
European Union Is Treating Three Transcaucasian Countries As A Single Entity

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In another word in the long term they expect the Armenia and Azerbaijan will find the solution: professor György Schöpflin

Professor György Schöpflin was born in Budapest in 1939 and lived in the UK from 1950 to 2004.

He graduated M.A., LL.B. from the University of Glasgow (1962) and pursued postgraduate studies at the College of Europe in Bruges (1962-1963). He worked at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (1963-1967) and the BBC (1967-1976) before taking up university lecturing, at the school of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London (1976-2004), including latterly as Jean Monnet Professor of Politics and Director of the Centre for the Study of Nationalism. He is currently teaching in Forlì, University Bologna, Faculty of Political Sciences

Professor Schöpflin, the first question that I would like to ask is the question which is discussed now, as the most important one- the world financial crisis. What do you think about it and what is your point who will faster overcome this period of world panic: big states or some small with less economic ambitions?

Basically this problem which affects the whole the world, though in different ways. But the solution can only come from a combination of United States as the leader, the EU together with Japan (one of the largest economies), China, to some extent with Russia, India and Brazil. As to the actual dimension of the crisis, they are currently trying to sort out the crisis of the finance industry, but the problem is that it has rippled through into the real economy. This means that we now see the very serious impact on all economic activity, with rising unemployment and a downturn in capital flows, and while we can't yet see all the other outcomes, this year and next year will be very unpleasant.

I know that you worked as a journalist and now you currently teaching at the University of Bologna, in the faculty of Political Science, moreover, as a member of the European Parliament you might have clearer position about lobbying. I'm asking about it because in Azerbaijan there is no transparent lobbying system; and in this case how do you think if we have strong lobby in Europe, will Azerbaijan gain from it and may be have more opportunities to inform State members of European Union about Armenian aggression or about conflict in Nagorny Karabakh?

In general terms, in principle, lobbying can be effective. In other words, if you have a lobby organization which puts your case to a group or a body or an institution which doesn't know anything about it, that in a way functions as a mechanism for increased information flow. As you may know, information that is provided doesn't automatically mean that information is accepted. So, an effective lobby is one that doesn't make a propaganda, but strong rational case for what ever the argument is. So if it starts from this position, it seems to me, that Azerbaijani government has done a certain amount to put its case certainly to European Union. I do talk to the Ambassador and some members of the embassy...

You mean Azerbaijani?

Yes, and only from these conversations I actually understood, for example, that the extent of the territory is that it currently under the Armenian occupation, it isn't just Nagorny Karabakh but seven other rayons. Basically, this is a kind of information which doesn't get through and, by the way, it should not just be the EU that Azerbaijan should be lobbying, but should also provide information to the world media - which is not happening. I don't know for example whether Western knowledge might help Azerbaijan to overcome this situation. For the time being Azerbaijani case is presented rather weakly. The other point here is that when an embassy is lobbying, it won't achieve so much beyond a certain point and it becomes counter-productive, because people will say "well, they only putting their own countries case and it is not the whole picture". You really need an independent lobby which is ready to say: "look here is Azerbaijani case here is this, with pluses, and minuses, and this is why it is so important... whatever". You probably need to concentrate not so much on Nagorny Karabakh at the moment, but on Nabucco, notably that objections being raised by Ankara.

May I might ask you the subjective question and if you mind you could not to answer it. How do you feel as the Member of the European Parliament, is the Armenian lobby really so effective or it's kind of myth? Which lobby is representing better in Europe?

There is a very strong Armenian lobby with respect to Turkey but not with respect to Azerbaijan. I have never encountered Armenian lobbying with respect to Azerbaijan. Neither of them is very strong - neither the Armenian nor the Azerbaijani is making a very strong case. The European Union is treating the three Transcaucasian countries as a single entity, in another word in the long term they expect the Armenia and Azerbaijan will find the solution.

Some days ago, I saw the reporting in Euronews channel and some Members of European Parliament in their short interviews raised the question about economic and political interests of European Union in Azerbaijan. What do you think about it and how could be Europe interested in the region or may be vice versa?

The primary interest is not actually the only interest of this time... it is that Azerbaijan is the potential energy supplier, in the simplest terms. Both with respect to Azerbaijani resources and also the transit country for Turkmenistan. That's it.

And what about Azerbaijani interest in Europe?

It was my impression when I went to Baku two years ago, that there is an active interest, especially among the young people that I met there that in participating in Europe is their future and eventually, who knows when, a hope of membership of the European Union. The impression that I had is that the Azerbaijani people see themselves as the European, a long way from the centre of the Europe, but still as the part of Europe. My position is that I quite ready to accept that, but Azerbaijan must make a much stronger case that it is, indeed, a European country. Most people in the West have no idea that this is, and, if nothing else, Azerbaijan should join the European Song Contest, showing that they are the part of Europe (this has happened since then). Many people don't know where Azerbaijan is, they have never heard about it. In this area, much more should be done in terms of cultural diplomacy, sporting and other areas of this kind. This may be difficult at the moment, I know, when people are concerned primarily with economic problems, but there is long term strategy here, that what Azerbaijan is and that is what it should do to present itself as a European country.

The last question that I would like to ask you is about Nabucco. As far as I know there is no confirmation for Nabucco from the side of EU. What concrete steps will be made by EU Commission for diversification the oil imports to Europe?

This is a political commitment, though no contracts have been signed. My understanding is that the EU continues to be committed to Nabucco; however there are also interests which don't want it particularly. Germany, I think, is very committed to North Stream and sees the Nabucco as a competitor and that is a source of the problems. It seems to me generally looking at Nabucco that while there is a political commitment, there is as yet no timetable for implementation.

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