

Study Trip to the South Caucasus: Report

Date: 3-10 September 2023



Description and Goals

The IIP has been covering developments in the European Southern and Eastern Neighborhoods throughout years. The South Caucasus has been dealt with as well, mainly with regards to persisting conflicts in the region, namely between Russia and Georgia over the break-away regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration and trends towards or away from democratization in the region have been another point of interest. After the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the interest in the South Caucasus in the EU in general and in Austria in particular has grown due to geopolitical transformations there caused by Russia's weaker presence (but not a complete withdrawal). The IIP is thus strengthening its focus on the South Caucasus with the aim to inform the Austrian public and decision makers about the region's political, security and economic realities, and possibilities for a stronger EU engagement in conflict management/resolution processes.

The aim of this study trip was to familiarize IIP staff and board members with the current situation on the ground in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with regard to the following issues:

- Peace prospects between Armenia and Azerbaijan: is a formal peace agreement in sight? Is there a potential for a durable and sustainable peace among actors on all levels?
- Role of external actors in the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict/negotiation process (EU, USA, China, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Georgia).
- Economic and political impacts of the war in Ukraine on Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan
- Impacts of the war in Ukraine on the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia
- Political developments in Georgia in light of parliamentary elections in October 2024
- The role and image of the EU (and Austria specifically) in the South Caucasus
- Role of civil society and space for civil society in the three countries to engage in the political process
- Infrastructure and energy transit in the region in light of the closure of transit routes via Russia
- Russia's changing role in the region

The results of the study trip supported preparations for an expert conference dedicated to the South Caucasus that was held in Vienna on 27 November 2023.

Participants of the visit

Heads of the delegation: Hannes Swoboda (IIP President and former MEP – present in Georgia and Azerbaijan only) and Angela Kane (IIP Vice president and former UN Undersecretary General)

Members: Stephanie Fenkart (Director), Marylia Hushcha (Researcher), Elene Gagnidze (Project Assistant)

Study trip coordinator: Marylia Hushcha

Armenia



With Alexander Iskandaryan, Director of the Caucasus Institute



With Hovhannes Nikoghosyan from the American University of Armenia



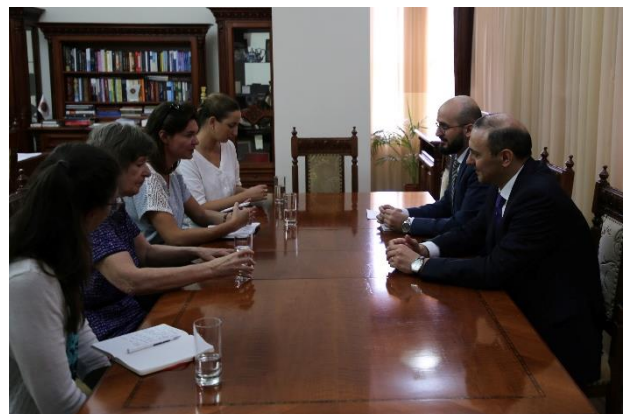
With Mher Sahakyan, Head of the China-Eurasia Council for Political and Strategic Research and Narek Sukiasyan from Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Yerevan



With Paruyr Hovhanissyan, Deputy Foreign Minister



With Ruben Rubinyan, Vice President of the National Assembly



With Armen Grigoryan, Secretary of the National Security Council

Georgia



With Julien Velcof from the Regional Office of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus



With Kornely Kakachia (Director) and Bidzina Lebanidze (Senior Analyst) from the Georgian Institute of Politics



With Ekaterine Metreveli, President of the Rondelli Foundation and Ghia Nodia, Professor at Ilia Chavchavadze State University



With Giorgi Gakharia, chairman of 'For Georgia' party and former Prime Minister, Marcel Rötig (Director) and Irina Seperteladze (Project Manager) from Friedrich Ebert Foundation South Caucasus



With members of the 'For People' Party at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation Tbilisi office



With Member of Parliament Tinatin Bokuchava ('United National Movement' party)

Azerbaijan



With Mahur Gasimov, Head of the Department for Analysis and Strategic Studies at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs



With Peter Michalko, EU Ambassador to Azerbaijan



With Farid Shafiyev (Director) and Shahmar Hajiyev (Senior Specialist) from the AIR Center



With Zaur Shiriyev, Analyst at the International Crisis Group



With Shahla Ismayil, Chairwoman at Women's Association for Rational Development



With Rusif Huseynov, Director of Top Chubashov Center