

---

# Changing Geopolitical Realities

By Gerard Chaliand  
civilitasfoundation.org

---

`In this changing world, the cards that Armenians are holding are not getting better,' said Gerard Chaliand, an international expert in armed conflict studies and international and strategic relations. Chaliand, a member of the Honorary Board of the Civilitas Foundation, was the guest speaker at the Civilitas Foundation's discussion on "How Changing Geopolitical Realities Impact the South Caucasus." The discussion was attended by diplomats, representatives of international organizations based in Armenia, such as the OSCE and Council of Europe, as well as heads of non-governmental organizations, students and analysts.

Chaliand spoke about the current situation between Armenia and Azerbaijan, remarking, `My impression of Karabakh is that the probability of a war is bigger than before. I will talk to you as a strategist, someone willing to understand the perception of the other side. If I was Azeri, I believe that at one point or another I would be for war, because the situation has been at a standstill. War does solve problems up to a certain point. And it creates new opportunities for the winner. A surprise is something we should be prepared to face. The surprise will be very short because the Russians will intervene ` they are the ultimate arbiter of the situation in this region and the peace keeper.' Chaliand just returned from his fourth visit to Karabakh, in which he met with Karabakh officials. He also visited the front lines.

Russia is not only an arbiter Chaliand insisted. `On paper, the countries which are rather friendly to the Armenian position are Iran, China -- few people know that China is interested in Armenia -- and to a large extent, Russia. Russia is interested in keeping Armenia because you always like an ally who has no choice but to remain your ally because there is no alternative. Russia will always be interested in Armenia, and it does help Russia to keep Azerbaijan dependent by the fact that Armenian troops are in Karabakh.'

Chaliand discussed the change in Turkey's role in the last century: `In 1924, Mustafa Kemal brutally cut the cultural and religious ties in his society. He did it to more closely resemble Europe. That's exactly the process that happened. But you don't cut the roots of a people by decree. It comes back. It started to come back in the 50's. You felt that in the countryside that nothing was forgotten.'

Today, Turkey is still grappling with its image. `Turkey today is at the same time a moderately Muslim state with secular remnants and a very strong nationalist state,' said Chaliand. `They have all the cards in their hands to play Muslim with the Muslims and nationalist with the nationalists.'

Chaliand was not hopeful about the situation between Turkey and Armenia: `The protocols were not very intelligent. I don't see why on the problem of genocide a common Turkish and Armenian commission. It's a bit like you would make a common commission between the Germans -- a Germany that did not accept the events of 1942-45 -- and the Jews to discuss what happened in World War II. Also, supposedly because there is nothing about Karabakh in the protocols, this will be forgotten? The border is closed because of Karabakh. The border is not closed because of the Genocide. It was a trick that ended up demonstrating that Turkey is ready for negotiation and it's Armenia looking like it's making all the difficulties.'

But there are things Armenia can be doing, Chaliand insisted. 'I think it would help to have economic growth, a more democratic system, and a more subtle and imaginative foreign policy,' he said.

Civilitas Director Salpi Ghazarian concluded the program by acknowledging that Armenian public discussions are usually brutal when it comes to domestic matters, but Armenians skirt around the complexities of the Karabakh situation, simply because everyone takes for granted that at the end of the day, Karabakh is Armenian and Armenians will defend its security and its future. In that context of conscious commitment and responsibility, Ghazarian said that this rare diagnosis of the difficulties facing us is particularly useful.

The Civilitas Foundation  
One Northern Avenue, Suite 30,  
Yerevan, Armenia  
[2][info@civilitasfoundation.org](mailto:info@civilitasfoundation.org)  
[3]<http://www.civilitasfoundation.org>

P.S. Visit our web site at [6][CivilitasFoundation.org](http://CivilitasFoundation.org) where you will find information about our goals and programs as well as weekly news and political analyses, social commentary and guest views on events in and around Armenia. Regular mailings such as this one will provide regular notice about new content and upcoming events.

---