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16th Seminar

Baku Political Studies Programme 2011/2012

(CoE Network of Schools of Political Studies)
16-18 September 2011, Novxani

REPORT

20 September 2011

Written by: Ilgar Mammadov, Director, Baku Political Studies Programme (BPSP)

The 16th National Seminar of the BPSP was the first in the School's 2011/2012 round. In addition to the 35 members of the 2011/2012 round, several alumni from 2007-2011 groups attended part of the seminar as usual, thus strengthening the networking component of the programme. We also arranged accommodation and meals for some of the guest speakers.

The Seminar was held in the Olympic Novxanı Hotel, 30 km north of the capital city Baku. The focus of this seminar was on bilateral, multilateral foreign policy issues and on the role of parliament in defining foreign policy. The general topic of the seminar was "Foreign Policy Challenges in a Dynamic Political Geography of South Caucasus."

As customary, the seminar was governed by Chatham House rule.

In his opening lecture, the German Ambassador, Herbert Quelle, elaborated on a number of issues of bilateral German-Azerbaijani relations. The discussion allowed participants to identify the German segment of European Union interests in the South Caucasus region. Particular attention was paid to the subject of democratic transition, where certain problematic areas, such as the protection of property of local citizens and foreign investors were discussed in the detail.

In his presentation Mr Ilgar Mammadov, Director of BPSP, introduced major stages of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan since 1987 through the 1994 ceasefire to the ongoing protracted negotiations. The political and legal context of the OSCE mediation was given particular attention. Discussions addressed the chances for a resolution from a number of political, economic, demographic, and cultural perspectives. Participants were divided on the means of making progress at talks, with some arguing for conflict transformation through economic development (i.e. regional competition), whereas others were on the whole pessimistic of the chances for a peaceful settlement. Economic co-operation with Armenia was not welcome as it would allow Armenia to benefit from Azerbaijan's oil wealth without softening its stance at negotiations. Political co-operation and dialogue was generally welcome among participants as a tool for keeping avenues open for future regional integration.

A presentation by Ambassador Roland Kobia, Head of EU Delegation to the Republic of Azerbaijan provided participants with an overview of the European Union's concept beginning with its evolution from the post World War II situation. Participants were asked to compare the concept with the model of the Soviet Union, and identified both similarities and differences. According to participants, the EU concept could not evolve without attaching proper value to the Soviet Union, such as joint (not market) economy, single currency, etc. However, the EU concept developed as a privileged club, whereas Soviets preferred the empire style of integration.

Mr Zardusht Alizada, Director of the Baku School of Journalism, who served in Egypt and Yemen during Soviet times, and is a recognised expert on Arab affairs, shared his views on the wave of revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East. Most participants agreed that democracy deficit was the primary source

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of the Arab Spring. Analogies made between overthrown political systems and Azerbaijan's current political system were supported by one group of discussants, while rejected by another. Projecting political realities into the region was believed to be either premature or a mistake.

A Member of Parliament, Elmira Axundova, spoke about her own and her colleagues' experience in representing Azerbaijan's Parliament in various inter-parliamentary assemblies, such as OSCE PA, Black SEA PA, CIS, Euronest, PACE, etc – a total of some 15 assemblies. 70 groups of inter-parliamentary contacts exist within the Azerbaijani parliament. They serve a number of purposes – from developing model laws to foreign policy co-ordination. Participants mostly argued that the well-known disconnection between popular will and representation in the parliament does not allow the country to use all the benefits of parliamentary contributions to foreign policy making. Some participants argued that Azerbaijan should select Euro-Atlantic inter-parliamentary platforms as a priority.

Discussions with Rasim Musabayov, a Member of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Parliament, analysed the "balanced" foreign policy of the current government as opposed to proposals to affiliate the country with the Euro-Atlantic community or Collective Security Treaty Organisation. After the introductory lecture, participants were divided into two "parties" which presented and debated their "platforms".

In conclusion, a lecture by Leyla Aliyeva, an expert allowed participants to discuss the correlation between the international image of the country and the success of its foreign policy, particularly towards Europe. Participants argued that the global democratic enthusiasm of the 1990s has totally vanished, and the global public opinion is now less attentive to a country's human rights record, but is instead back to the traditional models of "allies versus the others". Other participants disagreed by noting that Azerbaijan's lack of success in pursuing foreign policy objectives was mainly due to their failure to comply with democracy standards.

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WORK SCHEDULE

Friday, 16 September 2011

Place: "Olimpik Novxani" Hotel, Conference room, Novxani, Absheron district, Azerbaijan

08.15 – Bus with participants departs from the square in front of the State Committee for Statistics (near the Azercell Müştəri Xidmətləri) and arrives at the "Olimpik Novxani" hotel at 08.45.

09.00 – 09.15 – Opening remarks by Mr Ilgar Mammadov, Director, BPSP.

09.15 – 10.30 – Lecture by Mr Herbert Quelle, German Ambassador to Azerbaijan. Topic: "Diplomacy in the making: agenda of bilateral German-Azerbaijani relations." Questions and answers.

10.30 – 11.00 – Coffee, informal discussions.

11.00 – 13.00 – Lecture by Ilgar Mammadov, Director of BPSP. Topic: "Challenges to the Peaceful Resolution of the Karabakh conflict." Questions and answers.

13.00 – 14.00 – Lunch

14.00 – 15.45 – Discussion on Mr Mammadov's lecture. Questions and answers.

15.45 – 16.00 – Coffee, informal discussions.

16.00 – 18.00 – Ambassador Roland Kobia, Head of EU Delegation to the Republic of Azerbaijan. Topic: "Frameworks for the EU engagement in Azerbaijan." Questions and answers.

19.00 – Informal dinner.

Saturday, 17 September 2011

08.30 – Breakfast

09.00 – 11.00 – Lecture by Mr Zardusht Alizada, expert in Arab history, Director of the Baku School of Journalism. Topic: "Arab season's significance in geopolitics and democratisation"

11.00 – 11.15 – Coffee break.

11.15 – 13.00 – Discussion on Mr Alizada's lecture. Questions and answers.

13.00 – 14.00 - Lunch

14.00 – 15.45 – Presentation by Ms Elmira Axundova, MP, member of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (IPA CIS). Topic: "How influential are parliamentarians in international forums (example of the Committee for Culture, Sport, Tourism and Information of the IPA CIS)"

15.45 – 16.15 – Coffee break.

16.15 – 18.00 – Discussion on Ms Axundova's presentation. Questions and answers.

20.00 – Informal dinner

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Sunday, 18 September 2011

08.30 – Breakfast

09.00 – 11.00 – Lecture by Mr Rasim Musabayov, MP, member of the International Relations Committee of the Parliament. Topic: "Balanced foreign policy versus bloc affiliation: Azerbaijan's strategic considerations"

11.00 – 11.15 – Coffee break.

11.15 – 13.00 – Discussion on Mr Musabayov's lecture.

13.00 – 14.00 - Lunch

14.00 – 15.45 – Presentation by Ms Leyla Aliyeva, Center for National and International Studies. Topic: "Does Azerbaijan's international profile reflect the country's European choice?"

15.45 – 16.15 – Coffee break.

15.15 – 17.40 – Continuation of the discussion on Ms Aliyeva's presentation.

By 18.00 - Departure of participants