

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Nasimi Aghayev

Eventful few months in the Caucasus, Russia and wider Eurasia precede our Spring 2010 issue. Of course, the dramatic civic upheaval in Kyrgyzstan, the suicide bomb attacks in the Moscow metro and the victory of a more pro-Russian leader in Ukraine's presidential elections top the list.

In the meantime, the Turkish–Armenian thaw appears to be at the deadlock. Armenia has suspended the process following Ankara's insistence that Yerevan works first to find a sustainable solution to the Karabakh problem, something for which Baku has been repeatedly calling. For its part, Azerbaijan's government has serious concerns that by overemphasizing the protocols and not considering Baku's position, Armenia and the West are thus ignoring the Karabakh issue. At a historic summit in Baku attended by religious leaders from around the world, including Catholicos Garegin II, head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, calls for a peaceful solution have emerged. The need for all nations concerned to heed these calls is great.

Russia's role, as usual, is of utmost interest. Despite the domestic strife, Prime Minister Putin has been busy of late, with trips to Austria and Italy to ensure support for the South Stream gas pipeline project, which could be at odds with the Nabucco one and further increase Russia's influence over supplying Europe with energy. Russia on the rise in Europe perhaps signals greater difficulty for Georgia, particularly in terms of resolving the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Without measures to fix the internal stalemates, Georgia's westward drive will forever hang in the balance. Perhaps the opening of the Zemo/Verkhny Lars border crossing between Russia and Georgia is a move toward some sort of reconciliation, at least with regard to rebuilding vital trade links if not on initiating dialogue with its northern neighbor.

Our Spring issue includes some topics that offer a slightly different perspective. We look at some of the underlying causes of the significant changes. We display work that keeps the larger picture fully in mind while still offering deeper analyses of political, economic and social issues, many of which have the sort of bottom-up effect that drives large-scale action.

On Russia's political maneuvering, we have one paper that explores the effects of authoritarian tendencies on foreign policy and sheds light on the leadership's calculated drive to remain a major player on the world stage.

As such, Russia's energy politics are as important to counties in the former Soviet space as to those in the EU, and a second paper analyses this issue in view of alternatives to Russian energy resources and warning against overdependence of EU on Russia for energy needs.

Despite all the diversification rhetoric, the EU is still struggling to achieve a unity as far as its energy relations with Russia are concerned. It is widely understood that without a clear-cut strategy and the willingness to implement this strategy, it will be impossible to reach any energy diversification in the EU. We present in this regard a paper that adroitly explains the current situation and assesses the prospects of EU's common energy security policy.

Another paper analyzes the implications of the Georgia-Russia war of 2008 for the region and beyond, and tries to rigorously assess whether it could lead to a new cold war in the region.

New geopolitical realities of the South Caucasus are illuminated by a commentary.

An interview with a recognized expert from the City University of New York examines the pressing issues of state-building in Georgia.

Kazakhstan is also in the spotlight after assuming the OSCE chairmanship, and is now in charge of dealing with the Kyrgyzstan's turmoil. Thus another paper looks at civic nation-building in the country, which speaks to Kazakhstan's drive to show a strong, unified front to the international community.

We hope these contributions cast light on affairs in a meaningful way. Moreover, we thank all of our readers, authors, reviewers and staff once again. Enjoy the Spring 2010 edition!