



## **Democratic Developments in Armenia: Challenges and Expectations**

### **Featuring:**

**Arthur Baghdasaryan**  
*Member of Parliament, Republic of Armenia*  
*Chairman of the Rule of Law Party*

### **Chair:**

*Cory Welt, Deputy Director and Fellow, Russia and Eurasia Program, CSIS*

**Thursday, February 15, 2007**

**12:00 P.M. - 1:30 P.M.**

**Lower Level, Conference Room B1B  
CSIS, 1800 K Street N.W.**

### **Prepared Remarks of Arthur Baghdasaryan:**

It is a great honor for me to have a speech in the Center for Strategic and International Studies again for which I am very thankful to Mr. Cory Welt. The previous time I was present here as the second official of the Republic of Armenia. The situation now has dramatically changed and I am here today as a leader of an opposition political force.

Armenia is at a crossroads. We have both Parliamentary and Presidential elections coming up which will decide the future of Armenia. Armenia will either head toward the route of fostering democracy, a competitive open market economy, European integration, and the establishment of the rule of law, or the reverse, an undemocratic means of governance would deepen, the triumphal march of monopoly economies and a foreign policy with no clear emphasis and orientation would continue.

The "Rule of Law" party has actually proven that it is for the first of the two above-mentioned ways of Armenian development. We have struggled and shall do so for establishing rule of law in Armenia. That is why when after the 2003 parliamentary elections we were the second biggest party by our votes we founded a political coalition with two other parties in order to promote the reform processes in Armenia, in order to put an end to blossoming corruption, in order to struggle for furthering democracy and for furthering Western integration and spreading the Western value system in the country.

But when we witnessed part of the state property, including the energy system, being sold for a ridiculously cheap price, and when public opinion is not taken into account in that process, we could not agree to such a policy. Unfortunately, privatization and corruption are words that in Armenia often are identical and mean one and the same thing. Economic monopolies and criminal groups (clans) are hindering small and medium enterprises. Therefore we fought for the decentralization of power and economy, because an openly developing economy and society can accomplish far more than several governmental projects taken together.

The basis of all democratic reforms is legitimate and transparent elections. As I have stated several times, unfortunately the process of elections has continuously been criticized, as there have been too many electoral frauds and falsifications. I believe that free and fair elections have pivotal significance for the actual fostering of democracy. It's a pity that many people in the authorities stand for reforms as far as the latter do not touch them. So I believe that we must struggle for free and fair elections which for some in Armenia seems to be a dream, for the others a romantic deceit, but for us a way of struggle. Indeed free elections are a test for transitional societies aspiring for democratic governance. Free elections occur in free societies.

But recently the atmosphere of fear has become more rooted in Armenia; fear in society has become more visible. That is indicated by data and reports provided by various international structures, including Freedom House, which classes Armenia amongst the "partly free" countries and which stands rather closer to the "non-free" countries than the "free" ones. But one can and necessarily should overcome the atmosphere of fear.

Internal reforms in Armenia are directly connected with the foreign policy of Armenia.

It is necessary to understand that the spreading of democracy and freedom results in peace. The freer and more democratic Armenia, the freer and more protected our society is. Democracy I believe is the best means for achieving stability and integration in the region, as democracy is legitimacy. Free and fair elections are the preconditions for democracy. I appeal to everyone to keep all our obligations vis-à-vis democracy and freedom, and I believe that the hope of progress is far more important than the sad memories of the past.

There are too many unresolved conflicts in the South Caucasus. No one, including Armenia, is winning in this situation.

But I believe that the establishment of democracy and the long-term provision of security and stability are directly linked with one another. No wonder that Benjamin Franklin, one of the founders of the United States said: "Those who would give up basic freedoms for the sake of some temporary security, deserve neither that security, nor freedom." There are less and less people denying the theory of "democratic peace." In the meantime there is no such term as "autocratic peace" at all, despite the fact that there will always be people aspiring to it.

So our problems with our neighbors which we inherited from the past need solutions. This in itself means Turkish-Armenian dialogue, a dialogue much talked about lately. But unfortunately there are no practical steps taken in that direction as of now. We must overcome Armenia's isolation from Turkey, and Turkey should be involved in that. Turkey and Armenia both need an open and sincere dialogue with one another.

Armenia's history, culture, and customs are European. A democratic Armenia must necessarily be a full EU member in the future. Generally democratic countries have peculiarly economic interdependence and by their active involvement in international organizations. Therefore democracy, economic integration, the degree of participation of a state in international regimes and organizations are interlinked with establishing peace regionally and with the

decrease of the probability of armed conflicts. When I say that Armenia's future is the EU and deepened relations with NATO, I am talking about the deepening of Armenia's relations with the two most influential democratic international structures. The more a state is integrated in an international structure the more commonalities it has with the other members of that structure. That is why we see the future of Armenia and our region in the EU.

Hence EU membership, normalization of our relations with Turkey, the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, and establishing good relations with Georgia are the foreign policy priorities of my political team.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict must be resolved. It is diluting our region's strategic value and compromising our European perspectives. The conflict should not be used as a propaganda tool. The only durable solution is a negotiated settlement which will require a compromise on both sides. I am calling for reciprocal compromises for the sake of a better future. But on the other hand this problem can be resolved only by legitimate authorities which are elected by the people. The solution of the conflict is possible only through elected governments which would have a necessary public support, who would be capable of involving their societies in the peace and confidence making process. Regimes other than democratic ones will not be able to solve this conflict, as it will be used for power preservation, as a tool to control the public and stick to power. Some even have their power from this conflict, in which case I doubt if there can be the necessary will and readiness to solve the problems. Power has only one source, and that is people.

We believe in the Euro-Atlantic perspectives of Armenia and simultaneously we want to have relations of cooperation with Russia. Cooperation with Europe and the USA must not be contrasted to cooperation with Russia. Here it would be better to apply the idea of the policy of regional balancing.

Summing up I should say that the only guarantee for long term peace and stability in Armenia and the region are governments which have the vote of trust by the people, which came to power through free and fair elections. Only a democratic government can give a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and reach a predictable peace; only a democratically elected government can achieve the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border and the normalization of the Turkish-Armenian relations. Only a democratic government can integrate its country into the European family, thus evading the eventual nightmarish end – a state having a non-democratic development, and which is becoming a failed state.

But I believe in the democratic future of Armenia!

Thank You!