
Pro-Western Or Pro-Russian?

By Karine Mangassarian
Yerkir.am 25/5/2007

Political analyst Alexander Iskandarian believes both options are for internal use.

Political analyst Alexander Iskandarian says our society has a wrong perception of pro-Russian or pro-Western orientations. We tried to find out whether there have really been a shift from pro-Russian to pro-Western orientation in our society as a result of which more pro-Western opposition forces were elected to the parliament.

Before commenting on the question Iskandarian noted that it is very important to define the word "opposition" correctly. None of the political forces in the parliament except for the Republican Party that has a majority can be clearly defined as pro-government or opposition forces. Each of the other four parties in the parliament can theoretically join the coalition government or become opposition.

"It is not correct to call this or that political force 'opposition' today.

The political system is constructed in such a way that the political forces come to replace each other, at least this is the case in countries with a normal political system. There can be no permanent opposition because any political force is striving to get to power and does not want to be in the opposition. At the same time, any party should be ready to become opposition," Iskandarian said.

Iskandarian quoted the German experience where a coalition government was formed from political forces that could not sit together at one table. However, this did not prevent them from forming a coalition and the forces that were more tolerant towards each other became opposition.

What do people mean when they say pro-Russian or pro-Western orientation?

Iskandarian believes people mean that this or that party is defending the interests of the West or Russia. In other words, if the West says 'this is good' then it is good. If the West is fighting a war in Iraq - then it is the correct thing to do.

If the West decides to pressure Turkey - then it is the correct thing to do.

And what if the West decides tomorrow to give Nagorno Karabagh to Uzbekistan? Will this be the correct thing as well? The same can be said about pro-Russian orientation.

"I can say that these are all signals aimed at attracting the electorate. In order to gain the support of the older people, especially those living in the rural areas, they say that Russia is good, everything was perfect in the Soviet times. Meanwhile, people in Armenia do not know today's Russia and the Russian TV channels they watch do not give the true image of Russia.

On the other hand, in order to gain the support of the younger

generation and the electorate in the urban areas they say the same good things about the West despite the fact that even in the Western countries elections are sometimes rigged, the judicial system is interfering into the political, and there are clans like for instance the Bush brothers. We do not notice this. They explode cars in France after the elections. We do not notice this. I think this is to some extent normal because the political consciousness in transitional countries is infantile," Iskandarian says adding that pro-Russian and pro-Western orientations are the same thing.

Commenting on politics, Iskandarian says that Serzh Sargsian is different when he is in Washington, Moscow, Paris or Yerevan. He has different priorities, his wording is different. Even when Armenia is involved in some European projects and Russia makes a more advantageous proposal we agree to what Russia is offering. Iskandarian believes any political leader should agree to that.

"Of course there will be discussions and negotiations. We cannot say that we can live without gas because we are pro-Western. Or that we can live without trade because we are pro-Russian. People in Europe understand very well that the parliamentarians and the state officials are different. Putin cannot say the same things as Zhirinovski.

The latter's goal is not to govern Russia but to gain the voters' support.

You can be pro-Western if you are representing the Rule of Law Country Party or the Heritage party. If you are representing the Republican Party you cannot be pro-Russian or pro-Western.

You should be pro-Russian or pro-Western depending where you are and with whom you cooperate. You should try to survive in a real political system. If the same Heritage Party becomes the governing force it will change its behavior because it will have to negotiate about gas supply and other issues," Iskandarian says.

He believes these are elementary things. From our political debates one can see that there is a misperception of the situation. He reminded of the anti-Russian policies of the Pan-Armenian Movement in the first post-independent years when Armenia was getting money from the West, importing food through the Turkish border and buying weapons from Russia. And this was done by people with pro-Western orientation. Our political leaders are pro-Armenian and they make their decisions based on the country's interests, Iskandarian concluded on an optimistic note.
