secret that the medical treatment in Georgia has always been an expensive luxury. Treatment and services in maternity hospitals, which were considered previously free of charge, have had determined market price. At present those prices are determined and approved officially and termed as an "internal standard".

From now on a patient shall pay not only to physicians but also for issued receipts against offered services, according to established tariffs. Managers of the hospital considered those payments a main source of income and a source of relative well being, which allows them to provide power supply, acquire medicines and pay for communal utilities. So, the optimism of head physicians stands in direct proportion to the bulk of paid services. For maternity hospitals the "internal standards" is something like an auxiliary shop attached to the medical institution whose main mission is to help a human being born.

Very fearful insurance medicine.

(This subtitle is kind of play on words meaning in Russian STRAKHovaya (fear) medicine - fearful insurance medicine.)

Today in Georgia one fears to fall ill more than death. To visit a doctor on any occasion costs at least 3- 5 lari, in addition every analysis and medical treatment

has a determined price. As compared with the current international standards those prices look perhaps ridiculous. However, with an average salary of 30 - 40 lari, hardly anyone could afford visiting physician in clinics. As a result home-based treatment in Georgia become wide spread, hence we are ailing at home. Today a rare patient disturbs a physician on influenza, quinsy or bronchitis cases. People are trying to cure themselves and overcome more complicated diseases on their own. Only on extreme cases they realized importance and urge need in money. For instance, a friend of mine was forced to sell out own car and apartment in order to get money for the treatment. If someone has nothing to sell out, he stakes a life and could be offered no medical aid at all. I purposely outlined so gloomy picture in order to set off importance of free medical assistance in maternity hospitals.

It is necessary to mention that an insurance police offered to expectant mother by the State Medical Insurance Company ensures four free visits to Ob/Gyn physician during the whole period of pregnancy. Only four visits on the 12, 30, 36 th weeks of pregnancy. These visits costs the company 30 lari, whereas parturition expenses depend on complicity of specific case and could be classified in to three following groups:

- Physiological normal birth costs about 100 lari (\$1 = 2.3 lari)
- Pathological case about 200 lari
- Cesarean section - 300 lari

The question arouse what if an expectant mother needs an additional Ob/Gyn analyses? Should she cover all involved expenses on her own? These are vital questions. Additional visit to maternity welfare clinic would cost her 2 lari, while treatment in maternity hospital would cost her 50 lari per day. While working on this topic, I have failed to get an answer to the question - Who covers emergent medical treatment of parturient? It is turned out that this system has not elaborated yet. In case delivery process involves additional expenses, parturient is required to cover these expenses on her own. More often they fail to cover these expenses. Many managers of the hospitals claim that they are trying to settle that matter at the expense of "internal standards", whereby one patient pays for another one. Formally, invoice could be made out also to the Insurance Company. However it fails to pay even fixed insurance amounts not to mention an additional funding. It is turned out that insurance police is intended only for women with robust health capable of delivering a baby in wilderness. Alas, majority of our women is not robust thus much. Physicians say that half of expectant mothers suffer from anemia, the number of thyroid cases increased,

in 60 cases out of 100 fetus suffers from hypoxia, there is also noticed increased rate in perinatal mortality, death of fetus and newborn children.

One thousand infant mortality cases, out of 50 thousand total births, were registered in Georgia last year. Physical characteristics of newborn children have deteriorated, they suffer from acute infectious diseases, pneumonia and a number of developmental defects. Maternal mortality rate in 1996, 1997 and 1998 made respectively 31, 37, 34 cases. The paradox of the current situation lies in the fact that being claimed insurance, our health care system in fact has nothing to do with that concept. To some extent our medical care system can be considered a paid one and budget-supported medicine. As for term "insurance" it could be referred only to the company-mediator operating between state budget and medical organization. Is it possible to speculate about insurance medicine in the country where economy is shattered, industry is idle and income of the vast majority of population is much lower than subsistence minimum? Could any one insure own health? Could anyone pay monthly fees for effective insurance police? Can your company your you are working for cover insurance fee? For us, people of Georgia, these are questions referring to either vague future or well forgotten past. At present funds of the State Medical Insurance Company are raised through compulsory insurance payments of businesses, working individuals (a kind of medical tax) and budget allocations. However, empty state treasury caused a huge indebtedness of insurance company to the hospitals and clinics. The total arrears of the State Insurance Company to maternity hospitals in 1998 made 1, 631,532 lari, which makes up one-third of the envisaged funding.

It is better to be wealthy and healthy.

Did you know what salary gets highly qualified Ob/Gyn physician in Georgia? So, the answer is 25-30 lari. As I mentioned previously, according to State Insurance Company, Caesarian section costs 300 lari. Could you presume how much earn a surgeon who makes the Caesarian section? The answer is ridiculous - only three lari. Yes a meager three lari. Furthermore, surgical operation, which costs a patient 800 lari, gives a surgeon an opportunity to earn only 8 lari.

Fees of surgeon, in amount of 1-1.5 % of the price of surgical operation could be considered a striking, distinguishing feature of our medical care system. But where has gotten the remaining 99%?

According to Professor Poliko Kintraya, a chief Ob/Gyn specialist of Georgia, "More than half of this sum is paid for various taxes. Tax legislation treats

medical organizations equally with barbershop or brick factory. It grants no advantages nor considers specific nature of hospitals and clinics. Furthermore, our efforts to reduce food prices for in-patients are nipped by the Price Control Department. So, recently, I have been fined for charging 10 lari against determined 12". What can do a physician or surgeon who gets a fee of 5-8 lari for difficult and sometimes risky operations? Can our maternal and delivery system, this rapidly vanishing islands if free medical care, remain free? Perhaps it could be considered free but in reality it is requiring payment.

Today an obvious tendency could be traced on increasing a number of paid maternity hospitals. So, in Tbilisi already functions one maternity hospital that requires payment and Ob/Gyn department of the National Child Welfare Hospital offered paid services as well. Of late began to function paid delivery centers attached to the state-run maternity hospital.

The first maternity hospital requiring payment appeared in Tbilisi five years ago. Termed as experimental it is located on the territory of the First City Hospital. Amiran Koridze, brother of aforementioned doctor Koridze, is the head physician of that maternity hospital. Nine years ago doctor Amiran with a group of colleagues took a decisive step. The core of the concept was the idea that Ob/Gyn physician may and have to get high earnings. Who can argue that idea? In 1990 a group of kindred spirits pooled own resources and began overhauling of the maternity hospital. It takes four years to put it in order. Institutional issues were settled quickly. Even City Prosecutor Office had intently interested in that experiment. The group succeeded in overcoming all obstacles and today Tbilisi Experimental Maternity Hospital is considered one of the best in Georgia. The hospital charges for delivery average 400 lari. As a real expenditure exceeds that amount, the paid hospital experiences the same difficulties as the state-run. In some cases parturient fail to pay additional money. As complained doctor Amiran, "Sometimes we incur losses".

Previously, before slump in the exchange rate of the national currency a certain kind of advance payment system was formed, whereby an expectant mother paid regularly monthly fee, accumulating personal fund for upcoming delivery. However, unstable exchange rate has compelled us to refuse that system. Instead appears so-called "terrorism" of expectant mother. The plot is intriguing: an expectant mother waits until for birth pangs intensified and goes to the paid maternity hospital, expecting that doctor will not drive away her and promise to pay later. As soon as she delivered a baby she surprisingly exclaims:

"O doctor but whence should I get money like that?"

It is hard to believe that this depicted funny picture could be true, since it is assumed that our state-run maternity hospitals do not require payment. As remembers Maya Ts. - mother of two-year old son Gogi, "We with my husband tried hard to make necessary savings during my pregnancy. We have known that it is impossible to deliver a baby without payment. Only woman in dire plight would go to deliver a baby expecting free treatment. It is dangerous to insist upon your rights in maternity hospital. When I was delivering, my ward-mate was a woman who paid nothing to physician, since she was in dire plight. She was in an awful situation. Physicians and nurses disregarded her and took every chance to treat her rudely. She has been offered no kind of medical treatment even blood pressure had not been taken".

Even in well being period when physician got high salary, a parturient usually paid money to ensure successful delivery. And it would be strange if that custom would disappear these days. Currently, illegal payments to Ob/ Gyn physician range from 200 to 400 lari. In addition it is necessary to pay to Ob/ Gyn nurse, ward physician, pediatrician, sanitary and so on.

Kristina M., young mother delivered a second baby in December, tries to recollect all expenditures involved in delivery process during five days being spent in maternity hospital.

"It is not hard to recollect amount of money being spent during delivery. It is embedded in my memory like a birth of my child. When I was discharging from the hospital friends of mine were interested how much I spent, in order to compare with their cases. In my case it costs me a hundred lari. We have not much, the same amount we paid for the first baby; although physician and nurses were displeased with paid money. It is good that I am easy to get on with it. Others being rather sensitive usually broke with tears and cry."

As witnesses Guliko Ch., mother-in-law of Maya, she spent \$ 400 in maternity hospital. It would be better id she would deliver a baby in paid clinic, where by paying the same amount once, not is some installments like in state-run hospital she would have been treated much better. In state-run hospital you should pay for every procedure, every minute. Just pay and you will be adored and welcome.

But if one refuses to pay, she will be treated rudely and could be cursed. But I am superstitious grand mother. I have tried not to offend anyone and made much debts. I have rather high salary and expected

to repay debts soon. But what if I would have not money. Perhaps I would get crazy”.

Another mundane story: A well-to-do journalist paid a physician an agreed amount of money for delivery a baby. Confinement was successful without any complication. Happy father inquired a physician how was a delivery process. A doctor carelessly mentioned that everything was normal without any complication. In reply father mentioned, why I paid you this money, pay me back, because my wife delivered herself.

A physician paid money back. Afterwards a wife of greedy journalist had been threatened and treated rudely. She felt very nervous to the extent that soon pediatricians diagnosed newborn child diabetes. Perhaps it is difficult to insist upon cause-effect relation of these facts, but the fact is that a woman suffered from attack of nerves and a newborn was diagnosed a diabetes. Upon discharging from the maternity hospital a woman divorced not forgiving the husband irresponsible behavior.

To make overall picture of the situation impartial, I would like to present an opinion of the other side. Here is opinion of the doctor George M. Ob/Gyn physician having thirty years of experience, “It is impossible not to charge for delivery. It is just the same as you journalists would not charge for writing articles, you would not, don't you? Neither do I. We have not other source of income but the fees of parturient. Today perhaps no woman is observed in maternity welfare center. A woman who is going to deliver a baby came to agreement with her Ob/Gyn physician who observed her during pregnancy. And as soon as birth pangs began the physician comes to the hospital and ensures successful delivery. The amount is usually agreed beforehand and ranges between 200 - 400 lari and is contingent upon variety of factors. Every physician usually has night duties. And if a woman giving birth is not a patient of mine, I would not ask her to pay me. I have to admit that there are also widespread cases of extortion, mainly on the part of nurses and sanitary staff performing janitorial-type duties”. Another conflicting aspect lies in relations between physician and expectant mother. Let's assume that Ob/Gyn physician would ask a French or American expectant mother to undergo additional analyses twice a week during a month. Perhaps she would follow exactly prescribed procedure. But our women first think that a physician required additional analyses as pretext to fleece her. Our women look with suspicion at the physician asking for additional testing.

In virtually all maternity hospitals in Tbilisi(excluding a paid one), staff has not get salary

for a long time. Meanwhile our people regard Ob/Gyn profession as highly lucrative occupation. But to land a job in maternity hospital for nurses or sanitary one should pay a round sum. For instance a midwife graduated from medical school pays 2-3 thousand US dollars in order to get a job in Tbilisi, a nurse pays 5 thousand and a physician for landing a job in prestigious clinic pays much more. One would ask what for? To wait for a long months for a salary of 30 lari?

For recent years a number of medical institutes, universities and colleges proliferated in Georgia. Those private institutes prepare Ob/Gyn physicians and sometimes Ob/Gyn specialty is ranked with professions like journalists, winemaking, computer design, etc. One could come across also shady medical organizations called themselves bombastically “centers” equipped with obsolete facilities and having underqualified staff. Professor Kintraya considers that by applying professional attestation of physicians it would be possible to resolve this entangled situation..

As emphasized professor Kintraya to get a license will not be easy process. In licensing process took part only one-third of total one-and-half thousand Ob/Gyn practitioners, half of which was denied a license.

Although those who were denied a license will be granted two additional chances to get it. It is excepted that by the year 2000 all physicians will be licensed. However, a question arouses, should licensed physicians charge higher? What should we do with cunning insurance and so-called free maternity system?

Today in Georgia everyone is adapted to our strange life - physicians are used to long absence of the salary, insurance company for empty treasure, maternity hospitals to taxes and price policy. And only woman cannot be adopted and evade natural inevitability, after nine months she needs to be cared and treated by physician. Should she wait until proclaimed free delivery become reality? Today she is waiting until rough time over, where it is impossible to earn money. Today in Georgia no one seriously ponder about free health care system.

Marina G. went back to her village and works as teacher. She has the only dream to have a baby. Doctors do not recommend her to deliver a baby. Meanwhile time goes by and she is getting older. However she hopes to make a chance in two years and meanwhile to save some money. •

SIX DAYS IN BAKU

VICKEN CHETERIAN

The small UN plane took off from Zvartnots airport heading directly to Baku. It was June 28. The passengers were not the usual foreign community members, foreign passport holder businessmen or diplomats. Six of them were Armenian citizens, and although I had the white-cross of a Swiss passport, my family name ended with the familiar «ian». In the plane, some of us were silent, while others were talking and laughing loud.

After landing, a UN official greeted us. He had our names and asked whether someone would receive us. Although I said «yes», Kemal Ali, a Baku based journalist and our contact there was nowhere to be seen. The airport security was not informed that we were coming, but reacted in a very relaxed way, providing us with a phone to clarify the situation. One of the airport workers, a woman in her forties, said loudly to a colleague: «Ranshe (before) we had so many Armenian friends in Baku. They were very nice people.» After forty minutes and many cigarettes, Kemal appeared accompanied by tall and muscular KGB officers, who would ensure our security in the next days.

The drive from the airport to Hotel Azerbaijan revealed the numerous stereotypes described by first time visitors: the Aliev posters and slogans on the walls, the rusty oil-pipes and rigs, the grey countryside and the hot and humid air of summer. This was the first group of Armenians going to Baku since the controversy over Karabakh turned into a full scale war. In our group was Alyosha Manvelian, the Armenia correspondent of BBC-Azeri service, who was already in Baku and Ganja in 1996. Gayane Movsesian, the chief-editor of Snark news agency, was born in Baku (Ermenikent district). The occasion of our trip was the eight conference of the three-year old Caucasus Media Support Project. In October 1997 we succeeded for the first time in inviting journalists from Baku to Armenia. Again in summer 1998, Azeri journalists took part in the Stepanakert conference. For over a year and a half I was trying to get the green light to come to Baku. At last...

The idea of the project was simple. First, to create working conditions between journalists from various sides of conflict zones. Then invite them to participate in conferences on the «other side», meet with local

politicians and the population, and return with material for articles or for broadcasting. By doing so, the journalists would become more sensitive towards the fears, the hopes and the argumentations of the «enemy», and therefore have a more differentiated reporting. Since the work is done with journalists, this could have a greater impact on the public opinion. Communication by itself is not enough to resolve problems, and a one of the magnitude of the Karabakh war. But without such exchanges, and many more is needed on both governmental levels as well as on civil society level, it is impossible to imagine finding any civilized way of conflict-resolution.

Some of the papers presented during this conference were better than in previous ones, but there was a sense of impatience; the Armenian and Georgian participants wanted to go out to the streets, meet with the Bakintsi, with politicians...

Already on the second day we met with Vafa Guluzade, the presidential advisor on foreign affairs. Guluzade played an important role in realizing our visit to Baku, by talking about it to the Azerbaijani president and receiving his agreement. Guluzade is a seasoned diplomat, and the architect of Azeri foreign policy. He was there with Mutalibov, and he is there next to Aliev. Guluzade speaks perfect English, and he is a specialist of Arabic, being the personal translator of Soviet leaders including Brezhnev during meetings with such leaders as Sadat or Arafat.

But, surprisingly, what Guluzade said was not very diplomatic. He repeated his position, already heavily publicized by successive interview given since late last year, that the conflict over Karabakh was, in fact, a struggle between Azerbaijani drive to independence and Russian imperial forces. He opened the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, wrote some passages from Russian analysts, and turned to the journalists packed in his office and said, «This confirms that the source of the conflict is Russia's struggle against the Azerbaijani people for complete independence. The Armenian nation has less possibilities to resist, and has become dependent from the Russian military machine. Russia has even unified Mountainous Karabakh to Armenia, to keep Armenia in a dependent position. Without Russian

protection, Azerbaijan could return Karabakh back to its rule.»

Guluzade is a diplomat with a difficult mission. How to explain the Azerbaijani defeat against such a tiny little force as Karabakh Armenians? Add Karabakh to Armenia, still they are smaller than Azerbaijan in every aspect (population, economy, military...). Then, accusing Russia to be behind the war would serve another aim of Azeri policy, that is to become attractive to the West, and especially to Washington. Moreover, the «Russian involvement» theories are popular in the region. Some years back I was told in Armenia that the 1988 earthquake was in fact done by the Russians by an underground explosion to punish rebellious Armenians. In Georgia, the defeat in Abkhazia is directly attributed to Russian role there. No one bothers to have a serious look at Russia, and to explain how the omnipotent force was defeated by the disorganized Chechens? In the mids of the crisis to explain both the sudden collapse of the Soviet giant, the reasons of the conflicts, and the curious phenomenon that smaller units won against larger ones (Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Chechnya), any explanation is good, and any interpretation is of political nature.

What left me the most perplexed is when Guluzade left the field of diplomacy to talk about history. «If one talks about history,» he said, «then everyone knows that Yerevan was Yerevani Khanate, which was Azerbaijani territory. Russia created Armenia on Azerbaijani territory. Let's talk about Zankezour. It was given to Armenia to separate Azerbaijan from Turkey.» The presidential advisor also talked about the Armenian Diaspora, which is using the question of the Genocide to put pressure on Turkey, «for events that happened» under the Ottoman Empire. Why did a diplomat go so far? Was it done with certain political intentions? Or, was it Guluzade the human being reproducing beliefs held common by the Azerbaijani public?

The foreign minister Tofik Zulfugarov, that we met on our third day, was equally attentive to the activities of the Armenian Diaspora. For example, he knew that European Armenians had recently held a gathering, and decided to create a forum based in Geneva. In Baku, I had the impression that the importance of the Armenian Diaspora was held higher than among many politicians in Yerevan... Zulfugarov is a young minister, who left a decontracted, and professional impression on us. Without introduction, he was ready to answer our questions. About Baku's attempts to enter into alliance with NATO, he said: «The idea of the Azeri-US military cooperation should be seen on the

background of Russian-Armenian military alliance.» To the question that in spite of oil, the US is maintaining sanctions against Azerbaijan, Zulfugarov said that the sanctions were becoming less and less strong, and in the future Armenia itself might be subject to US sanctions. The minister was also confident about the future of Caspian oil, and was not bothered by recent failures. «Although some companies are leaving, others are signing new contracts,» he said. Even those who leave, do so after important investments. For example, Penzoil left Baku in February, after investing \$120 million on Karabakh offshore field, from which Azeri economy benefited.

The peak of the trip was the meeting with president Heydar Aliev. After double-metal-detectors check, clicking cameras and recorders, we were invited to take our places in the presidential conference hall. Seven TV cameras were recording the event. Aliev is an impressive personality, who kept the country in his hands now nearly for the third decade. But he looked pale and weakened after his operation this spring in a United States hospital. He started his speech by, «Salam, gau marjos, parev.» The president was informed that Azerbaijani journalists had already been to Armenia, and highly appreciated such initiatives (see editorial). Aliev hardly made projections to the future, and analyzed the past, going back to the years of the Soviet Union and longly talking about his relations with Garen Demirjyan. He was confident that a peaceful solution can be reached between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Referring to Karabakh, he added, «I am not using the expression of autonomy, but the status of self-government, which can be the highest status that exists in international practice. To enter into a more detailed discussion one should agree with the idea that yes, Karabakh should have self-government status within Azerbaijan (...) This is a status bordering independence.» About the opposition: «We have opposition, but what can I say about it... it is immature. I wish the opposition was serious, and not thinking exclusively about taking power.» And added, «our society transited from one system to the other, and we are asked to have the highest form of democracy...» For the president, the major challenges of Azerbaijan in the next century are of social and economic order.

Isa Gambar, the head of the Musavat party, was the speaker of the parliament under Elchibey. In a time when Azerbaijan is insecure concerning the post-Aliev period, Gambar is one in five considered as potential successors. Gambar has a similar discourse on foreign affairs and the Karabakh conflict as the authorities, mainly considering Russia to be the major enemy of Baku, and the major obstacle for

resolving the Karabakh issue. Yet, Gambar has serious differences with the government, going as far as saying that «the current authorities are not legitimate and unable to solve both the issue of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and its social-economic problems.» Asked about Iran, he said: «There are objective reasons for the difficult development of relations between Iran and Azerbaijan. Iran does not want to see a normal, developed and stable Azerbaijan that could attract millions of Azerbaijanians living in Iran. Iranian Azerbaijan should have the right for cultural rights, their own schools and to develop natural relations with Azerbaijan.»

On the sixth day, after the Georgian journalists left by train, and five of the six journalists went back to Yerevan by the UN flight, with Aris Ghazinyan who is a reporter of «Yergir» and the project coordinator in Yerevan, we stayed in Baku. We had our flight a day later to Almaty, the capital of Kazakhstan, for another working trip to Central Asia. We met with yet two other opposition leaders. Zardusht Alizade, the head of the Social-Democrats, is a unique intellectual. Another orientalist, Alizade speaks Arabic with Egyptian accent, where he worked in the 70's. «We think that the conflict should be solved by the Armenian and the Azerbaijani peoples. Without NATO, without OSCE... each mediator that comes here have their own interests.» The concept of Alizade is the following. Karabakh should be kept within Azerbaijan, with its Armenian population having all rights enjoyed. For that, Azerbaijan should win the trust of the Armenians, to guarantee them that their safety, and prosperity within Azerbaijan. «Our party calls for dialogue with Armenia, with Nagorno Karabakh. We never said let us give Karabakh to Armenia. ... In January, we called to end the blockade against Armenia. At any case, our oil reaches Armenian market through Georgia.» For Alizade, a democratic Azerbaijan is the answer. «With the change of the head of the state there will be a change on the Karabakh question. Aliev reached a dead-end,» he concluded.

The last meeting was with Nizami Guliev, a deputy in the Milli Mejlis (National Assembly) from the oppositional Popular Front. The meeting took place in the «café of the popular front», behind the Turan news agency. «We do not support the internal politics of the head of the state. But in foreign policy Aliev has moved from a pro-Russian stand in the first year and a half towards the Popular Front positions,» that considering Russia not as an ally, but adversary. «The plus of Aliev is that he could bring order to a country that was under the shadow of armed groups.»

While in the café, after finishing the discussion, a young man, skinny and with bad teeth, approached

and wanted to talk to «the Armenian journalists». We had such a great attention from the media, TV, front page articles with pictures, that people recognized «the Armenian journalists» while we were walking in down-town Baku. He said that he was a leader of the young Turkic nationalists, and he wanted that we publish what he was going to say. It went on like this. He considered that Armenia had won the war both de facto and de jure. But in some years the Azeri people will take its revenge and there will be no single Armenian left in the entire Caucasus. Both me and Aris were not disturbed by the violence of the discourse, and after the young man finished his speech, we had numerous questions to him. Like, what does he mean that de jure Azerbaijan lost the war? How many members do they have? But the young man was trembling with excitement, and after the conversation ended he left the place as if escaping.

I tell this event because it was the only «aggressive» confrontation we had. What was more common that people talked about the friends they had in the past, the places they visited in Armenia. A refugee from Alaverdi (northern Armenia) said that he dreams about the mountains of his birthplace nearly every night. He wanted to talk to the Armenian journalists, in Armenia. «When will all this end?» he asked. I do not want to sound like someone repeating Soviet toasts of «druzhba», but I was expecting a more aggressive public opinion. This was the first time I was in Baku, and up to now my contacts were limited to meetings with politicized circles of officials and journalists. (I do not know how people think in the provinces, since we did not have an occasion for that). And if I think about my birthplace, Beirut, and imagine six Israeli journalists visiting it, I am sure no one there would say «when will all this end» or «before, we used to live so well together...»

The Azerbaijani public consciousness is shifting its attention away from confrontation of Karabakh. Two major topics of preoccupation are the post-Aliev political era, and the way the transition will take place, and the fact that less oil is being discovered, and more and more foreign companies leaving the country.

On July 2, we had another airport story. After we said good-bye to Kemal, and to the security guard Fakhruddin, we checked-in, and went to the passport-control. The officer there was surprised to see an Armenian passport, first got a bit nervous, and then called his superior. This other, recognized us as «the Armenian journalists», and tried to behave kindly: «when will all this end,» he said. •

NEWS FROM ARMENIA

ARMENIA: TV WATCHDOG RESIGNS AHEAD OF ELECTIONS

Snark, Yerevan, 28 Apr 99

Armenian Press Club chief Boris Navasardyan has announced his resignation as the government's representative at the Armenian National Television, the Armenian news agency Snark reported on 28th April. Navasardyan said he did not think conditions were right there to guarantee unbiased coverage of the 30th May parliamentary elections and that he could do little to influence it, the agency reported. •

CULTURE TV LAUNCHED IN ARMENIA

Snark news agency, 7 May 99

A new TV company, Culture, headed by Armen Smbatyan, rector of the Yerevan State Conservatory, will start broadcasting in Armenia from 10th May. The broadcasts will be in VHF and cover 90 per cent of the republic's entire territory, Armen Smbatyan himself told journalists at a news conference. Senik Gevorkyan, president of the Armenian-russian joint-stock company Prometey Zakneftgazstroy [Transcaucasian oil and gas construction], has helped him financially to set up the TV channel. In fact, Gevorkyan owns the company. A contract has been signed with the Armenian Ministry of Post and Telecommunications on the allocation of radio relay communications and leasing of state rebroadcasting stations. •

ARMENIAN JOURNALISTS RESIST ATTEMPT TO SHUT DOWN PAPER.

RFE/RL, 10.6.1999

A brawl broke out at the editorial office of the independent newspaper "Oragir" last week when justice ministry officials attempted to confiscate its property in lieu of \$25,000 in compensatory damages imposed on the daily by a Yerevan court last April, RFE/RL reports. The court ruled that "Oragir" inflicted financial and moral damages to Mika Armenia trade company by repeatedly implicating it in questionable connections with Interior and National Security Minister Serzh Sarkisian. The paper refused to pay, calling the verdict "illegal and unconstitutional." The brawl stopped after law-enforcement officials were told that the bulk of the paper's equipment is leased. •

THREE ARMENIAN NEWSPAPERS CLOSE

From Asbarez-on-Line 11.6.1999

YEREVAN (Noyan Tapan)—Three Armenian newspapers "Oragir," "Zhamanak" and "Menk Plus" have been closed. The "Menk Plus" newspaper's publication has been temporarily halted by the leadership of the Liberty party, which is the newspaper's founder.

The publication of the People's Party of Armenia, the "Zhamanak" newspaper, will resume in 2 weeks.

The closure of the "Oragir" newspaper occurred due to the refusal of "Tigran Mets" publishing house to print it. •

NEWS FROM AZERBAIJAN

AZERBAIJANI JOURNALISTS ARRESTED, BEATEN.

RFE/RL, 27.4.1999

Rovshan Ismaylov, a correspondent for the journal "Ganun," was detained by police on 13 April, beaten, and held in custody for two days before being charged with resisting arrest, Turan reported on 26 April. According to the annual report of the Paris-based organization Reporters Sans Frontières, at least 24 journalists were arrested in Azerbaijan in 1998 and 40 beaten by police. Ten newspapers were subjected to total or partial censorship in 60 separate incidents. •

AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION PROTESTS JOURNALIST'S ARREST IN IRAN.

RFE/RL, 7.5.1999

Independent organizations representing Azerbaijani journalists issued a statement on 6 May condemning the detention three days earlier of Ganimat Zahidov, editor of the newspaper "Ekspress," by Iranian customs officials, Turan reported. Zahidov was returning from a trip to Iran during which he conducted a 10-hour interview with Mahmudali Chehragani, who is a professor at Tabriz university and a representative of Iran's ethnic Azeri community. The Iranian officials claim Zahidov was smuggling a pair of binoculars, but they also confiscated his tapes of the interview with Chehragani. •

PICKETERS DEMAND AZERBAIJANI JOURNALIST'S RELEASE.

RFE/RL, 28.5.1999

Some 50 people picketed the Supreme Court building in Baku on 27 May to demand the release of Fuad Gakhramanly, who was sentenced last November to 18 months in prison for an unpublished article considered subversive, Turan reported (see "RFE/RL Newslines," 30 November 1998). Acting Supreme Court judge Gulzar Rzaeva promised to review the case. Also on 27 May, Ali Mustafaeu, chairman of Azerbaijan's Helsinki Human Rights Committee, told journalists

that the granting of an amnesty to mark Azerbaijan's 1918 Independence anniversary is not solely the prerogative of the president and that the parliament should proclaim such an amnesty in the president's absence. Mustafaeu also criticized the continued detention of 62 people for taking part in opposition demonstrations in October-November 1998, saying it violates the constitutionally guaranteed right of Azerbaijani citizens to participate in rallies. •

AZERBAIJANI REPORTER CHARGED WITH LIBELING PRESIDENT'S BROTHER

Associated Press Newswires, 06/17/1999

An Azerbaijani journalist has been charged with libel for suggesting President Geidar Aliev's brother wields significant influence in the country's gas station industry, her editor said Thursday.

Irada Huseinova wrote an article for the Bakinsky Rabochy newspaper last November about the gas station business in which she called Jalal Aliev one of the "gas kings" of this former Soviet republic.

A Baku court ordered the newspaper to run an apology and refutation by Jalal Aliev in December.

This Tuesday, the Baku prosecutor's office charged Huseinova with libel and contempt and is seeking her arrest, Bakinsky Rabochy's chief editor, Elmar Huseinov, told reporters Thursday.

Azerbaijan saw a string of libel lawsuits last fall and winter, many connected to articles about relatives of the authoritarian Aliev. The lawsuits prompted hunger strikes by dozens of journalists, and some newspapers received staggering fines.

Aliev, who led Azerbaijan in Soviet times, has been criticized by international human rights groups for cracking down on the media and opposition in his Caucasus Mountains nation. •

NEWS FROM GEORGIA

WHO IS LYING: THE JOURNALIST AND THE VICTIM OR THE INVESTIGATOR?

Ghia Yakobashvili. "Resonance" No. 101, April 16, 1999.

From: CIPDD News Digest, 17.4.1999

The trial of the case the Security Minister and his son vs. the Resonance newspaper continues in the Didube district court of Tbilisi (the minister and his son brought the action against the newspaper for an article which reported about alleged involvement of the minister's son in a recent street incident in Tbilisi when a teenager was wounded). At yesterday's trial the author of the article and the victim's parents claimed that documents of the minister's son strangely disappeared from the case files. •

MASS MEDIA DEMAND RO RE-INVESTIGATE THE CASES OF POLITICAL PRISONERS

Zaira Mikatadze. "Resonance" No. 115, May 1, 1999

From: CIPDD News Digest, 10.5.1999

On March 27 - the day Georgia was officially admitted to the Council of Europe - seven members of the political organization "Free Georgia - Future Generation" declared a hunger strike demanding to release political prisoners. The same day, six prisoners of the Avtchala and Ksani colonies also went on hunger strike demanding a meeting with representatives of international organizations and mass media. These six are the "zviadists"

convicted for the August 29, 1995 assassination attempt against Shevardnadze and are serving sentences in spite of the fact that other people, including the former chief of the state security service - Igor Giorgadze, were charged with this attempt later. In support of this hunger-strike, 32 journalists signed an open letter to the ombudsman, appealing for re-investigation of the cases political prisoners. •

MEDIA AND CIVIC SOCIETY CONSIDER FUTURE LAWS ALARMING

"Resonance" No. 145, May 31.

From: CIPDD Daily Digest, 1.6.1999

Considering the draft Criminal Code which is to be debated in Parliament rather unliberal, the leading mass media and NGOs appeal to the President, the Chairman of Parliament and the Minister for Justice. The draft Code contains, for instance, articles stipulating criminal prosecution for insulting honor and dignity; according to civilized norms, such articles must belong to Civil Law, their statement goes. They point to the fact that Articles 337 and 401 do not clarify that a public appeal to overthrow the government or to wage a war can be prosecuted only if proved to entail a real danger for the society. They are also concerned with Articles 260, 363 and 375 which stipulate special punishments for offending the President, statesmen, procurators, judges and policemen. •

CIS NEWS

JOURNALIST SENTENCED TO IMPRISONMENT

Source: Reporters sans frontières (RSF), Paris 19 April 1999

RSF is protesting the sentencing of journalist Ruben Arutiunian to imprisonment, in Moscow.

On 15 April 1999, during a ten minute audience, and with no other witnesses present than three police officers who assaulted him the previous day, Arutiunian, a reporter with the human rights weekly "Express Chronicle", was sentenced by the Tverskoy (Moscow) court judge, Dmitry Gavrilin, to a ten-day prison term for "hooliganism." On 14 April, Arutiunian was stopped outside the same court by three police officers while taking photographs for a report on the justice system. Accused of having sought to enter the court with his camera, the journalist was taken by the police officers to a room, forced to the ground and beaten. His materials and film were seized.

Such activities by the authorities are unconstitutional, as Article 123 of the Russian Constitution guarantees the openness of the justice system and according to Article 47 of the Russian media law journalists have the right to access all areas in the context of their work. •

KAZAKH JOURNALISTS CRITICIZE DRAFT LAW ON MASS MEDIA.

RFE/RL, 4.5.1999

Meeting in Almaty on 3 May to mark International Media Day, journalists subjected Kazakhstan's new draft law on mass media to harsh criticism, RFE/RL correspondents in the former capital reported. They charged that unless unspecified drastic amendments are made to that draft, freedom of speech and the press in Kazakhstan will be restricted. It is not known who prepared the draft law, which was published in the press last week but has not

been distributed to parliamentary deputies for discussion. •

KYRGYZ AND KAZAKH GOVERNMENTS TARGET NEWS MEDIA....

RFE/RL, 6.5.1999

The Kyrgyz Human Rights Committee and the Vienna-based Helsinki Federation of Human Rights express their strong suspicions that state security officers raided an independent newspaper, "Asaba," on the night of April 24-25 and erased computer files related to employees in the Ministry of National Security. No locks were broken and nothing was stolen. Two days earlier, a senior official of the ministry called "Asaba," asked that the files be handed over, and threatened court action if the newspaper used material from the files.

In another action, President Askar Akaev appointed the chief of the Ministry of National Security in the town of Osh, Imanberdi Jalilov, to head the Osh-3000 TV and radio company. At about the same time, the Bishkek city court ordered the independent weekly "Res Publica" to pay plaintiff Amanbek Karypkulov, head of state TV and radio, the equivalent of \$6,670 for damaging his reputation with the publication of an open letter to Kyrgyz leaders, signed by a group of writers and 20 radio and TV employees. The letter criticized Karypkulov's "anti-constitutional" policies. In Kazakhstan, the government is pushing a new media law which would increase state control over all periodicals, TV channels, and radio stations, according to opposition members of parliament and journalists. •

BEREZOVSKII ACQUIRES KAZAKH TV CHANNEL, NEWSPAPER.

RFE/RL, 17.6.1999

Russian politician and businessman Boris Berezovskii has purchased the Almaty TV channel KTV and the independent satirical newspaper "Karavan," RFE/RL correspondents reported on 16 June, citing a second private Almaty TV station. •