

June 25, 2004

ACNIS Releases Opinion Polls on Karabagh: Society Weighs In on Peace, Security, Status

Yerevan—The Armenian Center for National and International Studies (ACNIS) today issued the results of both a public survey and a specialized questionnaire on “Regulating the Karabagh Conflict,” which it conducted between May 27 and June 18 in Yerevan and all of Armenia’s regions. The announcement and accompanying analysis were made during a roundtable discussion at ACNIS headquarters which assessed the present phase of the Mountainous Karabagh peace process, compared and contrasted expert and public perceptions of the issue, and summarized its possible outcomes.

ACNIS founder Raffi Hovannisian greeted the invited guests and public participants with opening remarks. “These twin surveys, in which 50 policy analysts and 1,950 citizens from across Armenia respectively took part, provide a solid basis for recording, interpreting, and evaluating public attitudes in the light of more specialized opinions. It is our hope that the relevant republic-wide institutions will draw appropriate conclusions for the charting of Armenian national policy,” Hovannisian said.

ACNIS legal and political affairs analyst Stepan Safarian presented “The Aims, Methodology, and Results of the Survey,” focusing in detail on the findings of the expert and public opinion polls. Accordingly, 60% of the surveyed experts assert that the Karabagh question is the priority issue for Armenia today, 32% are of the opposite opinion, while 8% find it difficult to answer. In the public opinion poll, these indices read 64.9%, 22.1%, and 13%, respectively.

Since the raising of the Karabagh question (1988-2004), 82% of respondent experts consider the greatest achievement to be independence and sovereignty, 8% guarantees of physical security, 4% confidence in our own abilities, and 4% enhancement of territory. As for the public survey, 49.7% think that the most important accomplishment is independence, 6% guarantees of physical security, 10% confidence in one’s own abilities, and 12.8% enhancement of territory. 54% of responding specialists see the status of Mountainous Karabagh as a part of Armenia, 32% as an independent and sovereign republic, while 10% find it acceptable for Karabagh to be an autonomous part of Azerbaijan. Among the broader public, these figures are 59.7%, 38.6%, and 1.1%, respectively.

What destiny awaits the liberated territories? In response to this question, 6% of experts suppose they will completely be united with Mountainous Karabagh, 20% expect their union with Armenia alongside Karabagh, 40% believe it fair to yield the liberated territories, except Lachin and Kelbajar, to Azerbaijan as the result of compromise, 20% are for ceding the liberated territories to Azerbaijan, save Lachin, under the same conditions, and 8% think that they will completely be attached to Azerbaijan. The public also is concerned about the future of the liberated territories. 30.3% of responding citizens are for their union with Karabagh, 45.5% opine that they should be united with Armenia alongside Karabagh, 11.2% are for dividing these territories among the parties to the conflict, leaving Lachin and Kelbajar to Armenia, and 1% conclude that they should be attached to Azerbaijan.

In this connection, 50% of the polled experts think that the Armenian parties might make territorial compromises only in the case of Azerbaijani recognition of Karabagh’s independence or its union with Armenia, 4% in case of Azerbaijan’s opening of roads leading to Armenia and Mountainous Karabagh, and 20% upon signing a peace accord with Azerbaijan and ruling

out war with it, while 26% find that liberated lands cannot be subject to mutual concessions and bargaining, even if that means the resumption of military operations. The public opinion poll looks like this: 40.7% would agree to compromises only in case of Azerbaijani recognition of Karabagh's independence, 6.4% in case of Azerbaijan's opening of roads leading to Armenia and Mountainous Karabagh, and 14.1% upon signing a peace accord with Azerbaijan, while 32.4% will concede nothing even if that means the resumption of war.

The majority of experts, 86%, are against the return of Azerbaijanis to their places of former residence in Karabagh and the liberated territories, and only 14% are for it. As for the circumstances under which they would agree to such a return, if necessity dictates, 42% think it is possible only after final regulation of the Karabagh issue, 18% simultaneous with resolution if this can help promote the process, 26% are opposed in all cases, while 8% believe it should turn on an equivalent step taken by Azerbaijan and Turkey. The figures received from among the rank-and-file citizens differ a bit here. 21.3% of polled citizens would agree to the refugees' return only after the final resolution of the Karabagh question, 14.7% think it should be conditional on an equivalent step taken by Azerbaijan and Turkey, while 41.9% are unequivocally opposed.

40% of the experts are completely dissatisfied with the Karabagh negotiation process, 32% are more dissatisfied than satisfied, 14% are more satisfied, 4% are completely satisfied, while 10% find it difficult to answer for lack of information. In contrast with the private analysts, the members of the public are in a more optimistic mood. Only 13.5% are completely dissatisfied with the negotiation process, 37.9% are relatively dissatisfied, 22.6% are relatively satisfied, and 3% are completely satisfied, whereas 23% find it difficult to answer for lack of information. To the extent the negotiation process is deemed unsatisfactory, 18% hold accountable the former administration, 42% the current administration, 8% mediating organizations, 8% the international community, 10% Armenian society, and 8% all Armenians. In considerable measure, expert opinions and citizen attitudes do not coincide on this question as well. 29.5% of the latter blame the former administration, 34.6% the current administration, 1.7% Armenian society, and 3.6% all Armenians.

70% of the questioned specialists are dissatisfied with the activities of the OSCE Minsk Group, whereas 54% of citizens are not even familiar with them. 60% of experts believe that the position of none of the co-chair countries in the OSCE Minsk Group corresponds with those of Armenia and Karabagh, 18% think the United States position to be more in line with the Armenian ones, 10% appreciate Russia's position, and 10% mark France. As for the public poll, the corresponding findings are 36% (none), 2.8% (USA), 28.8% (Russia), and 25.7% (France).

The overwhelming majority of experts, 90%, are convinced that the Karabagh problem can be solved peacefully and without resort to renewed war, and only 8% think that the solution can be achieved by force of arms. In this regard the citizens again are the more optimistic: 86% of them believe in a peaceable resolution of the conflict, while 14% conclude that military might is the only way. It is noteworthy that 67.7% of the public respondents are ready to participate to their utmost in the defense of Mountainous Karabagh in the event of a fresh outbreak of hostilities.

What do the figures reveal? Davit Petrosian, political analyst for Noyan Tapan news agency, offered a critical intervention entitled "An Alternative Comment on the Poll Results." Petrosian maintained that one of the most valuable accomplishments reflected by the surveys is that both responding experts and citizens hold Armenia's independence in high esteem, and this is an encouraging affirmation. There also are, however, painful results. "We may deduce from

many of the answers that the public does not trust the Karabagh problem to the current administration, and to be more exact only 2.5% trust it," he said.

The formal presentations were followed by contributions by Supreme Council Deputy Club chairman Ruben Torosian; Avetik Ishkhanian of the Armenian Helsinki Committee; Yerevan State Linguistic University professor Hrach Tatevian; Armen Aghayan of the "Protection of Liberated Territories" public initiative; Artsrun Pepanian, political analyst for AR television; ACNIS analyst Hovsep Khurshudian; Ruzan Khachatrian of the People's Party of Armenia; National Press Club chairperson Narine Mkrtchian; National State Party chairman Samvel Shahinian; Tamara Vardanian of the Noravank foundation; Karabagh analyst Alvard Barkhudarian; Slavonic University professor Rosalia Gabrielian; and several others. Most speakers underscored the importance of the information and supporting analyses uncovered by the surveys in terms of facilitating a comprehensive and objective understanding of the Karabagh challenge.

All 50 professionals who took part in the focus poll are from Yerevan. 90% of them are male, and 10% female; 8% are 30 years of age or below, 40% 31-40, 42% 41-50, and 10% 50 or above. All of the experts surveyed have received higher education: 20% are candidates of science (PhD), 76% hold a Master's degree, while 4% have earned solely a Bachelor's degree. As for the 1,950 citizens polled, 50% of them are male and 50% female; 30.5% are 30 years of age or below, 45.2% 31-50, 20.6% 51-70, 3.7% 71 or above. 45.7% of the responding citizens have received higher education, whereas 11.2% incomplete higher, 17.3% specialized secondary, 21.6% secondary, and 2.4% incomplete secondary training. Urban residents constitute 60.7% of the citizens surveyed, and rural residents make up 39.3%. 34.3% are from Yerevan, and 65.7% from all of Armenia's regions.

Founded in 1994 by Armenia's first Minister of Foreign Affairs Raffi K. Hovannisian and supported by a global network of contributors, ACNIS serves as a link between innovative scholarship and the public policy challenges facing Armenia and the Armenian people in the post-Soviet world. It also aspires to be a catalyst for creative, strategic thinking and a wider understanding of the new global environment. In 2004, the Center focuses primarily on public outreach, civic education, and applied research on critical domestic and foreign policy issues for the state and the nation.

For further information on the Center or the full graphics of the poll results, call (3741) 52-87-80 or 27-48-18; fax (3741) 52-48-46; e-mail root@acnis.am or info@acnis.am; or visit www.acnis.am, http://www.acnis.am/pr/soc_arc/Expert.pdf, http://www.acnis.am/pr/soc_arc/Public.pdf