
“EU Introduces cooperation, and not competition to the region”

Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia

Interview of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Arman Kirakosyan to Mediamax Agency

- What is your assessment of development of relations between Armenia and EU?

- In the recent years, relations between Armenia and the European Union have been developing successively and incrementally. We have entered a new level both as to the forms and as to the content of cooperation. Today, the EU becomes stronger not only as a global and regional partner for Armenia, but also in the context of wide agenda of our domestic reforms. Armenia's Action Plan within the framework of European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which has been in process of implementation since 2007, is the best manifestation of that multitask cooperation.

- Is such development of relations a result of EU's regional policy or a result of bilateral cooperation between Armenia and EU?

- I think that EU's regional policy and its approaches to Armenia do not contradict each other, moreover, they integrally interweave. In relations with Armenia, great attention is paid to regional cooperation, but at the same time, Armenia itself influences on the formation of EU's regional policy. At that, one should not forget about the fact that EU keeps to accurate regional approaches, the fact being expressed in presenting similar initiatives and cooperation proposals to all the countries of the region. Basing on this, one can say that the forms of cooperation have more regional coverage, but the content is more bilateral.

- Does the same logic serve as a basis for EU Eastern Partnership?

- Eastern Partnership attaches a more complete look to EU policy concerning its eastern neighbors. It is fully based on principles, fixed in ENP and makes them more applicable with the use of concrete cooperation mechanisms.

- Can one say that Eastern Partnership will become a part of ENP?

- EU Council, in which representatives of EU member-states discuss the detailed description of the proposal on Eastern Partnership, elaborated by the European Commission, will give the final answer to the given issue. It is expected that the process will be concluded in April, 2009, expecting that a Summit with the participation of leaders of EU and Eastern Partnership countries will be called in May. Taking this into account, I would prefer not to make any assessments as to the interconnection of ENP and Eastern Partnership before the latter is approved by EU Council, since shifts of certain emphases are yet possible.

At the same time, the approaches of the European Commission evidence that Eastern Partnership will aim at deepening cooperation with eastern neighbors, which has been realized so far within the framework of ENP. I believe that Eastern Partnership, which, according to plans, is to be realized in the format of EU 27 member-states, five ENP participant-states and Belarus, can sooner be considered not as a part of ENP, but as continuation of the latter, being different by its quality and depth.

- What will that quality change be?

- The most significant difference is that Eastern Partnership establishes more clear-cut parameters for cooperation. It not only assists modernization processes in partner-states, but also formulates the goals, which should be reached as a result of their development. In the sphere of trade-economic cooperation, this goal is the establishment of a more detailed and all-comprehensive free trade regime, in the sphere of migration - facilitation of visa order, and its liberalization further on.

Such an approach gives the opportunity to establish new contractual relationships between partner-states and the EU. EU is ready to offer associated agreements, which will substitute the current Partnership and cooperation agreements, to countries, which have such aspiration. The contracts will be elaborated in accordance with the readiness of each country; they will fix the necessity for gradual concordance with legislative and administrative functions of EU. The parameters of economic integration, cooperation in the sphere of migration and energy will also be reflected in associated contracts.

Agreements will also contain cooperation components on issues of common foreign and defense policy of EU, European security and defense policy.

Eastern Partnership also provides for more active cooperation between EU members and partner-states in political modernization and democratization of the latter.

And, finally, Eastern Partnership proposes to form a multilateral format of cooperation, within the framework of which EU member states and partners will cooperate on the same wide agenda, as in bilateral format.

- Are the parameters you mentioned related to prospects for partner-countries' full membership in EU?

- In this issue, the approaches of ENP and Eastern Partnership are practically identical - participation in those initiatives does not predetermine the membership of partner-states in EU.

- Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus will become participants of Eastern Partnership. How realistic is it to assume that all those countries have similar European aspirations?

- Indeed, despite the fact that all those countries face similar challenges of political and economic modernization, the approaches and the perceptions in individual cases seriously differ. This factor is determined by the special approach of the EU, which is known as the principle of differentiation, which is a basis for ENP and Eastern Partnership. As a result, all the sides are offered equal opportunities for cooperation, and the sides are the ones to define its volumes and depth.

- Can we expect that Eastern Partnership will in the course of time become an international organization?

- It is premature talking about that. The proposal, which is in process of discussion today, provides for establishment of cooperation platforms in four subject directions - political, trade-economic, energy and public contacts.

- Taking into account the fact that Azerbaijan has prejudices concerning the efforts to involve Armenia in any regional format, what will the

relations between Yerevan and Baku within the framework of Eastern Partnership be?

- The establishment of multilateral cooperation, aiming at reaching economic wellness and common values with the participation of countries, which have problematic points in their relations, is the historic achievement of Europe. Basing on this, Armenia has always supported the proposals on regional cooperation. Azerbaijan keeps to a diametrically opposite approach, which so far has not provided an opportunity to fully use European initiatives.

I believe that Azerbaijan will realize and will take constructive part in multilateral format of Eastern Partnership, which may contribute to formation of an atmosphere of trust in our region.

- How fully is Armenia itself ready to be involved in European Partnership? Does the present level of democratization and rule of law in Armenia meet the requirements, necessary to form more ambitious cooperation programs with EU?

- Armenia became one of the first countries, which stated its support for Eastern Partnership - back, when it was expressed in the form of a joint proposal by Poland and Sweden. This support was fixed in the Armenia-EU Joint Declaration, signed during November visit of the Armenian President Serzh Sargsian to Brussels. Cooperation, realized within the framework of ENP, allows Armenia fully developing it in the format of Eastern Partnership as well. One can only note that Armenia has already started cooperation with EU within the framework of ENP on two key issues of the Eastern Partnership - agreement as to the zone of free trade and the process to facilitate visa order.

Concerning the domestic political reforms, I can say that Armenia has always demonstrated will to solve the existing issues through cooperation. The agreement signed during the visit of the Armenian President on sending an EU Advisory Team, which would render consultation assistance to state administrative bodies in the sphere of consolidating democracy and securing the rule of law, evidences the fact. Such systematic form of cooperation is concordant with the approaches of Eastern Partnership on consolidating democratic institutions.

- Won't the new initiative by EU become a reason for new discords between the great powers in the region?

- I believe that the recent events in the region showed that EU has good will and opportunities to ease acute conflicts and to move them in the direction of resolution. It is obvious that EU introduces cooperation, and not competition in the region. Besides, implementation of political and economic reforms by the countries of the region on a similar agenda may give the region a new element of stability and trust.
