

Wrap-up 2009 for the sake of re-interpretation and transformation



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Reflecting back on the year is not a new tradition. Public figures and politicians pursue different goals when they do so. Some take it as an opportunity to sing self-eulogies; some others grab the chance to criticize one more time. “We did this”; “This is right, however that was a mistake”; “It is their fault”; “I had this achievement”; “Armenia benefited from it”; etc. The objective of any summary is to juxtapose the results with long-term targets, identify achievements and failures, evaluate risks and opportunities and prepare actions for the coming years. The major slogan for this wrap-up is defined as “What happened in 2009 and what shall we do for the next years?”

In the Armenian reality 2009 will remain as the year of shifting the status quo of the country’s foreign policy. This change can be described as a shift from a policy of “reactive defense” to one of “uncertainty with an initiative”. In general, 2009 was a rather busy year characterized with interesting developments, among which the component of foreign policy was the most dominant, specifically in terms of developments regarding the Armenian-Turkish relations. 2009 was quite fruitful in regard to sports and cultural events as well. There were several interesting events in the domestic policy of the country as well: for instance, the elections of the Yerevan mayor signaled the necessity of transformations, as well as the urgency of voicing out this need.

Foreign policy

Firstly, leaving aside all the biases it should be acknowledged that for the first time Armenia has approached the chessboard of the foreign policy as an independent player with an initiative. Actually, a chess player who knows the theory well, but makes concrete practical moves for the first time. Honestly, the taste of the first attempt is not very pleasant. However, without any relevant experience in the field of diplomacy Armenia would have always remained as one either avoiding any serious challenges, or holding the other players responsible. The phenomenon of debates, discussions, and various emotional and logical, though civilized, clashes of means and arguments expressing different political stances, was perceived as a much more positive move in the Armenian reality. The only fault worth mentioning has been found with the excessive and oftentimes unnecessary partiality of certain institutions and especially the media. In the result, the Armenian-Turkish relations have become not only an instrument of foreign policy, but also a resource to be used for the development of the domestic political culture.

Instinctively many presumed that the Armenian-Turkish relations would stalemate the other developments in the foreign policy, in particular the negotiations over the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This however did not happen, and Armenia continued actively in the major foreign policy directions, proving to itself that it can deal with a multiplicity of tasks simultaneously and without any hesitation.

Domestic issues

While 2008 was the year of extreme polarization, the beginning of 2009 inculcated some hope that the year would sooth the wounds of 2008. It did not happen. No social transformation occurred in terms of ideologies or discourses. The internal political arena remained strictly individual-centric at the level of old institutions. In the result, no one voiced out the internal issues of public concern. This is pregnant with serious risks and may incite an outburst similar to the one in 2008 in the near

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future. 2009 saw the expansion of domestic self-censorship. The revelation of the year in domestic affairs was the clear identification of the bankruptcy of the law enforcement bodies, including the professionalism in police, public prosecutor's office as well as the judicial system in general.

Recommendations for the coming years

First, it is necessary to continue the complex process of Armenian-Turkish negotiations, realizing that it will not be smooth and will demand considerable flexibility.

Second, the intra-Armenian debate including the whole spectrum of different methods and formats used in the process of normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations should be continued, based on the principles of pluralism and tolerance. This process should also be regarded as a source of developing the culture of domestic politics.

Third, the domestic agenda should include the internal discussions regarding the development of national interests in other directions of the foreign policy.

Forth, the foreign policy agenda should be regularly expanded and intensified, thus increasing the diplomatic reputation of the country.

Fifth, the domestic issues need to be seriously improved. 2010 should be the year of amending and transforming the internal rules of the relations between the opposition and the government. If polarization impedes transformations, neutral non-governmental and human rights organizations that lack political ambitions and positions should become the locomotive of these transformations.

Finally, the issues of the judicial system should be seriously voiced and the issue of the relevant personnel and professional cadres should be treated as a priority. Balance in this area has been violated significantly and a lot has to start from scratch.

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions voiced by the participants of the discussion "Armenia in 2009: Are we prepared for Success in 2010?", which took place on December 26, 2009. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations.