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# Polish Ambassador To Armenia Zdislav Rachinski: "Do You Know What The Customs Union Document Looks Like?"

By EMMA GABRIELYAN  
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This question was addressed by the Polish Ambassador to Armenia Zdislav Rachinski, assuring that having the EU Association Agreement did not assume impossibility of having a free trade zone with the CU.

- Mr. Ambassador, some Armenian political figures have expressed an opinion that as if Poland and Sweden are not the best companions or moderators in the EU policy towards the former Soviet Union countries, allegedly due to anti-Russian orientation. What is your opinion on these charges? For example, recently, the former Ambassador to Armenia Vyacheslav Kovalenko said that RF should form a 'pro-Russian elite' in Armenia; he believes that the West does a lot in formation of anti-Russian sentiments, and RF should oppose something to it.

Wouldn't it be right for other EU countries to lead the Eastern Partnership process? - Eastern Partnership program, which conditionally can be called EPP plus European Neighborhood Program (ENP), is the common, joint policy of EU 28 member countries. Poland and Sweden, with their initiative of the Eastern Partnership, added the value by adding to it, which qualitatively is different from the ENP and EPP, and which opens new opportunities and prospects to the New Eastern European countries, which was formerly missing with other countries collaborating with the EU. Apparently, it was not accidental that the EPP emerged after Sweden and Poland became members of the EU, by enriching the European democratic community with their knowledge of Eastern Europe, with the vision of their historical commitment and solidarity. As for anti-Russian imaginary claims, if any..., in my opinion, they emerge as a result of lack of knowledge, which certainly is not commendable, but it is possible to correct it. And the facts about my country are as follows: Poland as an EU country after Germany, Italy and the Netherlands is the fourth largest country in turnover rates with the RF. Poland is the only country in the Schengen area, where Russian citizens can visit without a visa. Along with Germany and France, Poland has the infrastructure of the most branched institutes with RF in the EU. There is even such a slight, but quite eloquent fact that Poland is the only EU and NATO country where the RF Foreign Minister attended the meeting of ambassadors as an honored invitee. What anti-Russian are you talking about?... I do not want to think that those who claim about Polish imaginary anti-Russian, are doing this with insidious intention, though, of course, such speculations, obviously, do not revive from the interests of Poland and, not to speak about the interests of development of Polish-Russian constructive relations. Of course, I do not want to think that Poland is blamed in anti-Russian activities for the fact that we have consistently and disinterestedly supported to the right of free choice and independence of other countries, to aspirations of the peoples of new Eastern Europe to live in democracy and welfare conditions, to become developed with their own vision to the perception of the world and the future of the region. Like during the communism, Poland's democratic forces were not accepting Brezhnev's Doctrine, so as today's Poland does not recognize and accept the policy of the canon-eternal territories. - However, it leaves the impression that a very tough battle is going for the South Caucasus between the West and RF, don't you agree? - I would not use

the word "battle", perhaps, a competition of different value systems, of different systems of integration. There are certain indicators of values.

Some believe that it is better to develop in authoritarian regimes, in the presence of centralized economy, at least a strong centralized authority and charismatic leader. At the same time, successful example of modernization and development of Singapore is mentioned. There is another system, according to which, to quote RF President "freedom is better than non-freedom", "choice is better than the lack of choice."

Everything that has emerged in the European continent, starting from ancient Greece to modern EU, has not been created in one day, it has been tested for centuries with its mistakes, and, good or bad, it is operating in current social and state models. All of this we call the European value system. This system functions, although sometimes there are difficulties. What we call European values, these are not only democracy, free elections, priority of law and the institutions of the enforcement thereof, but the first of all fundamental importance of the right of the person, the individual. Accordingly, of course, I disagree when this is denied, it is simply a consequence of lack of knowledge or intent. Yes, I can agree with you that there is not a battle, but a contest between these two values systems, yes, it is true. Any people can make a choice on how they want to live. We recommend what has worked effectively. Recently you have traveled to Poland and have seen what today's Poland looks like. If you were in Poland twenty years ago, you would have felt the difference. It is obvious.

Despite all the difficulties that are there, and everyone has, the progress is obvious, and I do not mean only well-being, but also institutional, infrastructure development, civil society, mass media freedom. Therefore, when Poles and Czech say that you can achieve all this, they are not just words, but a belief by own example that all of that can be really achieved. Therefore, it is not accidental that my very country puts forward the Eastern Partnership program with Sweden. There was nothing as such before, and I dare to conclude that, if not the Polish-Swedish initiative, in addition to the Neighborhood project, no other initiative would be generated. - Mr. Rachinski, the authorities announced that the Association Agreement between Armenia and the EU is still pending. This was stated by Deputy Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan a few days ago.

He also noted that the official Yerevan is working on "legally renovating" the document. Do you know what work is being done, and what it is about? - My country's position for Armenia and the EU is clear, open and permanent. Poland supports the nearest and closest relations of Armenia with EU, which will have such a form and legal basis, which Armenian wants and can have. Of course, from our perspective, the optimal solution for Armenia, which has an open and liberal economy, which has achieved a lot and has successfully completed the negotiations with the EU regarding enhancement of free trade and prospects on establishment of EU Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, would be to develop the economy and modernize the country within the framework of EU Association. Poland employed its authority and put forth much effort to convince its EU partners to make this approaches acceptable. But, as far as Armenia decided to choose a different model of integration, we fully respect Armenia's freedom of choice, and we will seek other remedies and decisions with other EU countries and the European Commission, who will respond everything that we've accomplished, and will find new legal framework for closer cooperation between Armenia and the EU. As to how the new agreement will be called, the question remains open; it can be called an Association Agreement. It is not the name of the agreement that is important, but the content, and to ensure that it meets the aspirations of the people of Armenia and the authorities, who want to see them in the EU Association. In

other words, not a blank document, but rather a tool, a road map, if you like, for transformation and modernization of the country. Here's what is the main. Due to known technical and legal reasons, currently the Association Agreement and DCFTA agreed between Armenia-EU can not be adopted in July. It has been two years since I am celebrating the incompatibility of two different regulatory systems, the Association Agreement and DCFTA with the Customs Union in the conditions that they exist today. And, I do not understand why documentation of this obvious fact sometimes irritates people. But what is impossible today, could be possible tomorrow... As for how the document will be called: updated and modernized, ultimately, it is important that the concept may have different contents. EU Association Agreements have been signed with various countries, particularly with the countries of North Africa, but they are completely different association processes, they do not have similar economic component, nor include the issue of visa facilitation. What was and, I think, is still in negotiations with Armenia, was a different matter, since the EU Association Agreement and DCFTA with Armenia had already been agreed, and the negotiations were completed. In other words, it was already a road map for creation of a common economic area, which was not, for instances, with Morocco, with which the EU is just beginning to negotiate on free trade are. Meanwhile, for Armenia and other countries, it was immediately suggested. Armenia and other countries of the Eastern Partnership are the EU European neighborhood countries, which are geographically and culturally closer to the EU countries, therefore, such a high degree of integration was offered to them. If you cut off the economic section of the agreement, the solid part of the political section remains without this path. Armenia has always said that the EU Association Agreement for Armenia is the path of country's modernization. And, now, to be honest, it is not so clear for me how the process should proceed. And, the fact that the Association Agreement remains on the agenda, I share this opinion because neither Armenia nor the EU will not go to anywhere, they will continue to be neighbors, and a platform of joint actions should be created around cooperation. How deep this agreement should be modernized, it will depend on Armenia, because we do not know what obligations Armenia will assume, declaring that it is ready to join the Customs Union. To the point, association with EU in no case assumes impossibility of having a free trade area with the Customs Union. And the contrary, as President Putin directly noted in Minsk, was impossible. EU does not say that it is impossible to be associated with the EU and at the same time to have free trade relations with the CIS countries. We say that it is not possible to combine the two regulatory regimes, there are such taxes and customs here, different ones over there, such traffic rules here, different ones over there, in short, it is technically impossible to combine. - And how do you feel about the calls, to publicize the text of the Association Agreement, taking into account the fact that quite speculations were voiced. For example, it was said that RF is not against the EU-Armenia cooperation, but it was against Armenia's conceding a part of its sovereignty to EU by signing this agreement. Mr. Ambassador, was there such a danger, if Armenia had accepted the Association Agreement? - You know, they are really speculations, which are aimed at sowing seeds of suspicion outdated in something for which there are no bases at all. First, let's start with the technical issues of the problem: publication of the agreement.

Armenia-EU Association Agreement will be made public after initialing.

Why not earlier?... Because almost a year would pass from initialing to signing, and meanwhile the public would get to know and express opinion. To the point, the initialing document was still not the main text, but it was still undergoing changes, the development was underway, and based on that logic, every day new changes were to be published until initialing, which would be meaningless. As for the content of the agreement, it is not a

geopolitical agreement about Nagorno- Karabakh, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey, but just a regulatory economic agreement on how to make free trade, and what are the prospects for future EU-Armenia relations. As for the aforesaid speculation, fortunately or unfortunately, are not generally touched upon. The Agreement did not also contain clauses on conducting joint flights to the space, as well as about capturing the Antarctic. On the other hand, do you know what the document on Customs Union is about?...

Was it published?... - Some Russian experts have voiced the opinion that the Customs Union does not need Armenia, but they are sure that Armenia announced joining the CU under the pressure of Russia. What do you think, why did Armenia made this step, anyhow, were there pressures towards the Armenian side? - There are two opinions: In his speech at the European Parliament, Mr. Fule definitely spoke against the pressure of third countries on the Eastern Partnership member countries, compelling them to make this-or-that decision. Armenia's authorities have officially stated that there has not been any pressure. This is what we perceived. Based on this statement, I acknowledge that Armenia has made its decision by pondering and not impromptu, it was an agenda item and a subject of negotiations for a long time that everything was calculated, and that the decision will provide a real benefit to Armenia, above all, economic advantages. I'm talking about the economic aspects since Armenia is regulating the security issues in the framework of CSTO and bilateral agreements. I do not know any other calculations, but I am aware of our experts' studies, according to which the adoption of the EU Association Agreement with Armenia would result in total increase of Armenia's produce, in annual growth of GDP by two to three per cent, in other words, around 150 million euros per year. But the most important thing that my Armenian colleagues were assuring is the provision of the road of rapid modernization of the country through the EU Association Agreement, which can not be measured by numerical indexes, but in terms of historical perspective, it was obvious. The EU is a unique organization. It is not only the world's most powerful economic union, but also a mechanism of cooperation of countries in all various areas in the earlier history. Despite the available problems, it is a working mechanism. Three countries, as of today, constitute part of the Customs Union: Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia. Of course, it is difficult to assess the level of democracy in these countries, because I do not work in those countries, but I dare to say that this level is not higher than in EU countries. I also think that the internal problems with regard to the development of the society are better regulated in EU countries than in CU member countries. When choosing this-or-that direction, we make the choice not only in today's economic interests, but between development prospects. You know, it's quite risky to make a decision on joining the EU, I do not hide it, because it requires tremendous efforts within the country, determination and vision. It might be safer to stay where there are.

But, one who achieves new heights, moves on. Accordingly, it's not an easy choice. From psychological point of view, I realize the frustration by the society because there were some hopes, expectations over there, but the historical process is not counted in months, it's a longer process, and, indeed, everything is still pending.

<http://en.aravot.am/2013/10/30/162273/>

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## **PM Denies Russian Objections To Armenia-EU Accord**

By Emil Danielyan

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Russia does not object to Armenia's hopes to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union after while being part of a Russian-dominated alliance of ex-Soviet states, Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian claimed after a weekend visit to Moscow.

'Our Russian partners have a clear position to the effect that they are interested in seeing Armenia continue to deepen and expand its relations with the European Union, including within the framework of the Association Agreement,' Sarkisian said in videotaped remarks broadcast by Armenian TV stations.

The remarks contradicted what some Russian officials have said on the subject in recent weeks and months. 'You cannot be associated to the EU and sign an agreement on the common economic space with Russia. This is legally impossible,' Sergey Glaziev, an economic adviser to Russian President Vladimir Putin, said late last week.

Speaking to Ekho Moskvyy radio, Glaziev also claimed that Russian officials helped their Armenian colleagues to look into the draft Association Agreement with the EU and realize that it poses a serious threat to Armenia's national security. He referred to President Serzh Sarkisian's unexpected September 3 announcement that Armenia has decided to join the customs union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, which will serve as the bedrock of a Russian-led Eurasian Union.

The authorities in Yerevan have since continued to affirm their commitment to the agreement with the EU despite the fact that membership in the customs union runs counter to key terms of that document negotiated for almost four years. They have offered to finalize a much shorter version of the accord, an idea dismissed by the EU so far.

In what was a rare public statement made since September 3, Tigran Sarkisian defended Yerevan's foreign policy U-turn, saying that joining the customs union is vital for Russian-Armenian relations and would earn Armenia substantial economic benefits. 'Staying away from those integration processes could have created serious obstacles to the deepening and expansion of our economic and cultural relations with our strategic partner,' he said. 'It was more expedient for us to join that union.'

Russia -- President Vladimir Putin (R) and his Armenian counterpart Serzh Sarkisian meet in Novo-Ogaryovo, September 3, 2013

The premier did not explain, however, what exactly Armenia would gain in economic terms. Economic analysts critical of the Armenian government say that membership of the Russian-led trade bloc would only push up the cost of key goods imported to Armenia and reduce vital proceeds from customs duties collected by Armenian tax authorities. They also argue that Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan account for less than one-quarter of Armenia's foreign trade. The EU's share in the total has exceeded 30 percent ever since the late 1990s.

Tigran Sarkisian himself repeatedly argued against Armenian entry into the customs union before President Sarkisian's surprise volte-face widely attributed to strong Russian pressure. In particular, the prime minister argued that Armenia has no common border with any of the union's three member states. He also said Armenia has a more liberal trade regime and, unlike Russia and Kazakhstan, lacks vast natural resources.

'We were never against joining the Customs Union,' Sarkisian claimed as he flew back to Yerevan to Moscow at the weekend. 'We only had a general

understanding that the absence of common borders is a serious obstacle.' He spoke of 'new integration instruments' that will address this hurdle but did not elaborate.

The Armenian premier travelled to Moscow on Friday to discuss preparations for the official start of membership talks between Armenia and the customs union's governing body, the Eurasian Economic Commission. He met with the commission's chairman, Viktor Khristenko, and two Russian deputy prime ministers.

The Armenian government released few details of those talks in a statement on Sarkisian's trip. The press offices of the customs union and the Russian government issued no statements at all.

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev declined to meet his visiting Armenian counterpart for unknown reasons. Medvedev was in the Russian capital during Sarkisian's trip. The two men had a phone conversation earlier last week.

Medvedev's apparent snub was construed by government critics in Yerevan as another Russian humiliation of the Armenian leadership. They claim that having forced Yerevan into the customs union, Moscow no longer regards its South Caucasus ally as a sovereign state worthy of respect. President Sarkisian's political allies deny this.

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