



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

Azerbaijan and the Euroatlantic Community

Samad Seyidov, MP

Chairman, Milli Mejlis (Parliamentary) Commission on Foreign Affairs and Inter-Parliamentary Relations;
Chairman of Delegation, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Russia and Eurasia Program
Caucasus Initiative

Friday, November 12, 2004

On November 12, 2004, the Russia and Eurasia Program hosted a seminar “Azerbaijan and the Euroatlantic Community” with Mr. Samad Seyidov, Chairman of the Milli Mejlis (Parliamentary) Commission on Foreign Affairs and Inter-Parliamentary Relations and Chairman of the Delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Mr. Seyidov was accompanied by Azim Mollazade, MP, deputy chairman of the opposition Azerbaijani Popular Front Party and member of Azerbaijan’s PACE delegation.

The recent visit to Azerbaijan by NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and an upcoming NATO Parliamentary Assembly seminar in Baku underline Azerbaijan's commitment to deepening its cooperation with Euroatlantic and European institutions. Mr. Seyidov discussed political reform, the status of Azerbaijan's relations with the Euroatlantic community, and Nagorno-Karabagh.

Mr. Seyidov opened by discussing Azerbaijan’s relations with Europe. He noted that a number of obstacles initially hindered the cooperation of Azerbaijan and the European Union, primarily resulting from an absence of common values and a common style of problem-solving. However, Azerbaijan has since found a common language with Europe through the Council of Europe, which it joined in January, 2001. Azerbaijan also maintains relations with the European Union and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation organization, but Azerbaijan’s membership in the Council of Europe is unique in prodding Baku to aspire to Europe’s high political standards. By acceding to the Council of Europe, Azerbaijan has committed itself to the implementation of democratic values. According to Mr. Seyidov, after three years of membership in the Council of Europe, Azerbaijan has accomplished more in this sphere than in its previous ten years of independence.

Mr. Seyidov specifically referred to the issue of political prisoners. He noted that a dialogue between Azerbaijani authorities and members of the Council of Europe has led

to the release of hundreds of political prisoners and increased efforts to promote civil society and the protection of human rights. Mr. Seyidov remarked that President Ilham Aliev has signed numerous pardoning decrees in the last year. Despite some continued problems, Mr. Seyidov indicated that Azerbaijan has adopted a proper democratic course.

Mr. Seyidov briefly addressed Azerbaijan's economic growth, noting that the continued promotion of economic growth is fundamentally linked to a continuation of democratic reforms. In addition to relying on the oil sector, Mr. Seyidov asserted that Azerbaijan should continue to increase transparency throughout the economy and encourage investment in sectors outside of oil. These steps are very important if Azerbaijan wants to become closer to Europe.

Regarding a solution to the Nagorno-Karabagh issue, Mr. Seyidov expressed his belief that the democratization of not only Azerbaijan, but of the entire Caucasus region, is necessary (he explicitly indicated firm support for the rise of a democratic Georgia). He noted that Azerbaijan has launched an important initiative in the United Nations on Nagorno-Karabagh. Azerbaijani officials hope this discussion will lead to open and objective discussions regarding the conflict.

Finally, Mr. Seyidov noted that while integration with Western states is important to Baku, Azerbaijan is the only country in the Caucasus that is able to truly pursue an "independent" foreign policy. Azerbaijan would like to deepen regional cooperation with all its neighbors, including Iran and Russia, but it often "feels like an island." Mr. Seyidov indicated that Azerbaijan wants to be a close partner and, perhaps, eventual member of NATO and seeks to construct its relations with NATO in an open and honest fashion.

Joining Mr. Seyidov, Azim Mollazade reiterated that all three countries in the South Caucasus should follow an identical vector of development toward democracy and Euroatlantic integration. He argued that the presence of foreign (i.e., Russian) military forces in the region poses a serious obstacle toward achieving the latter goal. Regarding regional cooperation, Mr. Mollazade noted that Azerbaijan and Georgia need peace and stability and are inviting Armenia to join them in building a better future for the region as a whole.