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# NATO is trying to find 'a common language' with Azerbaijan

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## Unfulfilled commitments

NATO is trying to find 'a common language' with Azerbaijan over the reforms which have not been implemented in the armed forces

As is known, the military committee of NATO's Euroatlantic Cooperation Council met at the level of chiefs of general staffs in Brussels on 14-15 May. The Azerbaijani delegation attending the meeting was led by the chief of general staff of the armed forces, Col-Gen Nacmaddin Sadixov.

## NATO calls for joining efforts

The meeting, which was attended by more than 60 representatives of the military of NATO member states and partners, discussed the military threats facing the alliance and ways of overcoming them, especially the situation in Afghanistan and Kosovo. The meeting was closed for the media and detailed official information was not given to the public on the issues agreed by chiefs of staffs. However, NATO sources said that chiefs of staffs of NATO member states and partners stressed the importance of jointly fighting the dangers and threats at the end of the meeting and joining efforts in this area. The head of the NATO military committee, General Ray Heno, said that it is necessary for NATO member states and partners to strengthen cooperation in the fight against terrorism. [Passage omitted: Heno's quote on strengthening cooperation and Brussels's plans to support reforms in Azeri army]

## Unfulfilled commitments

For the time being, NATO experts are interested in a number of commitments that Azerbaijan is to fulfil. "They want to get official guarantees from Baku on the fulfilment of these commitments. This may happen in June this year. Certain clarity will be brought to the fate of the reforms, which are envisaged in the first stage of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), but have not been carried out due to some reasons if the Azerbaijani leadership satisfies NATO. If this is the case, Baku will focus on the reforms that have not been carried out in the first stage together with those in the second stage. It is not ruled out that Brussels and Baku may hold another round of negotiations on the fate of these reforms if Baku refuses to implement some of them on the ground that they are 'harmful'. In that case, these reforms may be added to the second part of the IPAP or may be taken out of the agenda," a source close to the NATO circles told an Ayna correspondent. Our interlocutor did not want to specify which article was in question, but it became clear from the conversation that the emphasis is put here on four main points:

1. The formation of mechanisms of civil control over the defence and security sector of Azerbaijan, the establishment of a transparent military budget system and increased accountability of power structures to the parliament.
2. The conduct of staff and structural reforms in the Defence Ministry and the replacement of the ministry's staff and leadership with civilians.
3. The protection of the rights of servicemen and promotion of career opportunities for the military.

4. The announcement of the details of the existing military cooperation between NATO and Azerbaijan to the public and the state guarantee for separate civil society groups to carry out monitoring in the mentioned fields. Support for the policy of the media and non-governmental organizations on public awareness.

Ayna has learned that the Azerbaijani government does not seem to be so willing to carry out reforms in the mentioned areas. Baku has different arguments: some officials believe that the law and order in the military system may weaken and every kind of anarchy may arise there if the army becomes civilian and the military have closer ties with the public.

The incumbent leadership of the Defence Ministry is also extremely negative about another commitment the replacement of the military leadership with a civilian one. They believe that it will not bring about any positive result if the leadership consists of civilians who "have no idea about the army" at a time when Azerbaijan is at war [with Armenia].

However, NATO experts do not share all these opinions. Observers think that the main hindrance to rapid reforms in the mentioned areas in Azerbaijan is some top ranking military officials: "They are afraid of being replaced. Therefore, some officials continue to oppose rapid reforms."

Positive aspect of cooperation

Despite all the difference in opinions, NATO focused on one particular positive aspect in the present relations with Azerbaijan. This is Azerbaijan's providing strong support for efforts to fight international terrorism. Western experts believe that Azerbaijan is very active in this area and is trying too much to ensure harmonization between its peacekeepers and the NATO coalition. This issue is expected to be a new topic for discussions between NATO and Azerbaijan in the days to come. As has been reported, Azerbaijan's report on the Planning and Analysis Process Programme (PARP), which also includes the objectives of partnership, will be discussed at NATO's political and military steering committee in the 26+1 format on 19 May. According to information from Azerbaijan's representative office at NATO, a broad delegation from Azerbaijan will take part in the discussions. The head of the international cooperation and Euroatlantic integration department of the Defence Ministry, Maj-Gen Ramiz Nacafov, will lead the Azerbaijani delegation. It should be noted that the PARP was last evaluated in Baku in February 2007. Then, a NATO delegation met representatives of the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry and the Defence Ministry.

[translated from Azeri]

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