

ACNIS
Summary Report of Expert Opinion Polls
May 2004

“My View of Armenia’s Future”

In April-May 2004, the Armenian Center for National and International Studies (ACNIS) conducted its first two focus-group surveys on “My View of Armenia’s Future” and “Armenia’s Foreign Policy, Orientation, and Attitude toward Power Centers of the World.” Fifty experts participated in the survey, 30% of whom work at state-run and 70% in non-governmental institutions. 72% of them are male and 28% female. 18% are 20-30 years old, 40% 31-40, 32% 41-50, 6% 51-60, and 4% 61-70 years of age. Among them 98% had received higher education, 2% incomplete higher education. 2% of the respondent specialists were full professors, 32% were candidates of science, 60% had a Master’s degree, while 6% had earned only a Bachelor’s degree.

Within the framework of the expert poll entitled “My View of Armenia’s Future,” 16% are satisfied with current realities and ongoing policies, while 10% are reconciled to them but not satisfied, and 70% reject them; 4% consider themselves indifferent. 14% think they are able to change everything, 80% are able to change something or other, whereas 6% believe they are unable to change anything.

50% of the respondents deem themselves to be well informed, politically active and influential, 46% are well informed but do not struggle for the realization of their own opinions; only 4% view themselves as passive. As for social changes, 80% of the polled specialists are for systemic reforms in state and society, while 20% are for changing at least what is practicable. On Armenia’s economic system, 16% assess it as extremely negative, 54% as negative, and 30% as positive with certain reservations. 100% have a positive attitude only to the concepts of profit and competition. Meanwhile, 30% carry a positive and 70% a negative attitude toward the ideas of super-profit and privilege. The categories of fair competition, equal participation, and liberalism are viewed as positive by 96% and negative by 4% of them. 16% consider monopolies as positive, 84% as negative. 90% are for employee participation in the management of organizations and enterprises, as well as for trade unions, while 10% are against them. 14% are for and 86% against the command system of management.

Generally, capitalism is viewed as positive by 72% of experts and negative by 28%, while socialism as positive by 70% and negative by 30%. 4% identify themselves as left-leaning, 30% as center-left, 30% as right-leaning, 30% as center-right, and 6% on the extreme right. 60% are of the opinion that the development of Armenia is possible in a liberal democracy, just as 20% prefer social democracy and 20% national democracy.

The respondent experts also express their opinion about different problems facing Armenia. 18% think that the most urgent issue for Armenia in the near future is regional cooperation and the same number prioritize the deepening of democracy, 16% believe it to be regulation of the Karabagh conflict, 10% a reassessment of Armenia’s foreign policy, 10% establishment of law and order, 8% a strengthening of the army and maintenance of stability in the country. 6% find the struggle against corruption and 4% job creation to be imperative. As for the most vital issue for Armenia in the long run (10 years), 18% think it is democratization of political life and the same number the formation of a national security system, 12% activation of societal consciousness, and 4% the Karabagh question. 20% consider economic development of the

country and elevation of living standards as the most important issues, while the highest index, 28%, favors human rights and freedoms.

As for the problems inherited from the near and far past, 52% consider international recognition of the Armenian Genocide as feasible and 48% improbable in the next 10 years; 6% view the return of historical Armenian lands as possible and 94% impossible; 56% find resolution of the Karabagh conflict as achievable and 44% not; 68% see ways to prevent emigration and 32% do not; 52% consider poverty surmountable and 48% do not. Only 6% of respondents believe in the success of the campaign against corruption, while 94% do not.

12% regard the apathy and inconsistency of both government and society as the main reason for the country's problems, while 10% think it is the incompetence of the authorities, 2% each the intervention of international actors, Armenia's lack of resources, and the absence of a requisite political atmosphere. 6% find that problems are not solved as it is already too late to solve them, and an equal number that civil society institutions do not present problems to the authorities in a timely and proper manner. Another 6% believe that public support of the authorities is unsatisfactory or even absent, and finally a plurality of 24% are convinced that the principal reason for these problems is the absence of the necessary political will of the authorities.

24% of respondents fear the arbitrariness of the government, 18% life's uncertainty, 12% war with Turkey, 6% war with Azerbaijan, 6% further deepening of relations with Russia, 6% poverty, 6% loss of relatives, 6% God, 4% violence, and 4% death. 2% choose "other" and express concern about the need to defend the present authorities, while 6% are afraid of nothing.

40% of the experts surveyed are of the opinion that Armenia's dominant potential is the human one, 18% pinpointing the people themselves as the strongest resource; 16% select Armenia's geographical position and geopolitical importance, 14% the Diaspora, and 8% cultural heritage. 4% believe that none of the above can be considered as potential. Armenia's economic capacity, its natural resources, and attractiveness of the land and nature are not marked at all. After 10 years, 4% find that the territory of Armenia has expanded, and 8% that its political and geopolitical rating has risen. 18% note an increase in economic potential, 20% in human potential, 4% in cultural wealth, 38% in political maturity. 8% think that none of the cited resources has grown.

As for the presentation and pursuit of the nation's interests, only 14% conclude Armenia to be completely free, 50% partially free, and 36% not free. Simultaneously, 86% believe that Armenia does not define its own national aspirations and moves forward spontaneously, while 14% find its future imposed from outside.

According to the forecasts of 50%, Armenia will be a mediocre state in 10 years, 46% think it will be weak, and only 4% expect it to be a strong country. 80% note that today the prospect for Armenia to be a sovereign, democratic, legal and social state is in danger, and 20% do not think it is in jeopardy. Among the reasons for the above-mentioned problem, 44% are of the opinion that today the country lives exclusively in the past or at best in the present, but nobody thinks about the future; 26% see that the future is not charted today; 18% cite the difficult challenges of the future, and 6% think that the above mentioned ideals were threatened even in the past.

74% are convinced that Armenia will overcome all the difficulties of the present time, while 26% are of the opposite opinion. 36% think that most people in Armenia believe in the future of their country, but 64% think they do not. 28% find that people explain the country's problems by reference to their tough fate and bad neighbors, and 24% refer to pointless reliance on others. 20% are convinced that people consider themselves unable to solve their own problems; 12%

think that in this case people view the world and their partners in it as dishonest and solely driven by their own interests; 10% respond that people think they are alone in the world and do not have any partners. Finally, 4% believe people blame themselves for overestimating their abilities.

“Armenia’s Foreign Policy, Orientation, and Attitude toward Power Centers of the World”

Within the framework of the expert poll entitled “Armenia’s Foreign Policy, Orientation, and Attitude toward Power Centers of the World,” 56% find Armenia’s most important obligation before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to be human rights protection, including freedom of speech, conscience, assembly and press, while 34% think it is constitutional reforms and only 6% judicial-legal reforms. The vast majority of respondents, 82%, evaluate the process of carrying out these commitments as unsatisfactory. 50% are of the opinion that the gradual fulfillment of these obligations has a “partially positive” influence on the current state and demeanor of society, 6% say “partially negative,” and 16% register no impact.

56% view the arbitrariness of the authorities as the most widespread and flagrant violation of human rights in Armenia, while 34% consider themselves to be deprived of the opportunity to live in dignity.

18% believe that the executive branch of government hampers the development of society and thus improvement in living standards, 18% blame overall unlawfulness, and 16% the delay in solving the Karabagh conflict. It is noteworthy that only 12% find the major obstacle to be corruption and 12% the country’s clans and oligarchs.

In response to a question about which state or international structure restricts the republic’s independence and state-building, 56% note the Russian Federation and 12% the Armenian government, with 6% each for the United States and the Commonwealth of Independent States, while interestingly 10% fault none. As for the countries or international bodies promoting the development and sovereignty of Armenia, 72% cite the Council of Europe and the European Union taken together, 22% identify none, and 6% say the United States. No respondent names Russia.

The survey includes a number of questions concerning Armenia’s security system and its further viability. 66% opine that Armenia should join NATO during the upcoming 10-12 years, 28% do not think so, and 6% find it difficult to answer. As for the presence of the Russian military base in Armenia as the main guarantee for national security, only 18% of the specialists surveyed agree with this assertion, 76% do not, and 6% do not answer at all.

72% are convinced that the changes in volume of the US government’s financial or humanitarian assistance to Armenia do not affect the well-being of their families in any way, 22% think they do, and 6% do not make up their mind.

The final, and frequently contemplated, question on the improvement of Armenian-Turkish relations and the opening of borders is viewed as urgent by 50% of respondents and not urgent by 40%. 10% encounter difficulty in responding.