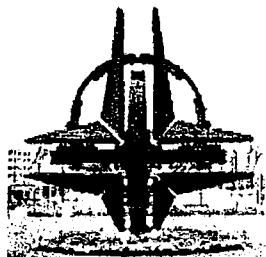


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Approved
Sept. 03

**North Atlantic Treaty Organization
Academic Affairs and Public Diplomacy**



NATO-EAPC Individual Research Fellowship 2001-2003

FINAL REPORT

**Foreign Policy Orientations in Azerbaijan:
Public and Elite Opinion**

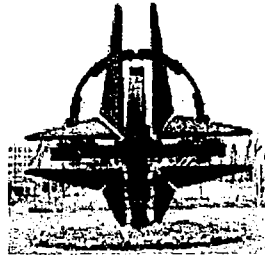
**Author: Dr. Tair Faradov, Ph.D
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Dr. Tair Faradov

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Department of Peace and Conflict Studies

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Baku, Azerbaijan, June 2003

Introduction

Since gaining independence in 1991, Azerbaijan is searching for its own place and role in the dynamical system of the contemporary international relations, and is now in the uneasy process of determining its partners and allies abroad in an effort to become one of the key "players" in the South Caucasus region and on international scene.

The current transitional period is very crucial and of great importance for Azerbaijan's foreign policy, as right now the process of formation of its foreign policy consciousness and behavior on international scene, the system of approaches to the decision of complex foreign policy problems are being shaped.

There is a great need for our newly independent state to integrate into changing and complicated structure of the international relations, to adapt to the main tendencies in the modern integrative processes and world order and civilization.

Tasks of paramount importance for the country are to work out a long-term optimum strategy of Azerbaijan external policy, to establish mutually advantageous economic, political, military and cultural relations with the other members of the world international community, to improve contacts with contagious countries, to improve its relations with European countries and the other regions, as well as to take care of its own positive, favorable image abroad.

The contemporary geopolitical situation, which has dramatically been changed since the collapse of the USSR, makes it necessary for Azerbaijan to work out a balanced foreign political line aimed at promoting a durable peace, stability and security in the South Caucasus region.

In this context it is extremely important for the new state to determine its geo-political priorities in long-term perspectives. It is obvious that in many respects the future development of the country and its people will be dependent on the system of foreign-political orientations and preferences to be formed henceforth.

The balanced and optimal model of foreign policy development chosen by Azerbaijan is expected to have a strong impact on its international relations, raise the level of stability and security on the whole South Caucasus region and lessen the possibility of new ethno-political conflicts.

It would be appropriate to note that the system and the configuration of the international relations, dynamics of contacts of our country are rather complex, many-dimensional and ambiguous. There is a set of alternatives and options of foreign policy development for the country.

The newly independent country has been gradually gaining a certain experience of foreign policy dialogue and interaction, communication and contacts with the other countries and international organizations. Over the past few years Azerbaijan has launched some important foreign policy initiatives.

Since proclaiming independence, the cooperation with the international organizations has become a key element needed for quick and effective involvement of Azerbaijan into international politics. In this regard, the entry of the country into such key international structures as UN, OSCE and the Council of Europe turned out the doubtless progress in this process.

One of the basic directions of Azerbaijani foreign policy is progressive integration within European and Euro-Atlantic political and economic structures, as well as security structures. Azerbaijan considers itself to be an integral part of Europe, adheres to its fundamental values: free market economy, democracy and rule-of-law, respect for human rights, and secularist society.

Our country intends to intensify its participation in European integration processes, in particular, in its security structures. Within this context Azerbaijan seeks to develop the cooperation with European and Trans-Atlantic partners, first of all, within the framework of international organizations, integrate into these structures.

Ties between Azerbaijan and NATO, Trans-Atlantic and European organizations have increasingly intensified in recent years. Close relations with NATO and integration into European, Western institutions (CE, EU) are regarded to be the best formula for Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan is taking an active part in the "Partnership for Peace" program, an arrangement designed to speed up the consultation and military cooperation with NATO, other related activities and programs.

In May 1994, Azerbaijan signed a frame agreement on joining the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, Brussels, Belgium.

Note that the participation of Azerbaijan in the NATO "PfP" Program, signing of agreement on partnership and cooperation with EU, membership in the Council of Europe and activities aimed at the adaptation of national law to European standards are the first steps on the path of integration of Azerbaijan into Europe.

The South Caucasian region, like Central Asia and Balkans, is likely to turn into the zone for the Alliance's responsibility and reaction. At the same time, there are other approaches to the Azerbaijan's foreign policy strategy.

In this regard, it is rather important for the newly independent state to identify its priority geopolitical orientations in the long-term perspective. Hence, the future international development of the country will primarily be affected by the already formed foreign-policy priorities.

The importance of the scientific research into of the proposed issue - foreign policy orientations in Azerbaijan: public and elite opinion - has been accounted for by the factors as follows:

1. The geopolitical importance of the South Caucasus region has appreciably increased due to the new large-scale projects on exploitation and transportation of tremendous energy resources;

2. The raising influence of the external actors in the region, the overlapping of interests of different countries and alliances, trying to safeguard here their own strategic and economic interests, as well as the proximity of this region to another vital strategic regions, like Russia, the Black Sea and the Persian Gulf;

3. The importance of promoting the security and resolution of long-lasting, protracted territorial disputes and ethno-political conflicts in this region characterized by extremely unstable and crisis-ridden, and simultaneously having high developmental potential;

4. Azerbaijan's precarious international geopolitical position, its location at the cross-road of different ideological, political, ethno-cultural and religious influences of various countries, which are competing, in fact, for their influence over Azerbaijan.

Part I. The General Overview of the Study: Main Concepts, Objectives and Methodology

1.1 The Role of Public Opinion in Making and Implementing Foreign Policy

At the present stage, in Azerbaijan's development there take place considerable transformations in all the spheres of social life. Particularly, these changes have affected the area of public consciousness and psychology. The collapse of the Communist system led to an ideological vacuum in mass consciousness, which came to be rapidly filled with various ideological trends, theories and concepts.

Complicated and painful processes of demolishing old stereotypes and attitudes and social re-evaluation of social values are ongoing. People are currently in a state of difficult search for new social, ideological, political and foreign-policy identities and loyalties.

At present, Azerbaijani society is experiencing an extremely crucial and responsible period in its socio-political, cultural and moral development. In a relatively short period of time it has found itself in a completely new socio-psychological situation. Its distinctive feature is the absence of monopoly of any ideology and a particular world-outlook or mode of life. Emerging on the scene is a real pluralism of thoughts, opinions and views. Citizens are in position to make a deliberate, free choice of different forms of their socio-political and socio-cultural existence.

It is evident that directions of social changes and transformations will, to a large degree, depend on what ideas and values are accepted or rejected by different groups and categories of the population. The Azerbaijan society's short- and long-term development model will be accounted for by the system of values to play the first fiddle.

This time, Azerbaijani society undoubtedly comes across an important historical threshold. This situation offers an opportunity of quite a precise analysis of the complicated nature of opinions, attitudes, and factors that influence changes, taking place in the sphere of internal and foreign policy.

Foreign policy strategy of the country should be determined, first of all, by its objective geo-strategic interests, social-economic and political factors. At the same time, the process of the establishment of foreign policy priorities depends, in the main, on public and elite opinion. Public opinion can play an important role in these processes and thus have an impact on their dynamics.

The public opinion would be able to significantly accelerate specific governmental decisions and foreign policy initiatives, for example, the establishment of regional, bilateral and multilateral integrative links, and, on the other hand, to come out as a powerful hindering factor.

To all appearances, the implementation of the official foreign policy course needs a broad public support by majority of citizens. Foreign policy initiatives should also be backed by the majority of the population. And on the contrary, the lack in the society of an adequate consensus may prevent the realization of certain programs and projects in the field of foreign policy.

It should be confessed that this influence is not unequivocal, one-dimensional. The broad range of issues related to the impact of public opinion on foreign policy-making has intensively been debated among political scientists, researchers and practitioners (*See Annex A. Endnote 1*).

One of the central issues in democratic theory is the proper role of public opinion in the conduct of international affairs. The capacity of the public to make informed judgments about these complex issues which are often far removed from their experience has been questioned. Not everything is clear in this regard. There are alternative versions, points of view on the role of public opinion in the conduct of foreign relations. (*See H. Morgenthau. "Politics among Nations", N.Y., 1973; Almond G. "The American People and Foreign Policy", N.Y., 1964; Key V.O. "Public Opinion and American Democracy", N.Y., 1961; Small M. "Public Opinion: Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy: Studies of the Principal Movements and Ideas", N.Y., 1978.*)

For example, theoretical disputes are taking place among experts on the following crucial issues: the role of public opinion in state politics; nature, force and intensity of this influence; how rapidly and how permanently does opinion change in response to international developments; how does public opinion affect foreign policy; by what means, and with what impacts, do elites shape general public opinion; how and when do politicians listen to the public; policy responsiveness to the public. They also provide for the relationship between opinion and policy that has changed over time; key political actors' use of public opinion to formulate domestic and foreign policy.

Moral-psychological atmosphere, prevailing public moods in the country determine support or rejection for some foreign policy initiatives and actions, approve foreign policy strategy of the country, serve as criteria for performing a certain official course, for example, officially proclaimed pro-Western orientation of Azerbaijan.

Therefore, the issue how the population of Azerbaijan perceives and understands the current international situation, what is the set of foreign policy attitudes and orientations dominating in the mass consciousness is becoming an increasingly important factor.

In consideration of the above-mentioned, a number of issues regarding mechanisms of interplay between foreign policy and mass consciousness have gained high theoretical and practical importance for Azerbaijan:

What does the present foreign-policy consciousness phenomenon look like? What are the main peculiarities, trends and dynamics of its development for the recent period of independence? What is the current state of the public opinion on our country's foreign policy and the modern international contacts, current developments and processes in the sphere? What is the range of foreign-policy attitudes and orientations dominating in the mass consciousness? What are the factors determining formation of the vector foreign-policy attitudes and dispositions both at the mass, societal and elite consciousness level? How do citizens view Azerbaijan's place and role in the contemporary system of international relations, its relations with the other countries and international organizations? What is the image of the different countries, blocs and alliances in the mirror of the Azerbaijani public opinion?

What factors - economic interests, ethnic or religious identity, shared cultural values, security issues, a common historical background - are prevailing in determining the partners and allies abroad? What is the extent of the public opinion's impact on the foreign policy strategy? What is the role of the

mass media and communication in the formation of the public opinion on the foreign policy? What are the main sources of information concerning foreign policy that enjoy greater popularity among the population? What are the channels and mechanisms of the public opinion transmission to influence the foreign policy-makers?

Even a preliminary, superficial analysis of the situation shows that presently in the country there is no consensus on external policy priorities. In the Azerbaijani mass consciousness there is a sharp differentiation of ambivalent, mutually contradictory orientations, opinions and divergent perceptions of the current developments in the area of international relations.

Different social and political groups are of different views on the future foreign political development of Azerbaijan, its place and role in changing international structure. Some groups of people think that Azerbaijan should ally itself with the West and they are mostly oriented on the Western-democratic, European values; another groups suppose that our country should be developed within Turkish or Islamic world, according to oriental values; there is also a group of Russia-oriented or Iran-oriented people.

It should be noted that the problem of foreign policy orientations within the context of contemporary geo-political realities is one of major research subjects. Applied researches and surveys of the phenomena and mechanisms of foreign policy orientations and attitudes have been conducted in various countries and regions of the world. (See *Holsti, Ole R. 1996. Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy. Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press*; *John E. Rielly, ed. 1999. American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1999. Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations*; *Page, Benjamin I., and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1992. The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences. Chicago: University of Chicago Press*; *Navigating Public Opinion: Polls, Policy, and the Future of American Democracy, edited by Jeff Manza, Fay Lomax Cook, and Benjamin I. Page, 2002, Oxford University Press.*)

At the same time, there is a great lack of concrete and reliable empirical data regarding foreign policy orientations in the post-Soviet context and, in particular, a rather scanty knowledge of the state of the public opinion and the aspiration of people in Azerbaijan during independence. The problem of foreign policy orientations in Azerbaijan has not yet become a focus of the special research attention.

All these predetermine a high importance of special sociological measuring of the state and character of foreign-policy orientations of Azerbaijan's population within the context of contemporary internal and geo-political realities.

1.2 Aims and Objectives of Research

The main overall purpose of the research was to obtain comprehensive sociological information concerning the peculiarities, dynamics and basic trends of the foreign-policy orientations in post-Soviet Azerbaijani society.

The research was designed to explore the basic sociological characteristics, parameters and spectrum of the mass foreign-policy awareness of Azerbaijan's population, analyze the system of social, political and psychological factors and circumstances affecting changes in the foreign-policy consciousness, as well as the assessment of the role of public opinion in performing foreign policy strategy.

The research objectives were the following:

1. To explore the images of NATO, international organizations and selected countries in the mass consciousness;
2. To determine the dominating trends in the Azerbaijani public opinion on current international affairs, international cooperation, security and conflict resolution issues;
3. To study the people's views and attitudes towards the modern international processes taking place in the South Caucasus region and the world;

4. To find out the subgroup differences in foreign-policy orientations, to explore the specific attitudes towards foreign policy among various social and demographic groups of population;
5. To identify the key types of the foreign-policy consciousness among the population to comply with the present period;
6. To reveal the experts' assessments of the various aspects of the current international affairs and Azerbaijan's foreign policy, international cooperation, security and conflict resolution issues;
7. To examine the role of mass media in public opinion formation process, its effect on the foreign-policy preferences and stereotypes.

These issues are of a big theoretical and practical importance for our country. The research conclusions and findings may serve a sort of basis for understanding, realization of the general social-political situation in modern Azerbaijani society and adequate estimation of the prospects for its long-term development.

1.3 Methodological Aspects of Sociological Analysis

Operationalisation of concepts. The concept of "foreign policy orientation" is a key notion for our research. Using this term we implied a particular sphere of public consciousness, reflecting a specific type of relations and institutions related to external affairs of the country. Under this term is meant the impact of international relations on the consciousness both on the entire social and demographic groups of population, as well as individuals. Regarding goals of the research, it was very important to use this notion for a specific empirical-sociological analysis.

Multidimensional model of foreign-policy consciousness. In our study, we regarded a foreign-policy consciousness as a multidimensional phenomenon. "Multidimensional" model implies the use of a balanced system of indicators, which provides comprehensive and valid information about the state and conditions of foreign-policy awareness in the Azerbaijani society.

The following sets of empirical indicators were used: 1) Cognitive components, which include such basic parameters as knowledge in this area, availability of basic information on these issues; person's self-identification, i.e. subjective affiliation to followers to a certain foreign-policy paradigm; motivation, i.e. a hierarchy of motives for this choice; 2) Affective components, which include sentiments reflecting a complex of people's emotional and psychological reactions regarding their choices; 3) Behavioral components, which include the aptitude or the disposition of a certain type of behavior to a certain object, event, or situation connected with international affairs.

The "public opinion on foreign policy" is a certain socio-psychological state of specific people, social groups and communities, set of their attitudes and orientations regarding foreign policy issues. Within the context of our research the public opinion on foreign policy represents a multi-dimensional and complex phenomenon, which includes public perceptions of Azerbaijan's foreign policy; public attitudes to NATO; opinion of selected countries; opinion of international organizations; opinion of international economic cooperation and collaboration; and public attitudes towards security issue.

Survey Research

The methodology of the research was based on the complex sociological analysis, providing a broad range of empirical data regarding the different aspects of the foreign-policy orientations and priorities in contemporary Azerbaijan.

Methods. The following methods of sociological research were used:

I. Public Opinion Survey

Regions. The public opinion survey was conducted in 5 towns of Azerbaijan shown below: 1) Baku (capital of the country) in September 2001-October 2001 (500 respondents) and in September 2002-October 2002 (500 respondents); 2) Gandja on 12-18 November 2001 (100 respondents) and on 16-22 November 2002 (100 respondents); 3) Sumgait on 17-23 December 2001 (100 respondents) and on 10-16 December 2002 (100 respondents); 4) Guba on 15-21 January 2002 (100 respondents) and on 16-22 January 2003 (100 respondents); 5) Lenkoran on 10-16 February 2002 (100 respondents) and on 17-23 February 2003 (100 respondents).

Total number of respondents interviewed - 1600 persons.

Procedure. The survey has been conducted through structured, formalized face-to-face interviews. Interviews were conducted in household conditions in the Azeri and Russian languages. Confidentiality of the interviewees was strictly guaranteed, which led to higher of reliability and validity of the data collected. The survey was carried out by the trained interviewers under permanent control and supervision of the Project's Author.

Tools. A special questionnaire has been constructed as a main tool for the public opinion survey. This questionnaire contained 40 main questions (35 closed-ended and 5 open-ended questions) and 8 supplementary questions covering all topics envisaged in the project to comply with the research aims and purposes. This was a system of unified questions directed to achieving intended purposes.

Sampling. Development of a relevant and adequate sampling strategy was one of the most important tasks of the survey. The probability multi-stage cluster sampling has been used. This method consisted of a number of logical stages and procedures of randomly selecting and identifying respondents. This procedure guaranteed a high reliability, validity and objectivity of the data obtained. The sample was representative for different social and demographic groups of the population of the selected regions of Azerbaijan.

Pretest. The pretest survey was conducted among 50 respondents in Baku in August 2001, in order to verify the quality of the questionnaire. Necessary corrections were made on the basis of the pretest.

Interviewers. A particular emphasis was made on the training of the interviewers. Among the interviewers there were 16 persons - local teachers, librarians, students from state and private universities, majoring in sociology, political science and international relations. Several theoretical and practical training sessions on modern applied social research methods have been conducted by the Project's Author. The interviewers were provided with a set of appropriate training materials and guidelines for interviewing and administering the questionnaire. The quality of interviewers' work was under a permanent control and supervision by the Project's Author.

Data processing. The public opinion survey data processing and statistic-correlative analysis was carried out through using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Data Entry and Processing program (Version 9.0).

Trend research. A distinctive feature of our approach was the use of the trend research. This meant that the public opinion survey included two successive stages: I stage - from September 2001 till February 2002, II stage - from September 2001 till February 2002. An interval between the stages was precisely one year. The same survey in the same regions was conducted through using the same sampling procedure and strategy to comply with the same methods and tools of data collection and analysis. Then results of the two stages were compared.

Such an approach made it possible to identify the dynamics and leading trends in the foreign-policy orientations of the Azerbaijani people, to assess the stability and steadiness of the trends explored. At the

same time, it ensured both the validity and reliability of the data gathered. Moreover, repeating the same questions across time provides a unique data base for analyzing trends within country and cross-nationally.

Social-demographic parameters. The sociological survey of foreign policy orientations and preferences was conducted with due regard for socio-demographic status of our respondents. We extrapolated from an assumption that various socio-demographic factors (age, gender, education, occupation) have a certain influence on the attitude of respondents towards foreign policy issues. Therefore, manifestation of foreign policy orientations in various social categories of the population has its own peculiarities. The subgroup differences in the patterns of perception of foreign policy issues may be preconditioned by the system of people's basic life values, interests and needs, their lifestyle and social activity.

II. Elite Opinion Survey

In-depth personal interviews were conducted by the Project's Author among 200 experts. This expert survey involved a wide range of persons holding quite high positions and playing a leading role in the diplomatic, academic, political, military, cultural, religious, and public life of Azerbaijan.

Experts interviewed represent the following major groups: 1) Diplomats involved in negotiation process, practitioners who conduct foreign policy; 2) Researchers, analysts, social and political scientists - scholars who study foreign policy, international relations and law, conflict resolution, sociology; 3) Governmental officials, top policy- and decision-makers, who deal with issues in the field of international relations, high level civil servants, members of parliament; 4) Military and justice officers; 5) Political leaders, elected politicians, representatives of different political parties, social-political movements and organizations; 6) Journalists, representatives of the local mass media; 7) Representatives of the educational establishments, university professors, lecturers, students majoring in international relations; 8) Activists of non-governmental public organizations - human rights and peace-related NGOs, youth and women's organizations; 9) Religious leaders and activists, representatives of various religious communities, groups and organizations; 10) Business and labor leaders; 11) Workers of culture; 12) Representatives of the national-cultural associations and organizations.

A special questionnaire containing 24 open-ended questions has been designed for the interviewing experts. The expert's opinions and assessments were analyzed by using both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

III. Mass Media Content-Analysis and Monitoring

The monitoring and analysis of the content of Azerbaijani press (most read governmental, pro-governmental, independent and opposition newspapers), as well as analysis of the content of the most popular TV channels were conducted in 2001, 2002, and 2003. The special instruments have been worked out for content-analysis of the mass media.

IV. Analysis of the Official Documents, Statistics and Other Relevant Materials

There has been conducted the analysis of official documents, statistics to comply with other related materials on the topic.

Greatly contributing to the analysis was Author's direct work at the Library of the NATO Headquarters in Brussels (10 May - 8 June, 2002).

Part II. Findings of the Public Opinion Survey

2.1 Public Perceptions of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

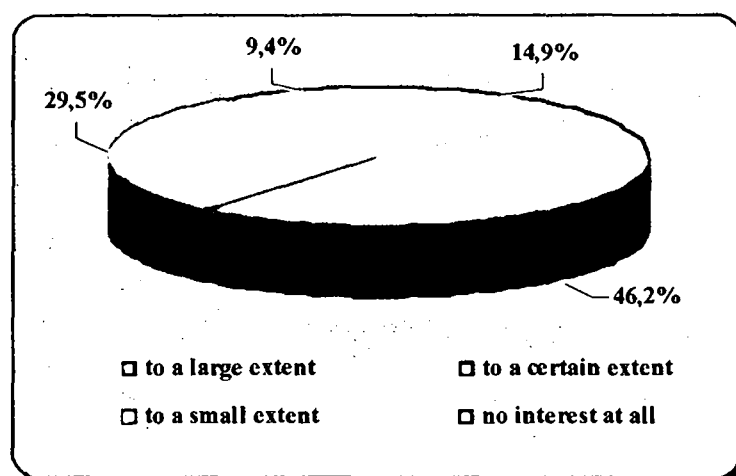
Interest in the issues of foreign policy and international affairs. First of all, in the course of the survey it was important for us to identify an extent and nature of the interest and concern of the country's population in the problems of foreign policy and international affairs. This was an attempt by an empirical way to determine what place the issues of foreign policy occupy within the structure of mass consciousness of the Azerbaijani population, within the set of people's social values and preferences.

It was important for several reasons. Firstly, there is a certain possibility that in terms of transition and social-economical hardships the ordinary citizens are not up to these external problems. They could react with an absolute indifference to what is going on outside the country, what kind of relations Azerbaijan maintain with other countries, in what international unions, entities and organizations our country has been involved, what would be our future development in international arena.

Thus, it would be appropriate to suppose that if the social apathy and nihilism do exist regarding the intra-social and political life and processes, what should one say in this case concerning external policy and affairs? On the other hand, different points of view can also exist. In terms of radical social-political transformations and crises, the public attention and concern can be predominantly focused on external-political problems and events. Therefore, we faced with the necessity to verify these alternative hypotheses.

According to the survey, in average 14.9% (i.e. 16.0% in September 2001 - February 2002 and 13.8% in September 2002 – February 2003) of respondents are taking the interest on the subject "to a large extent", 46.2% (47.6%-44.8%) - "to a certain extent", 29.5% (28.5%-30.5%) - "to a small extent", while 9.4% (7.9%-11.0%) - "practically taking no interest at all" in the issues of foreign policy and international affairs (See Annex A. Endnote 2).

Figure 1. Interest of Respondents in the Issues of Foreign Policy and International Affairs



As is evident, these figures are mostly affirmative of the second hypothesis. The general level of cognitive interest of our respondents in the issues of foreign policy and international affairs is quite high. It provides interest in the foreign policy phenomenon as it is (its essence, goals, tools), in the latest developments in the international relations area and, correspondingly, to the broad diversity of processes and events in this realm.

We think it rather natural that for an overwhelming majority of the survey participants' this interest is of sporadic nature, from event to another event, "if something interesting and attractive does happen". However, it is also quite symptomatic that there are some people among our respondents who take not only purely abstract interest in the issues of foreign policy and international affairs, but also rather stable and permanent "theoretical" interest, such as reading popular and even special professional literature on the

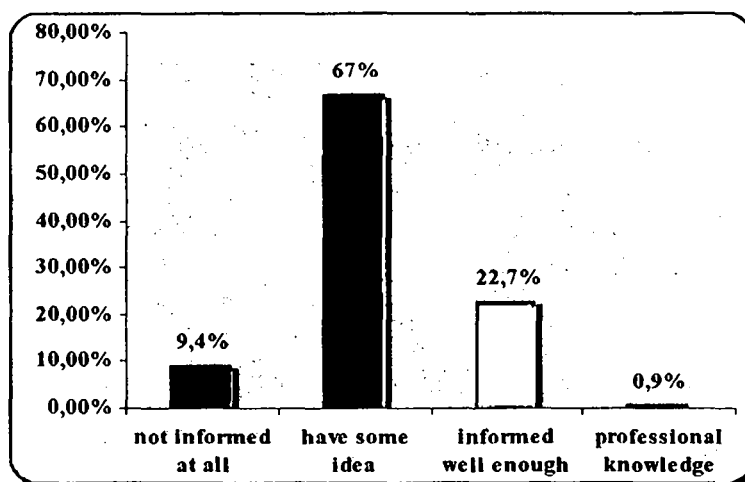
topic, involvement in various public discussions, talk-shows, etc. There is also a group of highly educated people, intellectuals, who take an acute and even professional interest in these issues, are deeply and seriously interested in the issues of foreign policy. This group is basically comprised of students of universities, representatives of science and policy, public figures.

In fact, a varying interest in foreign policy has been identified among different educational categories of the population. If people with lower educational level are more interested in the day-to-day news and events, intellectuals primarily concentrate on analytical aspects and special literature.

Awareness of the events and processes in the international life. An important component of people's foreign-policy consciousness is their awareness in this field, knowledge of the main, principal current events and processes in the area of international life and affairs. Our respondents have been asked to express their subjective opinion on the level of their competence in foreign policy and international affairs.

The below-shown are self-assessments of foreign-policy awareness: "not informed at all" - 9.4% of respondents (7.6%-11.1%); "some idea in this field" - 67.0% (65.9%-68.1%) ("I can maintain a conversation on the subject, but would like to know more"); "informed well enough" - 22.7% (25.4%-20.0%) ("familiar quite well with recent developments in this area"); "professionally deal with these problems" - 0.9% (1.1%-0.8%) ("I have good enough level of knowledge", "I have had professional training in the field"). And, at last, some respondents said that it was hard to evaluate their own knowledge.

Figure 2. Awareness of the Events and Processes in the International Life



As is seen, a rather considerable portion of respondents subjectively consider themselves as quite well-versed and informed in the area of international life, foreign policy and international affairs. Meanwhile, a share of those stressing insufficiency of their knowledge and being interested in gaining more additional information is substantial as well. Of empirical interest is the fact that while men are more informed in foreign policy and international affairs (27.6% vs. 17,8%), more women are trying to get the additional information about these issues (16.1% vs. 12.5%).

It is quite natural that awareness of foreign policy issues is higher with the educated part of the population than that with the less educated one. At the same time, they are characterized by a more realistic assessment of their knowledge and the desire to learn more about foreign policy.

Sources of knowledge and information about international relations. What are the main sources of information for citizens of Azerbaijan about events and processes taking place in the area of international relations?

Table 1. Major Sources of Information about International Life and Relations (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Foreign TV (Russian, Turkish)	72.9	77.3	75.0
2.	National TV	67.3	77.3	72.3
3.	Local newspapers and magazines	38.3	33.6	35.9
4.	Foreign newspapers and magazines	29.8	24.8	27.3
5.	Foreign radio	11.3	9.1	10.2
6.	National radio	9.6	8.0	8.8
7.	Public discussions	9.0	8.1	8.6
8.	Conversations, rumors	7.4	6.8	7.2
9.	Internet	7.3	4.9	6.1

As follows from the Table, presently there are numerous sources of information about international life and relations (*See Annex A. Endnote 3*). It is quite natural that mass media is the widely spread and popular sources of information. This, first of all, involves TV programs. People apply quite frequently (75.0%) to foreign (Russian, Turkish) or our national (72.3%) Azerbaijani television programs, take an active interest in current events, news, reports, interviews dealing with the international life and relations. Moreover, official (AZTV-1, AZTV-2) and independent channels (ANS, "Space", "LIDER") are approximately equal in terms of their popularity among citizens.

Thus, television has been the main source of information on foreign policy and international affairs for the respondents residing in Baku (capital of the country) or large cities, such as Gandja and Sumgait. An exception here have been small towns like Guba and Lenkoran, since most respondents in these regions receive information mostly from newspapers or occasional sources.

Next in importance for our respondents are local newspapers and magazines (35.9%), and foreign newspapers and magazines (27.3%). People prefer to read special articles in periodicals on various international topics. Special issues, scientific-popular books and magazines are very popular among the young generations, in particular, among students.

Considerably less popular with the Azerbaijani broad public are foreign radio (10.2%) and national radio (8.8%) programs. Among not very widely spread sources are also public discussions (8.6%), conversations and rumors (7.1%), which is, however, quite natural, for ordinary people like to talk about foreign policy and international affairs, to exchange of "confidential", "first-hand" information in this area. By the way, it has turned out that over one-third of respondents quite often touch upon on the topic. Some information is obtained by people, basically, youngsters, also from Internet (6.1%). Also mentioned were such sources of information as lectures, seminars, schools, universities, colleges, workplaces.

Regarding these matters, respondents noted in their comments as follows: "I am very much interested in events taking place in the world, especially, in the Middle and Near East, Iraq, antiterrorist campaign", "I watch very often any news on international contacts of Azerbaijan", "I like a special program about these issues", "it draws me closer to the world, I feel my relation to this world, since I'm aware of what is happening", "I want to know, what occurs in the modern world, because it may have its affect on events in our country, as well as on ordinary persons too", "for example, world developments may affect dropping dollar exchange rate in our country". The opposite opinions were as follows: "The events that occur in the world are very far from us, we have our own problems and difficulties, therefore, everything that occurs in contemporary world is not interesting for me".

Some respondents believe it is necessary to increase the number of special programs on television and radio devoted to international affairs ("it is very important"), while another group is prone to think that "there is already enough of them", "it is not so important".

Important and pressing problems for Azerbaijan. Respondents were offered to name what they believe to be the most serious and relevant problems for Azerbaijan today. The spectrum of important problems facing the country, listed by the respondents, was quite extensive. All of them can be grouped into the following key categories (in order of priority for respondents):

Table 2. Important and Relevant Problems for Azerbaijan (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Settlement of Nagorno Karabakh conflict	68.6	77.3	72.9
2.	Restoration of territorial integrity of the country	55.6	65.4	60.5
3.	Economic reforms	55.8	48.8	52.3
4.	Struggle against corruption and criminality	49.1	39.4	44.3
5.	Decrease of the unemployment	39.9	44.1	42.0
6.	Social security of the citizens	43.8	39.1	41.4
7.	Return of refugees' to their lands	30.9	42.3	36.6
8.	Establishment of stability and order in society	25.9	38.0	31.9
9.	Establishing the rule of law	35.0	28.4	31.7
10.	Democratization of public life	36.4	26.8	31.6
11.	Development of good, friendly relations with neighbouring countries	26.4	24.8	25.6
12.	Development of international relations	24.0	22.5	23.3
13.	Attraction of foreign investments	21.9	16.8	19.3
14.	Creation of favourable international "image" of the country	22.8	14.8	18.8

As has been expected, the overwhelming majority of respondents voiced problems related to unresolved conflict situation in our country. In the opinion of our respondents, the most important, "hot" and exigent for Azerbaijan are the problems of "settlement of Nagorno Karabakh conflict" (72.9%) and "restoration of territorial integrity of the country" (60.5%). Moreover, during one year passed since the first stage of the survey, this percentage has essentially increased - by 10 percent in both cases. Also, during the interview our respondents repeatedly referred to the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons as a consequence of this conflict, 36.6% of them believe that today the problem of primary concern is "return of refugees to their lands".

It has to be kept in mind that the problems of Armenian aggression against our country and ethnic separatism undoubtedly are of primary concern for citizens of Azerbaijan irrespective of their nationality. Representatives of all ethnic groups who took part in the survey practically were unanimous in stressing the extremely negative role of Armenia on this track. It was repeatedly mentioned by many respondents that Armenian armed forces still occupy a fifth part of Azerbaijan's territory.

Further, it is seen that many external problems are viewed by Azerbaijani people in the light of the unresolved conflict over Nagorno Karabakh. Even people's attitudes to either country depend on latter's official position and action regarding the conflict.

Another large group (52.3%) of respondents' answers dealt with the issues of "economic reforms", social and economic problems, such as poverty, social polarization and industrial decline. Respondents have also attached a particular attention to such mutually related problems as "struggle against corruption and criminality" (44.3%), "decrease of the unemployment" (42.0%) and "social security of the citizens" (41.4%). Another category of answers (one-third in average) touched upon such important issues as democracy-building in Azerbaijan: "democratizing public life" (31.6%), "establishing the rule of law" (31.7%) and closely related "maintaining the stability and order in society" (31.9%). As is evident, quite a great number of respondents consider the problem of building of the democratic, civil and legal society to be one of the most important and challenging for Azerbaijan at the present stage.

And, at last, worthy of note are such issues, as "developing good, friendly relations with neighbouring countries" (25.6%), "developing international relations" (23.3%), "attracting the foreign investments" (19.3%) and "creating favourable international "image" of the country" (18.8%) occupy close positions on the list.

It should be noted that Azerbaijani people mostly tend toward internal social, economic and political problems, but it does not mean that they ignore external problems. Despite of their location in the lower part of the list, the issues of international relations are taken quite seriously, interestedly and attentively by our general public. In fact, fourth/fifth part of interviewed people indicated these problems.

In other words, these problems occupy in the mass consciousness and public life a smaller portion, "density" only in comparison with internal problems of the country. Of interest is the fact that nearly the fifth part of the surveyed people is anxious for international "image" of the country. This is largely indicative of a certain maturity and developed nature of mass foreign-policy consciousness of Azerbaijan's citizens. Ordinary people, apparently, start to realize importance and necessity of the given issue for the international development of the country, its progress and the status on international scene.

Attitude towards current Azerbaijan's foreign policy. How have respondents assessed the current Azerbaijan's foreign policy and the foreign political line of our country?

Table 3. Attitude Towards Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Completely approve	10.1	12.8	11.4
2.	Basically approve	57.6	45.9	51.8
3.	Basically disapprove	23.5	26.8	25.1
4.	Totally disapprove	6.3	8.5	7.4
5.	It is difficult to answer	2.5	6.1	4.3

It has been ascertained that the considerable majority (63.2%) thinks that the current Azerbaijan's foreign policy may be approved. Among them 11.4% (10.1%-12.8%) of respondents "completely approve" ("reforms in this area are progressing fast enough", "we have achieved a lot of impressive, remarkable diplomatic victories thanks to our political leaders' and diplomats' efforts") and 51.8% (57.6%-45.9%) of respondents "basically approve" the external political course of the Azerbaijani government. For example, respondents stressed some achievements of our foreign policy over the last few years, such as a membership in the Council of Europe and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, improvement of relations with the West and Russia, diplomatic successes at the PACE and OSCE Summits in Lisbon and Istanbul.

There are no particular differences between men and women in their approving attitudes towards foreign policy matters. Also, all educational and occupational groups were represented in approximately equal proportions.

Meanwhile, 32.5% of respondents have expressed their dissatisfaction with the Azerbaijan's foreign policy and, respectively, international development of our country. They were saying that positive changes and reforms in this area "are not as rapid as they should be", "extremely slow and ineffective" and even that "reforms are not carried out at all". And finally just 4.3% (2.5%-6.1%) of respondents failed to answer the question.

Public's influence on decision-making in the area of foreign policy. What is the role of civil society in the foreign policy pursued by the country? Is the general public of our country capable of affecting the decision-making in the area of foreign policy?

Table 4. Public's Influence on Foreign Policy (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Does not influence at all	43.6	51.9	47.8
2.	Influences to a certain, somewhat degree	46.1	31.4	38.8
3.	Influences quite strongly	7.9	11.0	9.4
4.	It is difficult to answer	2.4	5.8	4.1

The survey has shown that approximately a half of respondents - 47.8% (43.6%-51.9%) are sure that general public does not influence foreign policy at all ("it could influence properly if we had democratic society", "no one is interested in our opinion"). Moreover, this category rose by 8 percent during a year. Another group of respondents - 38.8% (46.1%-31.4%) express an opinion that such kind of civil society's influence on the foreign policy takes place to a certain degree. On the contrary, this proportion reduced since the first stage of the research. Approximately one out of ten of respondents - 9.4% (7.9%-11.0%) is rather optimistic on this issue, suggesting that ordinary citizen are capable to influence foreign policy quite

strongly ("this has led to the improvement of our foreign policy activity", "there are some significant positive changes in this area").

As viewed by some respondents, the lack or absence of public control over foreign policy may lead to undesirable consequences, inadequate decisions on this track, "the influence of common people on foreign policy is mostly positive as there is a lack of trust towards political leaders and diplomats, bureaucrats". On the other hand, some respondents regard the growth in impact of public opinion on foreign policy as a negative phenomenon only, substantiating their position by the fact that "so far every political force or movement is making use of foreign policy for its own benefit", "unfortunately, foreign policy is being politicized", "it is not so easy, maybe impossible, to find decision that satisfies everybody", "I am categorically against all kinds of ordinary people's involvements and activities because they are completely incompetent in this area".

2.2 Public Attitudes to NATO

As is known, military-political contacts of Azerbaijan with the NATO block have intensified over the past few years. Azerbaijan is actively involved in different NATO programs, in particular, the "Partnership for Peace" program. Various news of the Alliance got widely distributed in the country and became accessible for ordinary people.

Therefore, one of the major goals of our empirical study was to analyze the public perception of the Alliance, social estimation of its role and place in the modern world as a whole and in the South Caucasus region, in particular, as well as opinions about its influence on geopolitical situation in the given region. A special emphasis was laid on the problems of development relations between Azerbaijan and NATO.

Awareness of NATO's activity. Major element of public perception of particular international organization is a certain amount of knowledge about it. Any attitudes and adherence to international subject account for, at least, an elementary level of familiarization with this entity. Therefore, during the survey, respondents were asked about the extent of their awareness and knowledge of NATO, its primary, dominant activity and mission.

Table 5. Awareness of NATO's Activity (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Not aware at all	17.8	24.3	21.0
2.	Have some information of it	59.0	61.0	60.0
3.	Informed rather well	23.3	14.8	19.0

It has turned out that 60.0% (59.0%-61.0%) of survey participants have some information of it ("have heard about it"), 19.0% (23.3%-14.8%) are familiar and informed rather well, while 21.0% (17.8%-24.3%) are absolutely unaware of NATO and its activity. We think that the revealed, quite reasonable level of people's general familiarity with NATO activity became possible due to the openness of Azerbaijani society that was achieved in recent years. But it is just one side of the coin.

In the survey context the respondents were also asked about their understanding and comprehension of some key principles, dominant activity and mission of the Alliance. In this regard, the picture was completely different. It has turned out that just a few understand quite well and know the nature of all these issues, for example, for what purposes the Alliance had been created ("to protect each other against the Soviet block," as most frequently mentioned explanation). The interview found out that vast majority of respondents had never heard about the program called "Partnership for Peace". Even just a few (around 3 percent) of our respondents do know the meaning and abbreviation of term as "NATO". Only one in twelve of the respondents identified term "NATO" correctly following the September 2002 – February 2003 survey. As compared to the September 2001 – February 2002 survey, where 7% of those surveyed said that they know what the NATO is, it was an insignificant increase of people who were informed in these matters. Nevertheless, one can conclude that the term "North Atlantic Treaty Organization" is still very poorly understood by ordinary people in Azerbaijan.

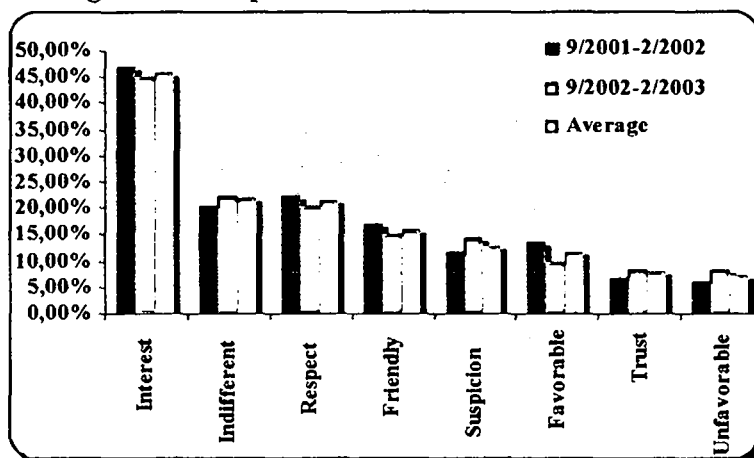
Major differences were identified between various educational and occupational groups. Based on profession, the percentage of the population who know the term "NATO" is highest amongst those engaged in education, mass media, public entities, science, law; and lowest amongst those employed in public catering, agriculture, transport, communication, trade and commerce. Industry, business, public health services, state administration, government, culture and art showed an average level of familiarity with the term "NATO".

At the same time, we consider as remarkable the fact that some respondents expressed interest in gaining the more detailed and precise information about the Alliance. Those interested in receiving more information on NATO were also asked in what areas they would like to receive more information. The area which respondents were more interested in was the prospective NATO enlargement and Azerbaijan's chance of becoming NATO member. The score of NATO enlargement, around 8 out of 10, is very indicative of the great interest the respondents show in such a process. The interest of the respondents to learn more on NATO enlargement found its parallel in all social categories. In each of them, NATO enlargement and Azerbaijan's chance of becoming NATO member received the highest score, despite variations in the level of interest in other areas. This once more confirms the importance that the respondents attach to Azerbaijan's NATO membership. Also our respondents would like to have a clearer view of this organization, to become closely familiar with its key principles.

As for professional categories, there were high levels of interest in greater awareness of NATO. There were, however, differences from one category to the other, some more interested to receive more information on NATO, others - less. Thus, the most interested categories were the mass media, which could have been expected. Yet even in this case, some 10% of the journalists showed no interest in receiving more information on NATO. State administration, government was the next category with highest percentage of respondents, 86.7 %, interested to receive more information on NATO. Business and local NGO respondents were least interested in this respect, although in both groups there is limited information on NATO.

Attitude towards NATO. What is, as a whole, people's attitude towards the NATO block? What is the "image" of NATO in the mirror of the Azerbaijani public opinion? The following spectrum of perception and attitudes towards the block has been discovered during the survey:

Figure 3 . Respondents' attitude towards NATO



As is seen, quite an extensive range of attitudes and opinions regarding NATO has been ascertained. First of all, it is necessary to specify rather interested attitude of our general public to the Alliance - 45.9% (46.8%-45.1%). Predominating are also positive, tolerant attitudes of "respect" - 21.6% (22.5%-20.6%), "friendliness and amiability" - 16.0% (16.9%-15.1%), "favorability, sympathy" - 11.7% (13.5%-9.9%), "trust, confidence" - 7.8% (7.0%-8.5%). This makes a total of approximately 60 percent.

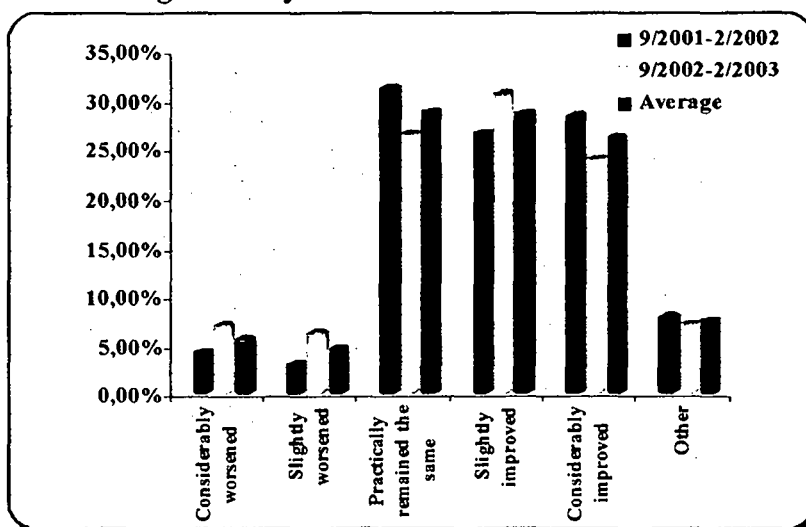
By contrast, unfavorable, negative and non-tolerant attitudes to NATO ("suspicion" - 12.9% (11.6%-14.3%), "dislike, hostility, contempt, criticism" - 7.3% (6.1%-8.5%)) were encountered only in a quite

small portion (in total of 20 percent) of respondents. It is also quite symptomatic that one in five respondents expressed towards the block NATO "indifference and neutrality" - 21.9% (20.3%-23.6%). This proportion is totally in line with the number of respondents (roughly 21.0%) who were absolutely unaware of NATO activity. In parallel with these assessments, some portion of respondents (around 5-6%) was characterized having other emotional responses and feelings regarding this organization, for example, "hope", "great expectation", "understanding" and even "sense of inferiority" ("sometimes I feel that we need very long way to achieve their advantages").

Some differences regarding this issue have been discovered between residential areas. Judging by the obtained information, particularly favorable and amicable situation is in Baku (21%), Guba (19%) and Sumgait (18%), unlike Gandja and Lenkoran, where, for instance, the share of those who have pointed out the "unfavorable" and "unfriendly" nature of NATO perception is the biggest (9.4% and 8.9%). For comparison, in Baku this indicator constitutes 5.6%. Probably, such a tendency is explained by the existence of a great number of various well-educated, intellectual, westernized groups of people in the capital of the country. Provincial respondents have displayed much more negative sentiments in their views of NATO. Nevertheless, in general it would be quite justifiable to talk of normal, calm perceptions of this organization in the surveyed regions, towns of our country.

Changing attitude towards NATO in comparison with the Soviet period. It was important to follow up on the dynamics of the changing attitude of the Azerbaijan's population towards NATO as compared to the Soviet period. Judging by the obtained information, a rather complicated picture of dynamics of NATO public perception is observed.

Figure 4. Dynamics of attitudes towards NATO



As is seen, a greater portion of respondents (54.3%) have changed their views on NATO towards growth of positive perception of the organization, while 28.4% of them have indicated that their attitudes "slightly improved" and 25.9% have pointed out that their attitudes towards NATO "considerably improved" since gaining independence. And at last, a very small portion was made of respondents, whose attitudes have "considerably worsened" (5.4%) or "slightly worsened" (4.4%) in comparison with the Soviet times. NATO perception of every fourth (28.6%) respondents has practically remained on the previous level ("just like before, in the socialist time").

It is, of course, quite natural that the negative facts of the representation of NATO for general public our respondents mainly associate with the Soviet times. Those are just few comments of our respondents - "in those days, NATO looked extremely badly", "we were afraid to tell something good about this block, while we are not now», "it was forbidden at that time, especially if you were a member of Communist party", "there were a lot of obstacles on the way of getting objective and true information about the Alliance".

It is indicative that many representatives of older and middle generations could not forget fear, restriction and prohibitions in the Soviet times related to the "aggressive", according to official propaganda, nature of the Alliance. They recall such examples of "political brainwashing": "even now, when I hear by TV about NATO, I feel a sense of fear", "even now it is unpleasant to me to speak on this theme", "this propagation was consequence of cold war", "then we lived as if in the besieged fortress, we had a besieged mentality", "an idea of tight opposition between the two camps constantly took roots into our mind and consciousness", "now it is not so easy to accept something good about the block".

Meanwhile, young generations are not able to compare these two periods. In their comments, they indicated and appreciated the present freedom, absence of fear in this area. Opinion of youth on the NATO is of the big interest, because they have no negative Soviet experience and are open to such kind of dialogue. According to the survey, young people in Azerbaijan mainly tend towards the West, Europe and America, are more susceptible to the Western democratic values, capable to apprehend the common universal concepts and values. It could be explained by the fact that now there is immeasurably more information on the outside world, there is no previous division into ideological camps and poles caused by "cold war". Young respondents marked present openness of our society as a very important factor in Azerbaijan's road towards European community, almost as important as the reforms in economy and politics.

Azerbaijan's relationship with NATO. An essential part of the survey explored opinions on the level and character of relationship between Azerbaijan and NATO, existing problems, contradictions and difficulties in this area. These relationships could be considered as a complicated phenomenon of various patterns of interactions existing in this area.

Table 6. Azerbaijan's Relationship with NATO (in %)

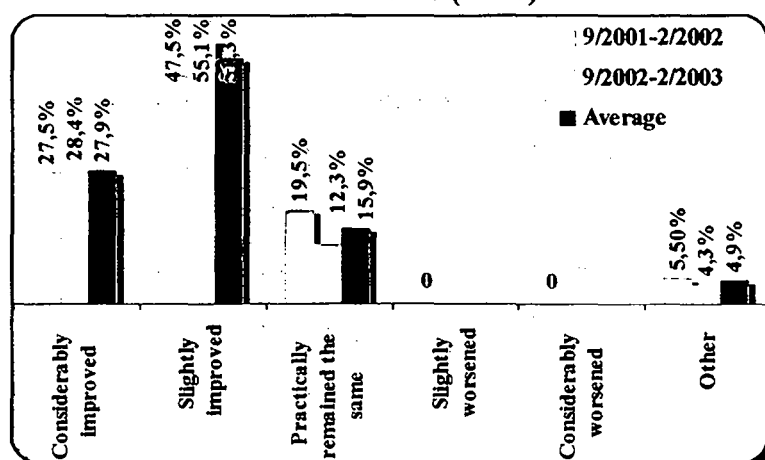
		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Relations of partnership	27.3	30.5	28.9
2.	Friendly, amicable	26.1	30.3	28.2
3.	Neutral	33.5	22.4	27.9
4.	Mutual distrust, dislike	7.4	8.3	7.8
5.	Competitive, rival	-	-	-
6.	Conflict	-	-	-
7.	It is difficult to answer	5.8	8.6	7.2

As is seen, present relationship between Azerbaijan and NATO is as follows. In the majority of cases (57.1%) these relations were evaluated as "partnership" - 28.9% (27.3%-30.5%) and "friendliness, amiability, mutual respect" - 28.2% (26.1%-30.3%), i.e. a favorable and benevolent estimation prevails. Further, these relations were perceived as "neutral" by 27.9% (33.5%-22.4%) of interviewed. Only 7.8% (7.4%-8.3%) of respondents think that these relations are based on "mutual mistrust and dislike". Also, 7.2% (5.8%-8.6%) of respondents had difficulties in giving their assessment. It is noticeable that no one from Azerbaijani general public indicated the "conflicting and tense" or "competitive, rival" character of these relations ("how can a relationship of competition between our entities be possible, since we are incomparable ones").

The answers to the given question, as a whole, illustrate mainly positive estimation of bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and NATO; these estimations are essentially shifted to the positive edge of the rating scale. Our respondents practically have not specified any serious, unsolvable problems in sphere of our mutual relations.

Change in Azerbaijan-NATO relations for the last several years. Our intention was to determine respondents' perception regarding how relations between Azerbaijan and NATO have changed for the last 3-4 years, how people subjectively evaluate recent developments, transformations in this area. It was important in terms of monitoring of public opinion dynamics.

Figure 5. Change in Relations between Azerbaijan and NATO for the Last Several Years (in %)



The survey has illustrated that the absolute majority of respondents (around 80 percent) thinks that the relationship between Azerbaijan and NATO has improved in recent several years. Among them more than a half (51.3%) (47.5%-55.1%) think that these relations have slightly improved, while every fourth respondent (27.9%) (27.5%-28.4%) believes that these relations have improved considerably ("the relations are becoming broader, friendly and constructive", "the situation in this respect has cleared up and ameliorated"). Only about 16 percent (19.5%-12.3%) suppose that relationship between Azerbaijan and NATO has remained practically on the previous level, unchanged. At the same time, none of the respondents has indicated that these relations have deteriorated.

Thus, Azerbaijani respondents have subjectively observed a considerable shift for the better in the area of Azerbaijan-NATO relations. In fact, this category was made up of representatives of different social, demographic and ethnic groups that have participated in our survey. This is an obvious indicator of the fact that such a positive response for the general state of Azerbaijan-NATO relations is not characteristic of any particular social group, but is rather connected with the real tangible general changes in this sphere over the last several years. Ordinary citizens just adequately perceive and follow these radical geopolitical transformations and dynamics.

Role NATO plays in the modern world. The respondents have been offered to define their opinions concerning the role NATO currently plays in the modern world and how its impact on international processes has changed over the past few years.

Table 7. Respondents' Views on the Role of NATO in the Modern World and its Impact on International Processes

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Positive	15.4	17.0	16.2
2.	Rather positive, than negative	52.9	49.3	51.2
3.	Rather negative, than positive	15.4	18.4	16.9
4.	Negative	4.1	5.0	4.6
5.	Other	8.0	4.8	6.4
6.	It is difficult to answer	4.3	5.6	4.9

The survey has demonstrated that the considerable majority (about 68 percent) regards this role as positive: as exclusively positive - 16.2% (15.4%-17.0%) and as rather positive, than negative - 51.2% (52.9%-49.3%). In so doing, the respondents most frequently used the following comments and arguments: "this Alliance gave the impetus to the system of international development", "without NATO's pressure on former Warsaw Pact countries, Soviet block, we would not have become an independent state", "we owe NATO countries for our independence, as the Soviet Union has broken up, being in no position to stand the arms races". It is a little bit more than 20 percent of respondents who perceive this role as negative: as

exclusively negative - 4.6% (4.1%-5.0%) and as rather negative, than positive - 16.9% (15.4%-18.4%). Another part of respondents – only 6.4% (8.0%-4.8%) presume that the role of NATO in the modern world has been dual: in some sense as positive and some sense as negative.

No statistically evident differences between respondents, representing various social and demographic sub-groups, have been discovered. It is worth indicating that some respondents as bearers of indifferent, even unfavorable attitudes towards NATO have stressed an important role of this organization in the modern world, its substantial impact on international developments.

Role NATO plays in the South Caucasus region. The respondents have been offered to define their opinions concerning the role of NATO in the South Caucasus and its impact on regional development. As is evident, this region is an extremely, vitally important for Azerbaijan nation's internal and external development and security conditions. Any changes in the balance of forces essentially influence security conditions of our country that we could observe repeatedly for the last several years. With that end in view, respondents were also asked to express their opinion concerning the growing or decreasing role of the organization in our region.

Table 8. Attitude of Respondents towards the Role of NATO in the South Caucasus and Its Impact on Regional Processes

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Positive	11.1	12.1	11.6
2.	Rather positive, than negative	46.1	36.3	41.2
3.	Rather negative, than positive	19.8	20.8	20.3
4.	Negative	4.6	5.8	5.2
5.	No role at all	4.9	9.3	7.1
6.	Other	6.1	4.3	5.2
7.	It is difficult to answer	7.4	11.6	9.5

Thus, more than a half of respondents (52.8%) think that the role of NATO in our region has been advancing in the positive direction. This role is perceived as exclusively positive by 11.6% (11.1%-12.1%) and as rather positive, than negative by 41.2% (46.1%-36.3%) of respondents. In so doing, some survey participants indicate that the role of NATO is on the increase of late, that this organization has started playing a more decisive and noticeable role in this region. Some respondents noted that this role is growing, but only for the time being, while Russia has considerably weakened for last years. It is indicative that the opinions concerning the positive role of NATO have been expressed equally by representatives of various social and demographic sub-groups.

A twice smaller is a share of respondents (25.5%) who guess that the role of NATO in the South Caucasus and its impact on regional processes is negative. Among this group of respondents are those who perceive this influence as exclusively negative - 5.2% (4.6%-5.8%) and as rather negative, than positive - 20.3% (19.8%-20.8%). Respondents primarily explain their negative vision by reason that the presence of this organization in our region brings split and isolation to the regional countries. Just an insignificant part of respondents (around 7 percent) said that the role of the organization is "equal to the zero", "very minor". Those are more frequently mentioned comments: "influence of NATO in our region at the present time is weakening", "several years ago the role of this organization was higher than now".

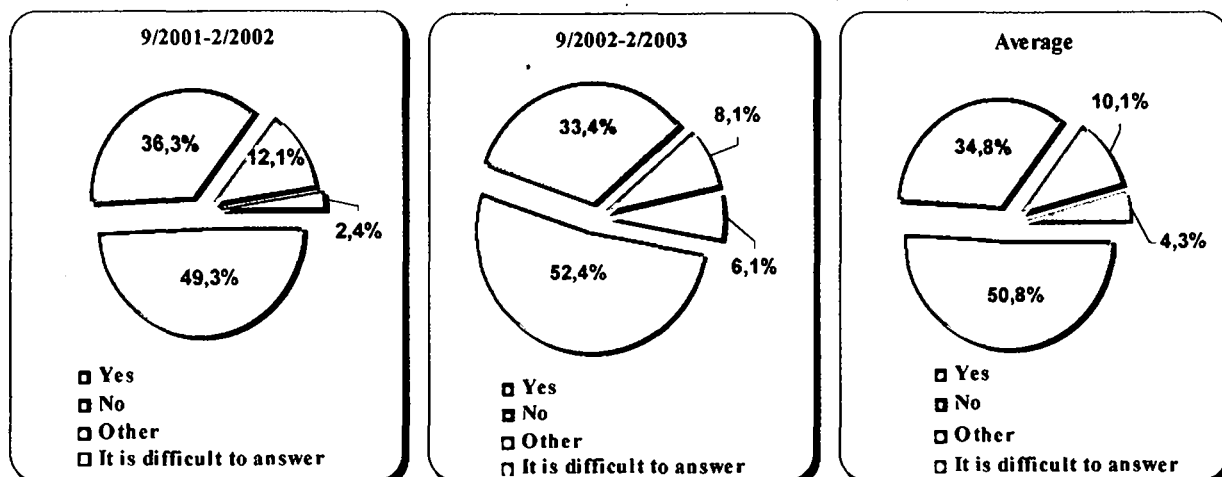
Approximately every third respondent declared that the influence of NATO in our region is on the increase of late, and generally welcomed the growth of this role. A tenth part of all respondents said they attach a tremendous importance to the role of NATO in our region. Every fourth respondent thinks that this organization occupies an important place in the region. This role is also regarded as moderate and insignificant for a small group of respondents, while one in ten has indicated that NATO does not play any role in this region.

It may be supposed from the obtained data that respondents allocate to NATO quite a noticeable part and sometimes an outstanding influence in the South Caucasus region. At the same time, they singled out some negative and alarming aspects of the NATO activity in this region and foresaw a number of potential problems in this regard. Some, for instance, have paid attention to the fact that "over the last several years

the role of NATO has increased, but one should not forget that we live in the region, which historically controlled by such great regional powers, as Russia and Iran", "we are very weak state and can not pursue independent policy yet".

Confidence in NATO's ability to promote peace, stability and security in the South Caucasus. Is NATO, in respondents' opinion, capable of dealing responsibly with problems and promoting peace, stability and security in our region?

Figure 6. Confidence in NATO's Ability to Promote Peace and Stability in the South Caucasus (in %)



As was the case (49.3%) a year ago during the first stage of survey, a small majority (52.4%) of respondents voiced during the second stage their confidence in NATO's ability to promote peace, stability and security in this region. At the same time, each third respondent - 34.8% (36.3%-33.4%) has stated mistrust regarding ability of this organization to deal responsibly with regional problems and to establish here stable and safe situation. There were also other reactions - 10.1% (12.1%-8.1%), like "doubt" and "skepticism". And, at last, just 4.3% (2.4%-6.1%) of respondents failed to answer this question.

It is interesting that these obtained data generally coincide and correlate with a previous positive estimation by our respondents the role NATO plays in the South Caucasus region. As this case is concerned, this role is specified in the stabilization of the situation in our region. This also reaffirms an overestimated level of expectations from this organization. One of the basic expectations is its assistance in the creation of stable and safe political atmosphere here. Owing possibly to the latest developments in the South Caucasus, certain frustrations and disappointments could arise among some groups of population concerning proper and improper actions.

Approval or disapproval actions that Alliance has taken in recent years. Of interest was to find out if Azerbaijani people approve or disapprove various actions and operations taken by this Alliance in recent years.

Table 9. Approval Actions That Alliance Has Taken In Recent Years (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Approve	51.1	56.6	53.9
2.	Disapprove	30.3	27.0	28.6
3.	Other	11.4	5.5	8.4
4.	It is difficult to answer	7.3	10.9	9.1

From these data we can see that although Azerbaijani people are well-disposed in general toward NATO and desire closer ties with the Alliance, they do not necessarily approve all types of its actions.

Almost one-third of respondents - 28.6% (30.3%-27.0%) disapprove actions that Alliance has taken in recent years. For example, such actions as NATO Allied Force Operation in Former Yugoslavia, have particularly been disapproved. They said that NATO was wrong in taking military actions against Serbia.

At the same time, it is interesting that more than half - 53.9% (51.1%-56.6%) of the Azerbaijani general public react positively to the actions and operations taken NATO of late. Among mostly approved actions there were NATO peace-making operations in Former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, mission in Kosovo. Almost one in ten - 9.1% (7.3%-10.9%) offered no opinion on this issue.

Accession of Azerbaijan to NATO: "for" and "against". What is citizens' attitude towards the idea of the accession of Azerbaijan to NATO? Is this idea supported or rejected by the majority of the population of our country? This is a crucial question of our survey. We guess that the general attitude to this organization, finally, should be realized in the aspiration to enter it, to become its full-fledged member. Respondents were asked a question: "What is your attitude towards the idea of the accession of Azerbaijan to NATO?"

Table 10. Attitude towards the Idea of the Accession of Azerbaijan to NATO (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Totally support this idea	17.6	22.8	20.2
2.	Basically it is a good idea, but now we do not meet their requirements and standards	37.8	40.4	39.1
3.	It is possible in principle, only if it will not lead to conflicts with another countries	21.0	19.9	20.4
4.	Neutral, indifferent	12.6	11.6	12.1
5.	This problem should not have something to do with our country	7.4	2.6	5.0
6.	Absolutely against this idea	3.6	2.8	3.2

As is seen from the Table, rather stable, even increasing trend is in the mass opinion on supporting idea of accession of Azerbaijan to NATO. If in September 2001 – February 2002 17.6% of respondents totally supported this idea, in September 2002 – February 2003 a proportion of respondents, who fully support the idea of Azerbaijan accession to NATO, reached 22.8%. In fact, a percentage of respondents having of neutral, indifferent attitude towards this issue remained almost the same - 12.1% (12.6%-11.6%).

Moreover, about 60 percent of our respondents generally accept the idea of future membership of Azerbaijan in NATO structure. Meanwhile, they stipulate this support by a number of conditions and circumstances. For example, 39.1% (37.8%-40.4%) of respondents think that basically it is a good idea, but now we do not meet their requirements and standards: "especially in the area of democracy and fair elections", "we have a lot of bribe in government and army", "there is no elementary order and respect for laws in our country", "presently our armed forces are at a very weak and low level".

There were also 20.4% (21.0%-19.9%) of those respondents, who expressed their concern in this regard. Thinking that this integration with NATO is possible in principle, they worry that this act will lead to conflict and clashes with other countries. The most frequently mentioned countries in this context were Russia and Iran ("if we enter NATO, their reaction might be very tough and unpredictable").

The survey has also illustrated that there is a part (around 8 percent) of respondents, who are strictly oppose the process of entry of Azerbaijan into NATO system. Among them 5.0% (7.4%-2.6%) of the interviewed, who justify this opinion by the statement that this problem should not have something to do with their country. In this case the following motivations were used most frequently: "we have now more important, vital problems and should solve them first of all", "it will have very bad, destructive consequences for our nation". But, it is also worthy to note that a share of respondents, who are absolutely against the idea of Azerbaijan's strive for the NATO membership even decreased on the second stage of our survey (2.8% versus 3.6%).

Thus, as it can be seen in the data above, the trend in the years 2001–2003 was rather steady – the results indicate that the support for NATO accession is expressed by over four-fifths of the Azerbaijani

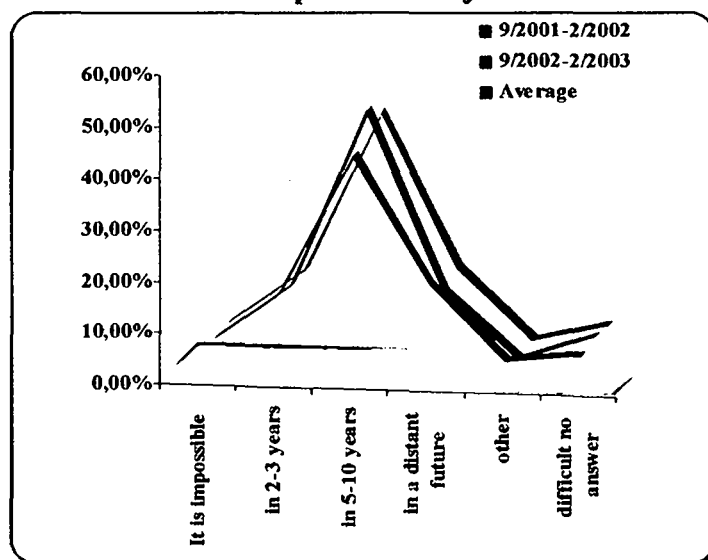
population surveyed. The same empirical fact that vast majority of Azerbaijani people have explicitly stated their desire to join NATO means, firstly, that they do not perceive it as hostile alliance and, secondly, they consider Azerbaijan's NATO membership as a very important factor in our path to the West, as a major chance for having safe and prosperous life. Rather high level of support for Azerbaijan's NATO membership was also reflected in the fact that respondents in all categories thought that strengthening relations with NATO should be priority for the Azerbaijani government.

The surprising fact came to light during the interview - a considerable number of respondents seem to think that NATO should admit Azerbaijan even if the latter is not ready to become a full-fledged member of this alliance. The answers among the professional and occupational categories varied considerably. In some of them, housewives, pensioners, unemployed, refugees, IDPs, the majority of respondents, answered that NATO can admit Azerbaijan even before the country is prepared to become its member. The fact that most respondents thought that NATO should admit Azerbaijan even despite its low standards reflects a major misconception on this process. Sometimes, integration with the Alliance seems to be perceived as a decision to be taken in Brussels rather than an ongoing effort on the Azerbaijani side to raise its economic, political, social and military standards.

During the survey, we checked up a hypothesis that the attitude to the integration into NATO is strongly correlated with social-demographic status of the interviewed, especially, with age and educational categories. This hypothesis basically has proved to be true. The strongest pro-NATO tendencies are connected with the age and the level of education. Note that age and education differences are striking, especially regarding the idea of the accession of Azerbaijan to NATO: the younger the person is and the higher his education, the stronger is the will to join NATO. Rise in educational level also increased the degree of acceptance this idea: from 15.3% when declaring that the level of education is "the lowest" to 24.8% when it is "the highest". It is obvious that as the educational level notably surges a share of "supporters". A great percentage of "supporters" is made up of people with elementary, incomplete secondary and incomplete higher education, while most of all "pessimists, nihilists" are among people with secondary education. Ironically, support for this accession was weaker among the younger age group 18-25 years old than among the older age groups. Our country's joining NATO was also of much less importance to women than it was to men. Among ethnic Azeri people the support rate is around 26 percent, which is higher than the average both among non-Azeris.

When will membership of Azerbaijan in NATO be possible? What are our respondents' prognostications regarding the possible prospective of NATO membership timeframe for Azerbaijan? The following distribution of answers from respondents was obtained:

Figure 7. When Will Membership of Azerbaijan in NATO Be Possible (in %)



Despite the empirical fact that the closer ties with NATO generally are favored and welcomed by Azerbaijani people, the majority (approximately 66 percent) of respondents is not very much optimistic on the issue of membership in this organization. As is seen, the biggest group - 47.8% (44.5%-51.0%) is comprised of those predicting that this event can become possible, but not earlier, than in 5-10 years. Another group - 18.0% (19.9%-16.1%) of respondents predicts the real and full-fledged membership of Azerbaijan in NATO only in a very long-term, distant future. It should be underscored that the percentage of convinced pessimists within a year has remained unchangeable: 5.8% (6.1%-5.4%) of the interviewed are sure that joining of Azerbaijan to NATO is impossible in principle. The percentage of "cautious optimists", who suppose that it can become possible in short-term perspective, in 2-3 years is not very high - 16.4%. Over the year it varies just from 16.9% to 16.0%. Moreover, almost one in ten respondents was at a loss to give any reasonable forecast in this matter. As one of them has noticed, "even our government does not know anything about it".

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the NATO membership term is not very clear and obvious for Azerbaijani broad public. People basically are inclined to see terms of the entering of our country into this organization only in a very distant future.

Related to the narrow understanding of NATO integration were also some serious misconceptions regarding the timeframe of the integration process. The first major misperception concerned the pace of the integration process. Most respondents thought Azerbaijan would join NATO somewhere between 5 to 10 years, while at the same time the majority of respondents thought it was moving slowly. Business and state administration were the two most optimistic categories. They had the largest percentages of respondents who thought that Azerbaijan will join NATO in 2 or 3 years, and the lowest percentages that marked 5 or more as the time needed for Azerbaijan's joining NATO. The three categories, less optimistic in this regard, were mass media, science and local public entities, NGOs. Of the three, mass media had the largest percentage of those who thought Azerbaijan would join NATO in 15 or more, i.e. it was the least optimistic.

It is difficult to find the source of such a high level of naive optimism regarding Azerbaijan's NATO integration process, besides, a lack of correct unbiased information and/or persuasive political propaganda on the process. No matter what the source of respondents' optimism is, it is important to note that there was a correlation between such optimism and the way in which respondents perceived NATO and Azerbaijan's benefits from this membership. The more optimistic they were on the pace of the integration process, the more positively they perceived NATO and Azerbaijan's benefits from this membership. Since the membership timetable for Azerbaijan becomes clear, it is very probable that perceptions on NATO might deteriorate and expectations of membership benefits drop.

Importance and necessity for Azerbaijan to expand co-operation with NATO. The survey data suggest the following palette of attitudes in the public opinion regarding importance and necessity for Azerbaijan expanding cooperation with NATO:

Table 11. Importance and Necessity for Azerbaijan Expanding Cooperation with NATO (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	It should become a strategic, priority direction of our external politics	16.8	22.3	19.5
2.	The social-economical and democratic progress of our country will considerably, in many respects depend on a solution of this problem	9.0	10.4	9.7
3.	Support in principle such cooperation, but only if it will be on mutually beneficial conditions	42.6	39.9	41.3
4.	Such cooperation must be only on voluntary and good will basis, but not under Western pressure	19.6	22.3	20.9
5.	Now we have another, more important problems, while it is not so urgent now	21.8	23.6	22.7
6.	This problem has no importance and value for our country	5.0	5.6	5.3
7.	Other	4.9	2.1	3.5
8.	It is difficult to answer	3.5	3.3	3.4

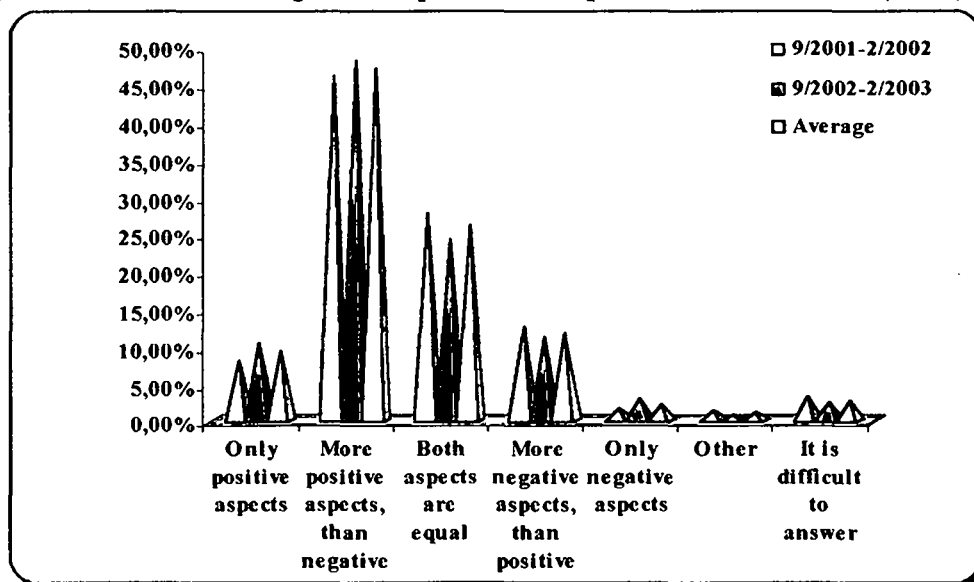
Almost one in three (29.2%) of respondents believe that Azerbaijan should work more closely with NATO unconditionally. Among them 19.5% (16.8%-22.3%) of respondents, who think that it should become a strategic, priority direction of our external politics, while 9.7% (9.0%-10.4%) of respondents suppose that the social-economical and democratic progress of our country will considerably, in many respects depend on the solution of this task. "I fully support the efforts of our government to develop and maintain friendly relation with this prestigious organization" - this is a leitmotif of numerous respondents' comments. It was emphasized that Azerbaijan "should continue to work with NATO as it does now".

At the same time, 62.2% of the surveyed in principle, basically being supporters the idea of expanding Azerbaijan-NATO cooperation, simultaneously stipulate it with mutually beneficial conditions - 41.3% (42.6%-39.9%). Another proportion of people stipulate this support by the voluntary and good will basis, not under the Western pressure - 20.9% (19.6%-22.3%). Around 29 percent of respondents do not consider this problem as important for Azerbaijan at present. Among them only 5.3% (5.0%-5.6%) think that this problem has no importance and value for their country and do not regard this problem as important for the country at all, while 22.7% (21.8%-23.6%) suppose that "we have another, more relevant and important problems, it is not so urgent now and, therefore, our country should work less closely with this Alliance".

Apparently, the general level of public support of Azerbaijan-NATO cooperation is very high. These circumstances create a good favorable social-psychological ground for the expansion of the cooperation, for the realization in practice a broad range of various specific programs and actions. It is very important in terms of maintenance of public support for the foreign policy actions directed at the development of bilateral contacts with this Alliance.

Positive or negative aspects of cooperation with NATO. Do our respondents regard the growing Azerbaijan's cooperation with NATO as a positive or negative phenomenon?

Figure 8. Positive or Negative Aspects of Cooperation with NATO (in %)



The subjective perception of the growing Azerbaijan's cooperation with NATO has turned out to be quite different.

For the majority of respondents (ranging between 55-60 percent), this kind of cooperation was associated with positive aspects. For every tenth respondent - 9.2% (8.0%-10.4%), collaborative relations between Azerbaijan and NATO are, beyond any doubts, a positive phenomenon only. According to their opinion, these contacts have positive impact on various spheres of mutual relations - "improves situation in our region", "helps overcome difficulties of our international status", "promotes security and consolidation of the nation", "strengthens and revives our army".

A quarter - 26.0% (27.6%-24.3%) of surveyed persons see both positive and negative sides that are present to the equal extent in the area of Azerbaijan-NATO cooperation. And, at last, just around 14 percent think that the cooperation with NATO is largely negative for Azerbaijan. Within this share of respondents either those, who notice more negative sides, than positive aspects of these relations - 11.8% (12.5%-11.1%) or those, who mark only negative sides - 2.2% (1.5%-2.9%). Thus, a portion of those seeing negative consequences of NATO's impact on our country was extremely insignificant (no more than 3 percent).

As is evident, dominating in the Azerbaijani society is the public sentiment of support and approval of the expanding sphere of Azerbaijan-NATO cooperation and NATO impact. At the same time, a certain apprehension is observed concerning the rapid changes taking place in this area of our social-political life, in particular, among ordinary people who are not directly or slightly interested in this field of international relations, being not properly politicized.

Positive aspects of collaboration with NATO. What are, in respondents' opinion, the positive aspects of Azerbaijan-NATO collaboration?

Table 12. Respondents' Views on Positive Impact of Azerbaijan-NATO Collaboration (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Strengthen international status and position of our country	42.3	46.1	44.2
2.	Help to attract western investments	44.0	33.6	38.8
3.	Help to resolve the existing regional conflicts	37.6	38.8	38.2
4.	Expand access to the world, global market	40.0	24.4	32.2
5.	Give us additional guarantees of our security	30.0	34.4	32.2
6.	Strengthen security and stability in the region	28.4	35.5	31.9
7.	Promote democratic development in our country	26.9	31.0	28.9
8.	Remove, take out ground for interference, intrusion of exterior forces	28.3	24.6	26.4
9.	Strengthen the state sovereignty and independence of Azerbaijan	25.4	22.3	23.8
10.	Help to restore territorial integrity of our country	20.4	17.3	18.8
11.	Other	2.4	2.1	2.3
12.	It is difficult to answer	2.5	3.5	4.3

Expanding collaboration of Azerbaijan with NATO, in respondents' opinion, promotes the formation of many positive implications and elements. Particularly frequently mentioned were such positive affects, as strengthening international status and position of our country - 44.2% (42.3%-46.1%), helping to attract western investments - 38.8% (44.0%-33.6%), helping to resolve the existing regional conflicts - 38.2% (37.6%-38.8%), expanding access to the world, global market - 32.2% (40.0%-24.4%), giving us additional guarantees of our security - 32.2% (30.0%-34.4%).

Also referred to were such positive consequences of Azerbaijan-NATO collaboration as strengthening security and stability in the region - 31.9% (28.4%-35.5%), promoting democratic development in our country - 28.9% (26.9%-31.0%), removing grounds for interference of external forces - 26.4% (28.3%-24.6%), strengthening the state sovereignty and independence of Azerbaijan - 23.8% (25.4%-22.3%), helping restore territorial integrity of our country - 18.8% (20.4%-17.3%).

It follows from the above-stated that Azerbaijani people focus on five important issues arising from Azerbaijan-NATO collaboration: a) security and stability arrangements (roughly 90 percent); b) investments and access to global market (roughly 71 percent); c) country's international status (roughly 68 percent); d) regional conflicts resolution and peace process (roughly 57 percent); e) democratic development and consolidation (roughly 30 percent). But it is also necessary to emphasize that people's expectations of cooperation and membership benefits have been dropped over a year by some items, including the attraction of Western investments, access to global market, intrusion of external forces, state sovereignty and independence, restoration of territorial integrity.

Our local people are extremely concerned with the regional conflicts' resolution. According to the survey, as viewed by approximately 40 percent of our respondents, there dominates an idea of Azerbaijan-

NATO collaboration as the strongest device of the resolution of existing regional conflicts. In all appearances, this idea is highly idealized by our local general public or imposed on them by politicians and mass media. It is interesting, that hopes on the resolution of the conflict on the part of this Alliance prevail among such categories, as refugees, students, public service and trade servants.

In consideration of the answers to the question, NATO is undoubtedly perceived by Azerbaijani public as an entity capable of effectively protecting not only their own members, but partner countries as well. This seems obvious, since the percentage of people who believe that there is some external menace to our country considerably arouses expectations. Moreover, the feelings of safety were suggested not on "today", but most likely on "tomorrow", in the perspective of the next several years. In the mass consciousness of Azerbaijani citizens NATO's protective "umbrella" is viewed as the matter that is not so much about the "here and now", as about the prospect for the future.

Negative aspects of collaboration with NATO. What are, in respondents' opinion, the negative aspects of such collaboration?

Table 13. Respondents' Views on Negative Impact of Azerbaijan-NATO Collaboration (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Be perceived negatively by some countries	54.8	52.1	53.4
2.	Boost intrusion of external forces into our domestic affairs	35.0	23.3	29.1
3.	Not help restore territorial integrity of our country	25.1	28.6	26.9
4.	Only lead to "freezing" regional conflicts	22.3	23.6	22.9
5.	Be favorable for NATO only, not for us	23.6	19.3	21.4
6.	Lead to limitation or loss of the state sovereignty and independence of Azerbaijan	13.6	10.8	12.2
7.	Not comply with our key national interests	11.6	11.4	11.5
8.	Not be able to guarantee our security	11.6	9.8	10.7
9.	Other	3.5	3.0	3.3
10.	It is difficult to answer	3.8	2.4	3.1

Judging by results of our investigation, respondents also pointed out some negative aspects of collaboration with NATO. The basic concern was as follows: collaboration with NATO will be perceived negatively by some countries - 53.4% (54.8%-52.1%). In this regard, such countries as Russia and Iran were referred to more frequently.

Respondents also stated the following rather significant (ranging between 20-30 percent) reasons and concerns: collaboration with NATO will boost intrusion of external forces into our domestic affairs - 29.1% (35.0%-23.3%), not help restore territorial integrity of our country - 26.9% (25.1%-28.6%), only lead to "freezing" regional conflicts - 22.9% (22.3%-23.6%), will be favorable for NATO only, not for us - 21.4% (23.6%-19.3%). Least of all, (around 10-12 percent) negative influence of Azerbaijan-NATO collaboration manifested itself in the spheres of limitation or loss of the state sovereignty and independence of Azerbaijan - 12.2% (13.6%-10.8%), not complying with our key national interests - 11.5% (11.6%-11.4%) and that it will not guarantee our security - 10.7% (11.6%-9.8%).

It may be noticed that there is a certain inconsistency where over 10-15% group that votes for NATO is convinced that in a sense it may lead to the loss of our sovereignty and independence.

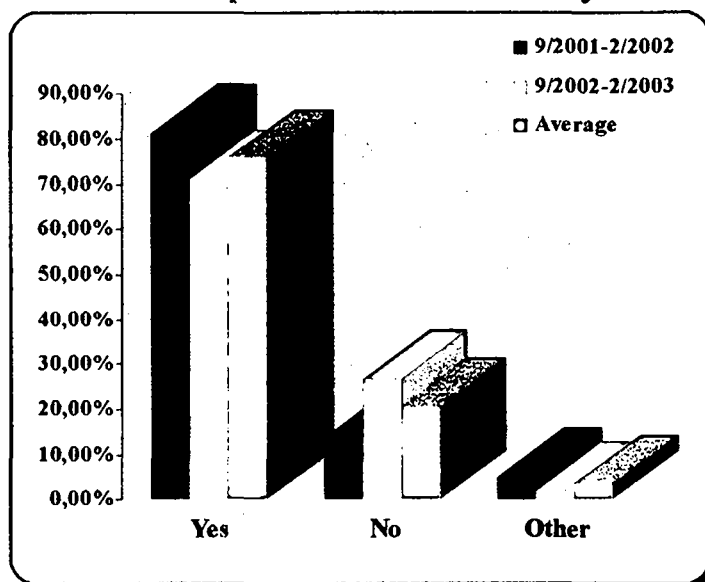
All identified tendencies are quite stable, particularly, regarding the concern over possible negative reaction by third countries (54.8% versus 52.1%). However, some fluctuations between all these positions in terms of time perspectives should be taken into account. For example, one can notice that the fear of intrusion of external forces into our domestic affairs over the last year has diminished from 35.0% to 23.3% and the concern that this collaboration will be profitable only for NATO, not for us has decreased from 23.6% to 19.3%, while skepticism regarding the impossibility of restoration of territorial integrity of our country has a slightly risen from 25.1% to 28.6%.

To conclude, major reasons of concern for Azerbaijani people are brought from the outside. These and other facts, as is evident from answers, have raised concerns of a considerable number of people and are regarded by them as disapproval and condemnation of collaboration with NATO regardless of

disrespect for these relations. This is also accompanied by some doubts - “do they really want to see us there?”

Obstacles on the way of cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO. During survey respondents have been asked to assess the general situation regarding some obstacles in the Azerbaijan-NATO relations. Respondents were asked: “What do you think, there are any obstacles on the way of cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO?”

Figure 9. Obstacles for Cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO (in %)



As is seen, the overwhelming majority - 75.9% (81.3%-71.4%) stated that they can observe a number of obstacles in this area, while one in five respondents - 20.6% (13.8%-26.6%) do not mention any obstacles (“there is no problem with this nowadays”, “Azerbaijan has never encountered such difficult situations”). It is worthy to note that a portion of those seeing no obstacles, rose from 13.8% to 26.6% within a year since the first stage of survey.

What prevents collaborative relations between Azerbaijan and NATO. What, to respondents’ mind, prevents establishing effective relations between Azerbaijan and NATO?

Table 14. What Prevents Collaborative Relations Between Azerbaijan and NATO (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Differences in the level of democracy, political systems	48.0	58.6	53.3
2.	We are not ready for this, unpreparedness of our country	30.9	26.5	28.7
3.	Unsolved conflicts in the region	23.6	32.3	27.9
4.	Social-economical discrepancies	28.1	24.1	26.1
5.	Destructive activity of some countries	19.8	14.8	17.3
6.	Existence of old Soviet stereotypes	17.3	14.0	15.6
7.	Lack of mutual confidence, distrust	11.5	8.4	9.9
8.	Lack of political will of our government, leaders	4.5	13.5	9.0
9.	Reluctance, unwillingness of the ordinary people to such dialogue	5.5	4.9	5.2
10.	Negative historical experience, heritage of Soviet times	4.5	4.0	4.3
11.	Propaganda in the mass media of negative image of NATO	2.4	1.9	2.1
12.	Other	3.0	2.4	2.7
13.	It is difficult to answer	6.4	10.3	8.3

Our respondents mentioned a plenty of hindrances on the path to fruitful collaboration between Azerbaijan and NATO. The major one, according to the surveyed, is differences in the level of democracy and political systems - 53.3%. Moreover, this indicator has sharply risen within a year from 48.0% to 58.6%. Next to priority group of respondents (around 26-28 percent each) is comprised of the following judgments: we are not ready for this, unpreparedness of our country - 28.7% (30.9%-26.5%), unsolved conflicts in the region - 27.9% (23.6%-32.3%), social and economical differences - 26.1% (28.1%-24.1%).

The survey participants also emphasized such (ranging between 16-17 percent) hindrances, as destructive activity of some countries - 17.3% (19.8%-14.8%) and existence of outdated Soviet stereotypes - 15.6% (17.3%-14.0%). The less importance is attached by respondents to such aspects as lack of mutual confidence, distrust - 9.9% (11.5%-8.4%), lack of political will of our government, leaders - 9.0% (4.5%-13.5%), reluctance, unwillingness of the ordinary people to such dialogue, relations - 5.2% (5.5%-4.9%), negative historical experience, heritage of Soviet times - 4.3% (4.5%-4.0%), propagation in the mass media of negative image of NATO - 2.1% (2.4%-1.9%).

Our respondents are able to distinguish very well between developed countries and our country in terms of differences in the level of democracy, social-economical and political systems. More likely, these examples were taken from people's present-day social-political and economic practice.

Specific spheres of prospective cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO. In what spheres, in the opinion of Azerbaijani people, should the cooperation and ties between Azerbaijan and countries of NATO be developed and promoted? The following distribution of answers from respondents was obtained:

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. Struggle against international terrorism | - 58.6% |
| 2. Defense and security | - 54.7% |
| 3. Protection of oil pipelines | - 30.7% |
| 4. Peace-building and peace-keeping | - 30.1% |
| 5. Diplomatic contacts and relations | - 29.4% |
| 6. Science and education | - 17.1% |
| 7. Ecological projects | - 14.8% |
| 8. Coordination of foreign policy | - 8.9% |
| 9. Energy projects | - 8.0% |
| 10. All of them | - 1.7% |
| 11. It is difficult to answer | - 3.6% |

As is seen, the prospective cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO is supposed to be predominantly developed, in respondents views, in such specific areas, as struggle against international terrorism (58.6%), defense and security (54.7%), protection of oil pipelines (30.7%), peace-building and peace-keeping (30.1%) and diplomatic contacts and relations (29.4%). Of less importance, according to our respondents, are the following areas: science and education (17.1%), ecological projects (14.8%), coordination of foreign policy (8.9%) and energy projects (8.0%).

How would it be possible to interpret these answers? The data obtained should be interpreted in terms of today's complicated events and world processes, as well as those taking place in our region and country proper. They, in one or another way, reflect realities of modern international life and relations. At the same time, these are apparent indicators of our national public expectations and sentiments.

For example, after tragic events of September 11, the problems of anti-terrorist struggle are given much more special attention in different countries. The international coalition against terrorism has been formed. Ordinary people realize that without active involvement of such powerful and influential organization as NATO, this struggle can not be efficient and productive. These problems are extremely significant and valuable for our country which is also a victim of the Armenian terrorism and aggression. The Azerbaijani people, therefore, assign particular hopes on NATO, realizing that for the West this struggle is both of strategic and tactical priority.

The security problems are also closely interlinked to these above-mentioned points. Our people feel their vulnerability to the multiple external threats and hazards. Therefore they long for the warranties of security for themselves and their country as a whole. The problems of national defense also concern our respondents very much. An essential role is attached by the respondents to peace-building and peace-

keeping problems. For our country, that for many years has been living in a situation of the frozen conflict ("neither war, nor peace"), this problem is also of vital importance.

A particular importance is also attached to the political and diplomatic aspects of ties between Azerbaijan and NATO. For the several past months, the problem of oil pipelines protection has been also essentially actualized, included in the agenda owing to the start of the construction of the new oil pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan. The fact that this item takes one of the leading places, confirms our previous deliberations.

The answers to this question reaffirm that the concept of "NATO", "relations with NATO" at the level of Azerbaijani mass consciousness are predominantly considered in collaborative, partnership terms. Relations with NATO are primarily regarded by the common people as a major and effective regulator of external, international life and status of our country.

Basically, this organization is regarded, in fact, as the most powerful external factor of economic and political life of our society, as an additional impetus for further development, as an supporting organization to rely on in the course of various types of exchange and cooperation.

2.3 Public Opinion toward Selected Countries

Ranking Azerbaijan's relations with selected countries. Attitude towards various countries is a major indicator of the geopolitical orientation, world-outlook and awareness of a person. Any country, no matter, neighboring or remote, can be perceived in various dimensions. Our respondents have mentioned wide range of the countries, which they treat either with a special respect and esteem, or, vice versa, with disrespect, disapproval, neglect and even contempt. So, how do our respondents rank Azerbaijan's relations with the following countries? How does Azerbaijani public opinion perceive the major determinants of Azerbaijan's relationships with other countries?

Table 15. Ranking Azerbaijan's Relations with Selected Countries (in %)

N	Countries	Friendly	Strategic partnership	Key ally	Neutral	Rival, competitive	Conflictual, hostile
1.	Georgia	72.1	20.5	5.9	5.1	3.1	1.8
2.	Armenia	-	-	-	-	11.6	96.6
3.	Russia	29.9	25.6	8.8	14.4	21.0	1.6
4.	Iran	8.4	3.1	-	31.6	57.6	10.6
5.	Turkey	49.8	30.1	61.8	-	-	-
6.	USA	35.7	33.9	5.3	28.4	-	1.5
7.	UK	25.8	19.1	2.6	49.6	-	-
8.	France	26.6	18.3	1.9	50.3	-	-
9.	Germany	28.8	15.0	0.3	42.6	-	-
10.	Turkmenistan	12.4	-	-	18.5	56.4	10.3
11.	Pakistan	40.8	7.3	3.1	49.8	2.5	-
12.	Uzbekistan	35.1	2.1	1.3	51.6	5.8	-

Among friendly for Azerbaijan countries most frequently were mentioned Georgia - 72.1% (75.9%-68.3%), Turkey - 49.8% (49.0%-50.6%), Pakistan - 40.8% (40.5%-41.1%), USA - 35.7% (33.8%-37.6%), Uzbekistan - 35.1% (43.4%-26.8%) and Russia - 29.9% (29.8%-30.1%). USA - 33.9% (34.8%-33.1%), Turkey - 30.1% (26.4%-33.9%), Russia - 25.6% (31.1%-20.1%), Georgia - 20.5% (17.8%-23.3%) and UK - 19.1% (20.8%-17.5%) are considered as strategic partners for Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan's relations with Iran - 57.6% (55.4%-59.8%), Turkmenistan - 56.4% (54.1%-58.6%) and Russia - 21.0% (23.9%-18.1%) are of competitive and rival nature, respondents hold. Such an attitude is quite understandable if we take into account constant, never-ending disputes between our countries over the status of the Caspian Sea and oil deposits.

In fact, Turkey is a country, which exclusively is regarded as a key ally for Azerbaijan - 61.8% (63.3%-60.4%). In comparison with this country, all other countries received much more lower rating in this respect, for example, Russia's rating is 8.8% (7.8%-9.9%), Georgia - 5.9% (5.4%-6.5%) and USA - 5.3% (5.4%-5.1%) respectively.

It is interesting that our respondents draw a clear distinction between such concepts as “friendship” and “strategic partnership”. The first of them is mostly associated with emotional reaction to a particular country. It is clearly traced back in the attitude to Uzbekistan: only 2.1% of respondents view it in the capacity of “strategic partner”, while 35.1% of respondents experience friendly feelings to this country. Meanwhile, these aspects practically coincide with regard to such country as UK – 25.8% and 19.1% respectively. The percentages are also identical in regard to Russia - 29.9% and 25.6% respectively.

Our respondents voice the greatest neutrality concerning the Muslim countries of Asia like Uzbekistan - 51.6% (48.5%-54.6%) and Pakistan - 49.8% (50.6%-48.9 %), as well as the countries of the Western Europe, including UK - 49.6% (48.5%-50.6%), France - 50.3% (49.1%-51.5%) and Germany - 42.6% (45.0%-40.1%).

The attractive image of such countries, as Turkey, Georgia and USA is the most stable, unchangeable. The positive perception of these three countries has not lately changed over the past few years. On the contrary, an attitude to Armenia, Iran and Turkmenistan remains stably negative and adverse. Moreover, relations with Armenia, as viewed by our respondents, go from year to year from bad to worst. Public moods concerning Georgia have somewhat increased in terms of rivalry and competitiveness. Meanwhile, the negative aspects of recognition in relation to Russia have slightly fallen.

An extremely favorable, positive attitude of Azerbaijani people to Turkey is accounted for by scores of factors. This country is depicted in positive spectrum only. A favorable and attractive image of Turkey is, of course, a natural phenomenon because of historical past, common ethnic, traditional values, congeniality of languages, and the most important thing for Azerbaijani people - unconditional support of Azerbaijan in Nagorni Karabakh conflict issue, its firm and fair position in this regard.

The Azerbaijani public resolutely and persistently supports a line on the strengthening of the foreign policy toward the cooperation with Turkey. The population counts this country not only as the most reliable and consecutive political ally, but also simply fraternal nation. For Azerbaijan, the military cooperation with Turkey has to be deepened, strengthened and expanded – maintains an overwhelming majority (88.1%) of respondents, participants of virtual weekly Internet-poll, attended by 219 persons (newspaper "Echo", on September 1, 2001, N 147).

Suffice it to refer to some typical views and statements of the large number of the surveyed regarding Turkey: this country is our practically unique, single ally and friend; it will never betray us; they are our brothers by birth; the trading, political, military, economic relations between our both countries constantly develop, become stronger; the foreign policy of this country is a good example for us how to behave on international scene; during Soviet times, no possibility to communicate with our Turkish brothers was available for us, but now we are free in communicating. At the same, there were some negative stereotypes - “they are artful and selfish”.

It should be underscored that Russia’s image is very contradictory and is comprised of mutually exclusive elements. Russia is mostly blamed for supporting Armenia. Such an attitude is not astonishing in the view of the latest developments in our region. Some respondents have expressed fears that Russia will introduce the visa regime, as with Georgia. At the same time, Azerbaijani respondents expressed respect for the Russian language, culture, mass media and ordinary people. Symptomatic is the fact that high enough is the percentage of people who believe that the reason of Russia’s objection (as to Azerbaijan’s rapprochement or accession to NATO) is its desire to restore its former sphere of influence in our country. Such a stand is taken by people with university education, as well as those who declare much interest in foreign politics.

The perception of Iran is enough complex, dual and inconsistent. On the one hand, people realize that it is our nearest, “next door” neighbor. It is also indicative, that approximately 10 percent specify friendly character of our bilateral relations. On the other hand, about 70 percent of respondents concentrate on disputable, tense and hostile aspects of our mutual relations. Many people have stated displeasure and discontent with a political line of Iran in relation to our country. Iran is primarily accused with rendering constant moral-psychological and, even military, pressure, as well for taking the pro-Armenian position. People are perplexed why they do support Armenians. “It is wrong, in fact, we are the Muslim nation too”.

As for the dynamics of public moods in Azerbaijan, it is possible to ascertain some decrease of initial euphoria toward the West in the first years of independence, and step-by-step increase of the level of

positive perception of Russia. An eloquent testimony is the attitude of the Azerbaijani respondents to America. Carried out in September 2001 - February 2002 and in September 2002 – February 2003, our investigation has fixed high enough rating of this country in the mass consciousness. Azerbaijani respondents increasingly view the US as our country's main ally and even as counterbalance to Russia. But, it is indicative, that over the past few years this rating has decreased a little.

For example, in 1997 I carried out a survey titled "America and Americans in the eyes of residents of capital of Azerbaijan" among 400 persons. It demonstrated that the significant majority of interviewed (63%) estimated bilateral relations of our two countries as friendly and favorable. About the fourth (24%) estimated them as neutral, while, practically, none of respondents believed that relations between our two countries were tense. Thus, prevailing were sentiments of interest (54%), friendliness and sympathy (45%), respect (31%) unlike mistrust and suspiciousness (only 3%). However, a picture at present is a little bit different. Most likely, it is connected with unfulfilled hopes and expectations concerning the US and the West's assistance in the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, some disappointment at the Western political line in our region.

Attitude, perception and feelings of selected countries. What are respondents' attitude, perception and feelings of various countries?

Table 16. Attitude, Perception and Feelings of Selected Countries (in %)

N	Countries	Favorable, friendly	Trust	Respect	Indifferent	Distrust	Unfavorable, negative
1.	Georgia	60.1	7.4	17.0	21.6	5.0	1.6
2.	Armenia	-	-	-	11.4	40.1	73.8
3.	Russia	33.4	12.8	39.7	6.4	30.3	6.1
4.	Iran	2.6	2.0	7.2	32.4	59.9	12.1
5.	Turkey	60.8	33.9	29.1	10.8	6.8	-
6.	USA	30.1	15.8	44.4	13.9	5.9	2.6
7.	UK	31.3	12.1	49.3	19.4	3.8	1.4
8.	France	28.3	7.4	48.9	23.8	2.6	-
9.	Germany	25.4	11.2	49.8	18.3	4.4	2.7
10.	Turkmenistan	12.8	-	5.7	49.7	29.6	13.2
11.	Pakistan	26.6	10.8	17.9	49.3	10.5	-
12.	Uzbekistan	25.3	6.3	16.1	58.6	6.6	-

As may be expected, most Azerbaijani respondents express favorable, friendly opinions of Turkey - 60.8% (51.0%-70.5%) and Georgia 60.1% (57.5%-62.6%). Presently, relations with these both countries are rather popular and widely welcomed in Azerbaijan.

Such countries, as Russia - 33.4% (29.1%-37.7%), UK - 31.3% (26.5%-36.1%), USA - 30.1% (25.6%-34.5%), France - 28.3% (24.5%-32.1%), Pakistan - 26.6% (24.1%-29.0%), Uzbekistan - 25.3% (23.8%-26.9%), Germany - 25.4% (24.5%-26.3%) are viewed in a positive manner. Opinions of Armenia and Iran are mainly extremely unfavorable.

It is indicative, that the countries, which have received the best rating, are, in the main, members of the North Atlantic alliance.

The most trusted countries are Turkey - 33.9% (30.1%-37.6%), USA - 17.5% (14.0%-15.8%) and Russia - 12.8% (12.3%-13.3%). Moreover, the level of trust to Turkey and USA has increased since September 2001 - February 2002. The most distrusted countries are Iran - 59.9% (55.6%-64.1%), Russia - 30.3% (37.0%-23.6%) and Turkmenistan - 29.6% (24.4%-34.9%).

It is interesting that Russia is simultaneously among both categories. This fact reaffirms the dual and uncertain image of Russia in Azerbaijani mass consciousness.

As in the prior stage of survey, our respondents hold overwhelmingly unfavorable opinions of Armenia - 73.8% (72.5%-75.1%). This country is also the most distrusted - 40.1% (29.1%-51.0%). Of course, people's assessment of Armenia is a particular case due to military conflict with this country. In this respect, attitudes to Armenia should be assessed specifically due to our protracted, deeply-rooted

conflict. It is also worthy to stress that Azerbaijanis are not optimistic about prospects of the settlement of the conflict. For example, when asked about the meetings between leaders of the two countries over the past few years, the prevailing majority said that the talks have not improved chances for the settlement, and just a few of them think that they have.

The unsettled conflict plays major role in forming attitudes towards Russia and Iran as well because of strategic positions of these countries concerning the current situation. There is a number of indications of the widespread mistrust of, and opposition to, Russia in Azerbaijani society. In particular, Russia's role in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict has substantially contributed to the mistrust of this country. Many people in Azerbaijan believe that the separatists could not have seized control of this region and occupied 20 percent of Azerbaijan territory without covert support from the Russian military.

The popularity of Russia is considerably less high, as well as of Iran. Opinion of Iran is much more unfavorable than favorable, as people guess that from this country Azerbaijan should keep the greatest distance. However, slightly more voice unfavorable than favorable opinions of Iran, the country which is often criticized for how it treats its large Azeri population and for exhibiting excessive religious zeal, supporting Armenia, confrontation in Caspian Sea. Our respondents faced with several cases of disrespectful attitude from the Iranian government towards feelings of our people. This may reflect the mistrust that some Azerbaijanis harbor for Iran.

Most important countries for Azerbaijan. Relationships with a number of countries could have a certain impact on our country. Therefore, it was interesting to see how Azerbaijani people consider impact, positive or negative, of some countries on our country. What countries are considered as the most important for Azerbaijan?

Table 17. Countries Most Important for Azerbaijan (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Russia	57.8	63.8	60.8
2.	Turkey	51.0	55.8	53.4
3.	USA	54.5	51.5	53.2
4.	Georgia	8.0	6.1	7.1
5.	UK	7.6	6.0	6.8
6.	Germany	7.5	4.3	5.9
7.	European Union (EU)	3.5	6.8	5.1
8.	France	6.0	3.3	4.6
9.	Pakistan	4.6	4.1	4.4
10.	Iran	1.8	2.6	2.2
11.	India, Uzbekistan, none, all mighty countries of the world	1.8	2.4	2.1
12.	Do not know	2.6	2.4	2.5

When asked which country is the most important for Azerbaijan future, Azerbaijani people most often name Russia, up from 57.8% in September 2001 – February 2002 to 63.8% in September 2002 – February 2003. About two-thirds (60.8%) of our respondents consider Russia as the most important country for Azerbaijan, that is a bit unexpected result. Russia is seen as “number one” and received the highest score. People mostly understand the term “importance” in terms of ability of this country to influence on the inter-political situation in our country, bearing in mind some negative experience from the past.

And slightly more than half of respondents regard Turkey (53.4%) and USA (53.2%) as the most important countries for Azerbaijan. A more than half (55.8% in September 2002 – February 2003), up from 51.0% (in September 2001 – February 2002) suppose that Turkey is the most important country for Azerbaijan's future, as “this country is of a vital interest to our future”, “we without this country nobody and nothing”, while 53.2% (54.5%-51.5%) presume that USA is most important (“counterbalance of Russia”). Behind this shift is, probably, a growing awareness of the major role that the US and Turkey have taken in working with and strengthening the Azerbaijani government, in the process of increasing the

role of our country in regional affairs. Regarding these both countries respondents mentioned that they consider their impact has been positive to a large extent.

Relationships with other countries are of little importance to Azerbaijan. Just few cite Georgia - 7.1% (8.0%-6.1%), England - 6.8% (7.6%-6.0%), Germany - 5.9% (7.5%-4.3%) or countries of the European Union - 5.1% (3.5%-6.8%). Far fewer mention France - 4.6% (6.0%-3.3%), Pakistan - 4.4% (4.6%-4.1%), Iran - 2.2% (1.8%-2.6%) and any other countries.

Significantly, young people under 25 years of age are most likely to view the US as the most important country for Azerbaijan and to say that Azerbaijan should ally itself with the West. The West is valued primarily for its economic development, strengthening the rule of law, democratization and well being in general. Also our population is impressed with its military power and mighty. In the case of the US, it is striking that more Azerbaijani people consider the US "most important", but that fewer have a favorable opinion of it. The first judgment may be influenced more by geopolitical and economic considerations; the second, by news reporting and maybe by some cultural, traditional trends.

Countries are capable to deal responsibly with problems in our region. What countries, in respondents' opinion, are capable to deal responsibly with problems and conduct accountable policies in our region?

Table 20. Degree of Confidence in Countries' Ability to Deal Responsibly with Problems in the South Caucasus (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	USA	45.0	52.4	48.7
2.	Russia	38.8	55.1	47.0
3.	Turkey	36.3	44.8	40.6
4.	European Union (EU)	12.8	10.8	11.8
5.	UK	3.8	7.4	5.6
6.	Other (Germany, France)	1.9	2.4	2.1
7.	No one	6.1	8.1	7.1
8.	Do not know	8.6	5.8	7.2

Indisputable leaders in the given question are three countries – USA, Russia and Turkey. A slim majority - 48.7% (45.0%-52.4%) express at least a fair amount of confidence in US's ability to promote peace, stability and security in this region. As they did a year ago, two in five - 40.6% (36.3%-44.8%) Azerbaijani respondents express at least a fair amount of confidence in Turkey's ability to deal responsibly with problems and conduct accountable policy in our region.

Almost half - 47.0% (38.8%-55.1%) believe that Russia will deal responsibly with regional problems, but no more than one in ten – 11.8% (12.8%-10.8%) says the same of European Union (EU). A proportion of respondents, who voiced a favorable of Russia's new politics in this region, has considerably, essentially increased over a year, despite its tough policy in this region. Just 2.1% (1.9%-2.4%) of respondents voiced confidence in Germany and France in this capacity. As in prior stage of survey, almost all lack confidence in Armenia's and Iran's ability to deal responsibly with regional problems.

2.4 Public Opinion of International Organizations

Preferable and important for Azerbaijan international organizations and entities. Participation and involvement, entering in what international organizations, blocks and alliances our respondents consider as the most preferable and important for Azerbaijan?

Table 21. Preferable and Important for Azerbaijan International Organizations and Entities (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	United Nations	45.6	59.0	52.3
2.	European Union (EU)	55.4	39.4	47.4
3.	NATO	42.1	39.9	41.0

4.	Council of Europe	42.4	39.4	40.9
5.	OSCE	23.6	31.0	27.3
6.	Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	27.3	23.5	25.4
7.	Azerbaijan-Turkish Union	27.5	23.0	25.3
8.	Union of Turkic-language countries	23.8	26.8	25.3
9.	Organization of Islamic Conference	26.8	21.6	24.2
10.	GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova)	14.3	18.6	16.4
11.	“Caucasian Four” (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Russia)	9.8	8.6	9.2
12.	Integrative union of three countries of the South Caucasus	6.8	4.8	5.8
13.	Russia-Byelorussian Union	2.0	0.9	1.4
14.	Other unions, blocks and alliances	3.5	2.0	2.8

As is seen from the Table, as the best option for Azerbaijan our respondents consider its integration into various Western, European institutions, i.e. European Union (EU) - 52.3% (45.6%-59.0%), Council of Europe - 40.9% (42.4%-39.4%) and OSCE - 27.3% (23.6%-31.0%). The other best choice for Azerbaijani respondents is integration with NATO - 41.0% (42.1%-39.9%). Opinion on this issue has changed little since September 2001 – February 2002.

Azerbaijanis' desire for close ties with the West is indicated in other ways as well. When asked during face-to-face interview about preferable Azerbaijan's place in the world, they say that our country should be more closely linked with Western institutions and organizations than with, let say, the CIS or GUUAM. Our respondents also quite highly support the continuation of Azerbaijan's participation in the United Nations structure - 52.3% (45.6%-9.0%).

The other preferable and enough desirable (around 50 percent) formula for Azerbaijan's international development is also its close relations with the Turkish world: Azerbaijan-Turkish Union - 25.3% (27.5%-23.0%) and Union of Turkic-language countries - 25.3% (23.8%-26.8%). Almost the same is the proportion of those adhering to the Islamic world, for closer and more versatile relations with the Organization of Islamic Conference - 24.2% (26.8%-21.6%).

The rating of such new regional organization as GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) is growing - 16.4% (14.3%-18.6%). Despite this, this relatively low rating was a little bit unexpected if we take into account the strong every-day propagation of it in our local mass media. It is accounted for by the fact that people have not yet seen any real advantage and benefit from participation in this newly-established entity. Even the very notion of “GUUAM” remains to be an abstract and non-understandable term for most of them.

Identified rather strong pro-Western and pro-Turkish orientation of our respondents does not mean that people do not orientate, at least poorly, to contacts and links within the South Caucasus region. Around 15 percent presume that Azerbaijan should develop closer contacts within either countries of “Caucasian Four” (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Russia) - 9.2% (9.8%-8.6%) or integrative union of three countries of the South Caucasus - 5.8% (6.8%-4.8%). But, at the same time, Azerbaijani people on no account want to see Azerbaijan within the Russian-Byelorussian Union, believing it is not an acceptable idea to join this Union - 1.4% (2.0%-0.9%).

For one quarter - 25.4% (27.3%-23.5%) of respondents, the participation in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is quite acceptable and preferable line of external politics, as “we should not introduce the visa regime with Russia and other CIS countries”. There was also a small group - 2.8% (3.5%-2.0%) of respondents who mentioned other organizations, unions, blocks and alliances, like Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Eurasian Economic Community (EEC), World Trade Organization (WTO), OPEC, etc. Also mentioned was “something like former USSR” by some elder people. In considering that this category of respondents remembers Soviet past rather well, it was not unexpected and surprising that some of them feel sorry that “the Soviet Union broke up”.

Today, like a year ago, many more respondents are convinced that Azerbaijan should develop closer relations with the US and other Western countries rather than with Russia and the CIS (40 percent versus

25 percent). About fifth declare that our country should seek a balance between the two “centers of powers”.

Role various international organizations play in our region. How do respondents estimate the role various international organizations play in our region? Of interest is how respondents evaluate the extent of their influence on the solution of various socially important problems of our society.

Table 22. Role Various International Organizations Play In Our Region (in %)

N		European Union	United Nations	OSCE	Council of Europe
1.	I am not informed about their activity at all	35.1	17.4	21.9	13.8
2.	Promote democratic development	23.6	20.3	14.1	29.9
3.	Help to solve economic problems	10.9	17.0	15.1	9.6
4.	Promote peace, stability and development in our region	11.6	23.5	21.8	7.7
5.	They act just for only their own interests	14.5	15.5	21.7	21.9
6.	Their activity is not constructive	15.4	26.6	26.4	13.7

Prevailing opinion is that organizations working in the country have had mainly a beneficial impact on Azerbaijan. For example, the biggest group of respondents - 29.9% (31.8%-28.0%) thinks that the Council of Europe promotes democratic development in our country. Rather considerable importance is attached to European Union for the solution of such social and national task, as promotion of democratic development - 23.6% (24.8%-22.4%) and to United Nations for “promotion of peace, stability and development in our region” - 23.5% (27.9%-19.1%). The peace-making potential of United Nations was also emphasized though this proportion has declined over the past year.

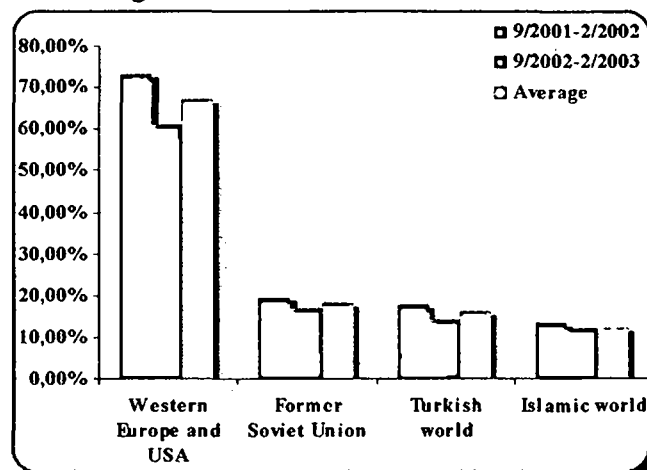
Mostly criticized for their not constructive activity were United Nations - 26.6% (23.0%-30.1%) and OSCE 26.4% (23.6%-29.1%), as well as for acting, operating just for only their own interests were Council of Europe - 21.9% (21.3%-22.4%) and OSCE - 21.7% (18.0%-25.3%). Least of all, influence of international organizations manifested itself in the peace, stability and development in our region by the Council of Europe - 7.7% (8.4%-6.9%) and assistance in the solution of economic problems - 9.6% (11.1%-8.0%). However, some fluctuations between all these positions in terms of time perspectives should be taken into account.

Just fewer have lack confidence in the OSCE, which has played a key role in effort to negotiate a settlement of the conflict over Nagorno Karabakh. The fact that confidence in this entity has declined over the past year may reflect strong disappointment about their inability to solve the intractable Nagorno Karabakh problem. Subsequent OSCE efforts to facilitate negotiations between the Azerbaijani and Armenian governments have not led to the settlement, to the restoration of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country and the return to Nagorno Karabakh and adjacent regions of about one million refugees and displaced persons. It is necessary to mention about public opinion in the country concerning activity of international mediators, which too is far from being positive. The number doubting in productivity of "intermediary three" (Russia, USA and France are co-chairmen of the Minsk group of OSCE) constantly grows. Our investigation became one more confirmation of opinion dominating in the Azerbaijani society on uselessness, inefficiency of activity of mediators of the Minsk group.

But what is striking about public opinion on the role of international organizations is the extent of ignorance of their activities; majorities offer no opinion, stated that they were not informed about their activity at all or think about them as just aid donors.

Countries and organizations preferable for economic collaboration. What countries and organizations are most desirable, preferable for economic collaboration and turning for assistance in solving social-economic problems of Azerbaijan?

Figure 10. Countries and Organizations Preferable for Economic Collaboration (in %)



As is seen, an absolute priority - 67.0% (72.9%-61.1%) here is held by countries and organizations of the West (Western Europe and USA). Probably, this perception is affected by social-economical, charitable and humanitarian activities of Western organizations, international oil companies in Azerbaijan. When asked whether certain Western organizations have had a positive or negative effect on Azerbaijan in recent years, a majority say that they have had a positive impact. Namely because of these reasons mainly all countries and organizations of the West are viewed positively.

At the same time, a joint rating (approximately around 46 percent) of all other countries and organizations, which have been taken together, does not exceed the rating of Western countries and organizations. Among them countries and organizations of the former Soviet Union were mentioned by 18.1% (19.5%-16.8%) of respondents, countries and organizations of Turkish world - 16.0% (17.8%-14.3%), countries and organizations of Islamic world - 12.1% (13.5%-12.1%).

2.5 Public Opinion of International Economic Cooperation and Collaboration

Importance and necessity of attraction of foreign investments and capital in Azerbaijan. Foreign investments have increased lately, much of it spent for the transportation of Azerbaijan's energy resources and construction of the oil pipeline running from Baku across Georgia to Ceyhan, a Turkish port on the Mediterranean Sea. Several agreements on this project were signed by the governments of these three countries. This project is already at the stage of realization.

Table 23. Importance and Necessity of Attraction of Foreign Investments and Capital in Azerbaijan (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	It should be encouraged, as promotes economic development of our country	46.0	39.3	42.6
2.	It helps implement large-scale international projects with Azerbaijan participation	27.9	38.5	33.2
3.	The more foreign businesses and businessmen will be in our country, the better	9.9	18.6	14.3
4.	It should be discouraged, because is implemented at the expense of natural resources of our country	12.3	9.5	10.9
5.	Hardly, it will lead to increasing living standards of our population	18.3	20.5	19.4
6.	I fear that we become dependent on the foreign companies, that they might gain too much influence over situation and affairs in Azerbaijan	10.4	12.0	11.2
7.	Other	3.9	2.9	3.4

There are various opinions about importance and necessity of attraction of foreign investments and capital in Azerbaijan.

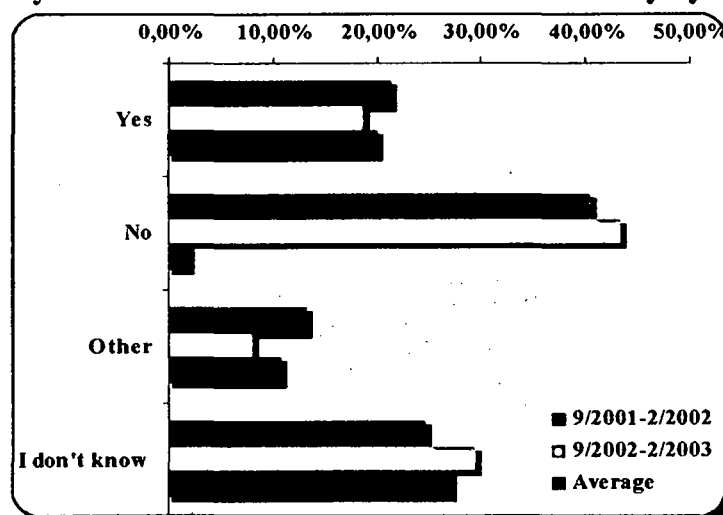
The huge majority (around 90 percent) totally support the process of attraction of foreign investments and capital in Azerbaijan. Among them two-fifths - 42.6% (46.0%-39.3%) of respondents say that foreign investments should be encouraged because it will promote economic development of our country. The third part - 33.2% (27.9%-38.5%) suppose that it helps implementing large-scale international projects with Azerbaijan participation, while the judgment "the more foreign businesses and businessmen will be in our country, the better" has been stated by 14.3% (9.9%-18.6%) of survey participants.

The proportion of those supporting foreign investments owing to its contribution to the implementation of large-scale international projects with Azerbaijan participation has risen from a quarter (27.9%) to two-fifths (38.5%) between September 2001 – February 2002 and September 2002 – February 2003. Young people and the better-educated people are generally more supportive of foreign businesses than are older, less-educated Azerbaijani people.

Roughly one-fifth - 19.4% (18.3%-20.5%) has expressed doubt that attraction of foreign investments and capital in our country will lead to increasing living standards of our population. This tendency is a quite stable. It is worthy of note that the same motives are characteristic of women and men (20.1% and 18.7% respectively). Yet, as many - 10.9% (12.3%-9.5%) say that it should be discouraged, because is implemented at the expense of natural resources of our country. Likewise, almost the same proportion - 11.2% (10.4%-12.0%) fear that we become dependent from the foreign companies, that they might gain too much influence over situation and domestic affairs in Azerbaijan. In so doing, women indicate twice as often (14.9% vs. 7.5%) than men.

Sufficiency of economic aid rendered to our country by the West. Do respondents consider as sufficient economic aid rendered to our country by the West?

Figure 11. Sufficiency of Economic Aid Rendered To Our Country by the West (in %)



In this case, views are distributed over foreign economic assistance. The largest part of interviewed - 42.0% (40.5%-43.5%) unsatisfied with the level, amount and volume of this help. One in five respondents - 20.1% (21.4%-18.8%) has answered in the affirmative way to the given question. And also 27.2% (24.8%-29.6%) of respondents say they do not know anything about such help.

Known large-scale international projects with Azerbaijan participation. What large-scale international projects with Azerbaijan participation respondents can mention, are known for them?

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Export Oil Pipeline (BTC) was named in the overwhelming majority of cases - 62.1% (51.3%-72.9%). Also mentioned were several modern projects, as Great Silk Road - 26.8%

(22.5%-31.0%), TRACECA - 13.6% (8.8%-18.3%) and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzrum Gas Pipeline - 5.0% (2.6%-7.4%).

Disposition towards the construction of the new oil pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan. What is respondents disposition towards new international energy projects, for example, to the construction of the new oil pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan?

Table 24. Disposition Towards the Construction of the New Oil Pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Geyhan (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Positive	60.5	64.8	62.6
2.	It is hard to say something particular, in concrete terms	29.5	22.1	25.8
3.	Negative	5.4	7.3	6.3
4.	Other	4.7	5.9	5.2

As is known, there has been quite an extensive construction and reconstruction of oil pipelines in the country of late. These issues are constantly in the focus of public attention, are become a subject of intensive discussions in local mass media and political midst.

The attitude of respondents to the matter differed. Much more than half of respondents (62.6%) (60.5%-64.8%) have the positive attitude to this construction. The leading motives for supporting this kind of project were the following: this is very important at present for improving economic situation; as an indicator of respect and confidence for our country; restoration of historical justice, because now we can independently dispose of our natural resources. Approximately a fourth (25.8%) (29.5%-22.1%) could say nothing specific with this regard, as "it is hard to say something particular, in concrete terms".

Every fifteenth respondent (6.3%) (5.4%-7.3%) opposed these new international energy projects, for example, construction of the new oil pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, as saying that it is better to spend money on other social needs, increase allowances and pensions, income generation, medicine, assistance to the destitute, handicapped and orphans. In so doing, some think there has to be the restoration of oil pipelines only and no new ones should be built, so the construction of new oil pipelines should be limited or prohibited. And just 5.2% (4.7%-5.9%) of our respondents expressed their indifference to the question.

Benefits from oil contracts and agreements. What is respondents' attitude to expected benefits from the oil contracts and agreements, signed by our country? It remains to be important how much the oil contracts and agreements will contribute to the Azerbaijani economy or how widely and fairly the benefits will be distributed.

Table 25. Expectations of Benefits From Oil Contracts and Agreements (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	I look on it with optimism	63.0	70.6	66.8
2.	I look on it with skepticism	18.9	5.0	11.9
3.	It does not matter for me	11.8	16.6	14.2
4.	Other	6.4	7.8	7.1

The survey has shown a quite high level of optimism regarding benefits from the oil contracts and agreements, signed by our country: 66.8% (63.0%-70.6%) of respondents look on it with optimism. Within a year, this percentage has risen by 7.6%. At the same time, each in ten respondent -11.9% (18.9%-5.0%) looks at it with skepticism. The same percentage has decreased from 18.9% to 5.0%. Also, for 14.2% (11.8%-16.6%) of the interviewed this issue does not matter at all.

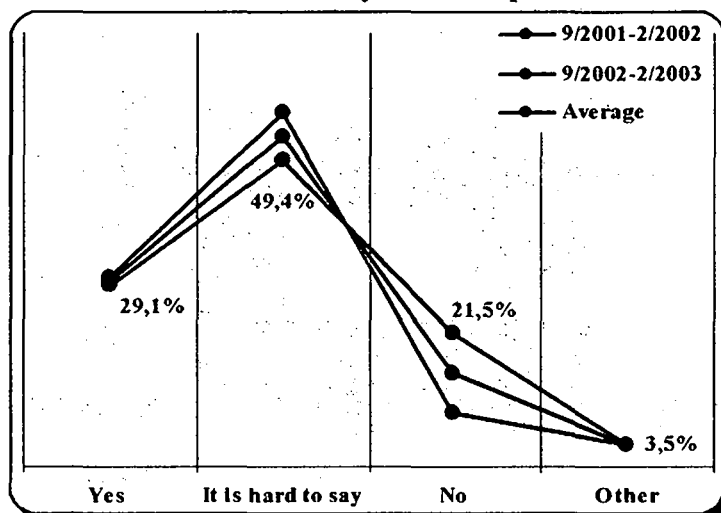
It is also important to note that there has been a correlation between such optimism and the way in which the respondents perceived importance and necessity of attraction of foreign investments and capital in Azerbaijan. The more optimistic they have been regarding benefits from the oil contracts and agreements, signed by our country, the more positively they have perceived importance and necessity of attraction of foreign investments and capital in Azerbaijan.

It should be also noted that now Azerbaijani public opinion is drastically split on those benefiting from the oil contracts and pipelines and those not; approximately two-fifths say that the people as a whole will, and three-fifths believe that only a few wealthy people will. At the same time, most believe that the development of the country's oil resources will enrich a few wealthy people rather than the people as a whole (60 to 40).

2.6 Public Attitudes towards Security Issues in Azerbaijan

External threats for security and independence of Azerbaijan. What people think, are there any immediate external threats and risks for security and independence of our country? Are they anxious about any aggression from the outside?

Figure 12. External Threats for Security and Independence of Azerbaijan (in %)



The figures speak for themselves: each in three respondents - 29.9% (29.1%-30.6%) is worried that another country might attack or try to destabilize situation in Azerbaijan in the next several years. As was the case a year ago in September 2001 – February 2002, the same proportion of respondents in September 2002 – February 2003 said that they are very concerned that a foreign country might attach Azerbaijan or try to destabilize situation here.

Insignificant proportion of respondents - 15.1% (21.5%-8.6%) is not very much concerned that a foreign country might attack or try to destabilize Azerbaijan in the next several years. It is worthy to note that this share visibly dropped within a year from 21.5% to 8.6%. And, at last, half - 53.3% (49.4%-57.3%) of respondents could not unequivocally describe their feelings.

The same fact that each third participant of interview is very concerned with external threat proves the lack or loss of the feeling of safety among a great number of people, who live under this psychological pressure during many years. Therefore, they aspire to obtain the safety guarantee through the inclusion in the NATO's framework, as they are convinced and realize that the core aim of this organization is to increase the safety of its members.

Countries posing greatest military threat for Azerbaijan's security and national interests. Which countries do respondents consider as posing the greatest military threat for Azerbaijan's security and national interests?

Table 26. Countries Posing Greatest Military Threat for Azerbaijan's Security and National Interests (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	Armenia	62.1	64.5	63.3
2.	Russia	32.0	29.0	30.5
3.	Iran	31.1	39.9	35.5
4.	Other (US, Turkmenistan)	3.5	2.5	3.0
5.	None	2.4	4.0	3.2

When asked what country or territory poses the greatest military threat to Azerbaijan, vast majority - 63.3% name Armenia (64.5% in September 2001 – February 2002, up from 62.1% in September 2002 – February 2003). Most citizens of Azerbaijan continue to view Armenia as the principal threat to national security. At the same time, they explain that this became possible only through the aid of its ally Russia.

Fewer (around 30 percent) mention Russia - 30.5% (32.0%-29.0%) or Iran - 35.5% (31.1%-39.9%) as the main immediate threat. Many Azerbaijanis believe that neighboring powers - in particular, Russia and Iran, seek to exploit our internal divisions, problems and difficulties for their own advantage. There are persisting worries about Russian and Iranian policy in this region.

Thus, according to the survey, external military threat is perceived mainly as coming from Armenia, but also from Russia and Iran. In the case of Armenia, this concern is predominantly connected with the occupation of our territories and constant territorial claims. In the case of Russia and Iran, it seems that the fear is connected with their military domination and imperial politics rather than the economic expansion.

Reaction to the possible stationing of foreign military bases in Azerbaijan. How would people react to the possible stationing of foreign military bases in Azerbaijan?

Table 27. Reaction to the Possible Stationing of Foreign Military Bases in Azerbaijan (in %)

		9/2001-2/2002	9/2002-2/2003	Average
1.	I would support this act	9.4	4.5	6.9
2.	It will depend on a specific country or block	48.0	50.9	49.4
3.	I do not care of it	11.8	13.5	12.6
4.	I would strongly oppose to it	25.8	24.5	25.1
5.	Other	2.4	2.9	2.6
6.	It is difficult to answer	2.8	3.8	3.3

The survey has identified different views on the possible stationing of foreign military bases in Azerbaijan. It is indicative that just an insignificant portion of respondents - 6.9% (9.4%-4.5%) would certainly support this act without any exceptions.

The largest portion - 49.4% (48.0%-50.9%) was made of those respondents, who put forward a condition that their attitude to the matter would depend on a specific country or block. As was the case a year ago in September 2001 – February 2002, four-fifths particularly oppose the presence of Russian troops on Azerbaijani territory and one-fifth is opposed to the stationing of American troops on Azerbaijani soil. Opposition to the stationing of Russian military bases on Azerbaijan territory has risen since September 2001 – February 2002. A quarter (25.1%) of the interviewed would strongly oppose to the possible stationing of foreign military bases in Azerbaijan without any exceptions, no matter, which block or country. This tendency remained stable over the year at the levels 25.8%-24.5%.

Part III. Findings of the Elite Opinion Survey

In the previous part of the report, the present condition and dynamics of the public opinion in Azerbaijani on the broad range of foreign policy issues and international affairs have been analyzed.

This part deals with the analysis of elite opinion of the Azerbaijani society, i.e. persons who actively influence the public opinion, prioritize basic strategic directions of internal and foreign policy, come out as carriers of professional and special knowledge. Of great interest are judgements and reflections of people in charge of decision-making on cardinal issues of internal and foreign policy of our country.

Certainly, it is hardly possible to cover a wide spectrum of key problems of foreign policy of Azerbaijan.

Hence, analyzed will be those aspects only which are important from the formation and determination of foreign policy orientations standpoint. The statements of elite on foreign policy priorities and relations with NATO are of particular interest. The in-depth personal interviews made it possible to find out the importance and urgency of the above-mentioned issues in the view of the Azerbaijani elite.

3.1 Current and Future Trends Concerning the Geopolitical Situation in the South Caucasus

The process of experts' interviewing started with their general assessments of the contemporary geopolitical, geo-strategic situation in the South Caucasus region, estimations of main factors, trends and prospects for its development.

As is well known, the South Caucasus has been under transition from one social-political-economical system to another for the last 12 years and thus become the most crisis-ridden and politically unstable area in the post-Soviet territory.

The region has been faced with a large number of ethno-political conflicts, sometimes assuming a form of severe military confrontation. The long-lasting Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno Karabakh is the most serious and complicated among them. Now the region of the South Caucasus represents non-stable zone with the numerous latent conflicts.

Experts mentioned a number of main factors influencing the contemporary geo-political situation in the South Caucasus region.

Collapse of the Soviet Union has brought to the emergence the three newly independent states in the South Caucasus, which presently are trying to identify their own appropriate role and place in the world system, to affiliate itself with the geopolitical "power centers" through establishing mutually profitable international contacts, finding allies and partners. As for Azerbaijan, it is trying to become one of the key players in this region and step-by-step associate itself with West and Turkey.

In some experts' opinion, now the South Caucasian regional space has been torn apart. Three South Caucasus countries experience all negative consequences of economic, social and political crises. The present situation in this region shows the existence of multiple internal difficulties of economic, military-political, ideological and cultural nature, which would reorientate towards new "power centers" outside the South Caucasus. Presently, one can observe the inclination of its different countries to the various centers of power and poles.

Nowadays, a lot of objective and subjective barriers among nations and peoples have arisen. A distinctive feature of the region is its ethnic and religious diversity and multiculturalism. Severe ethno-political territorial conflicts have a tremendous negative impact on the general situation and moral-psychological atmosphere in the region. Certain aspects of disintegrative processes have still been continuing.

Owing to the above-mentioned circumstances, disparities and broken relations, today it seems hardly possible to regard the South Caucasus as a single geopolitical unit with common information and communication space, which has a real potential for rapprochement and beginning of integration. At this historical and social-political stage, this is a "unity" rather just from a geographical point of view. However, this geographic integrity could be a favorable condition for the establishment of future integrative links. Rise of geopolitical vacuum on this territory made new established sovereign states to

think about what their future would be: together or apart, in joint block or as a member of inter-state unions.

According to experts, the general geopolitical configuration in this region is quite complicated. The peculiar characteristic of geo-political situation in the South Caucasus is its preservation as a focus of confrontation and political tension, collision of interests of superpowers and larger states of the region.

Some countries, currently pursuing their own geopolitical interests in the South Caucasus, have a considerable impact on the current processes and events. The main "actors" in the geopolitical game around this region, according to long historical tradition, still remain Russia, Turkey and Iran. Recent years, USA and Western Europe have also been actively involved in the regional affairs.

It was mentioned that the Western influence in the South Caucasus has been constantly becoming stronger that is primarily displayed in their growing political and ideological influence, increasing investments and trade activity.

Despite identical approaches to geopolitical importance of Azerbaijan, the interests of such strategic partners, as USA and Western Europe do not coincide in all points. Geographic proximity of the Western Europe to this region urges the leadership of EU countries to more pragmatic approach, while the USA is acting in the more global context.

There are also a certain differences between American and European centers of the West world in their practical realization of the politics in the South Caucasus. USA is far away from the region, and therefore this super-power is much more flexible in its decisions and pursues more dynamic and effective politics. Meanwhile, "the possible military tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia with the involvement of Russia and Turkey could have a certain dangerous impact on some neighboring European countries from the point of view of security and flow of refugees".

Also, experts noticed that for last years the positions of Russia in this region have strongly weakened. The situation is aggravated by a number of factors, adverse to Moscow, mainly the policy of two South Caucasus states, Georgia and Azerbaijan, associating prospects of their development and future to the great extent with the West, which, in turn, considers Caucasus as a zone of its strategic interests.

For example, in opinion of MPs dealing with international issues, especially after the events of September 11 in the USA, the region of the South Caucasus, and in particular Azerbaijan and Georgia, has got a greater importance in the world.

These two countries are seeking to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic space, to thus play an appreciable role as a sort of bridge for integration and rapprochement between the West and the East.

After Washington has succeeded in Afghanistan, the geo-political situation in the South Caucasus has been considerably changed.

Meanwhile, the situation in this region has not yet been fairly stabilized. The balance of interests between the newly independent states and developed world super-powers has not been established yet. Therefore, nowadays the South Caucasus is the potential source of instability, insecurity and threats for a number of local and large-scale conflicts. These circumstances just bring the additional elements of unpredictability and uncertainty into the geopolitical situation in this region.

Experts emphasized that from the point of view of cooperation the South Caucasus represents for NATO serious interest as a crossroad between Europe and Asia. The region has been gradually becoming in the center of attention of NATO which is intending to involve at once all three states both in regional cooperation and to cooperate with each of them separately within the framework of the program "Partnership for Peace".

Of interest is how experts predict how this geo-political situation will change in short-term and long-term perspectives. What are the prospects for regional development?

The percentage of experts who foresee a positive development is considerably greater than that of those thinking differently. Attractive optimistic scenario was described in the answers of 60 percent of interviewed. The majority of experts consider the future of our region only under conditions of peaceful coexistence, as "mutually beneficial cooperation", "developed state institutions", "social and political development".

The optimistic statements are probably based on the latest positive changes in the region arising from more active and effective synchronization of efforts of Russia and America. The USA and Russia

cooperate in the maintenance of stability in the South Caucasus. According to some political scientists, at present there are favorable conditions to accomplish the goal. Previously when between them there was a confrontation, no improvement of the situation was available.

Also, 34 percent of experts are drawing non-favourable, pessimistic scenario of the regional dynamics predicting in future conflicts and wars in our region, because "peaceful coexistence in our region is impossible", "the nearest future will be still quite conflictual", "it is not possible to promote development under conditions of war". Another 6 percent of experts suppose that it is not clear how the current situation will develop and change or that it will be in "frozen" conditions ("neither war, nor peace").

Experts mentioned factors that could hinder the resolution to regional conflicts, maintenance of peace and confidence-building. Below-mentioned poses, in the view of Azerbaijani experts, the greatest threat for the peace and stability in our region.

When making rank estimation, the highest rating has got such an obstacle in the way to regional peace and stability, as territorial claims to other countries (9.2 scores). Next, in order of priority there come such points, as ethnic separatism and secessionism (8.7 scores), militarization of region (8.1 scores), attempts to forcefully resolve disputes and conflicts (7.4 scores), a policy of superpowers in the region (7.3 scores), international terrorism (6.5 scores), differences in geo-political orientation of the regional countries (5.9 scores), aggressive nationalism, national intolerance (4.6 scores), religious intolerance and fanaticism (3.0 scores).

As a destabilizing there were mentioned the following factors: economic factor (31.5%), mutual negative perceptions (22%), problem of transitional period (19.5%), incompetence of former authorities (14%). Twenty six respondents did not answer this question.

Experts also pointed out common threats to countries of the region: interests of another countries (59%) threatening the independency ("the processes in the South Caucasus are lead by not Caucasian people", "there is a threat from Russia with its imperial views", "external forces use the continuation and prolongation of existing conflicts in their profit"), existing unresolved ethno-political conflicts and territorial disputes (30%), social-economical problems (28.5%), general backwardness (17%), terrorism (14%), ecological disasters (12.5%), underdeveloped state institutions (9%), demographic situation (6%), globalization (6%). Also sixty persons are sure that there are no a common threats to countries of the region.

In this context, experts lay a special emphasis on the issues of militarization of region. It has to be kept in mind that there are panic sentiments among some survey participants, declaring that our national interests are under threat. For example, some MPs and representatives of the centrist pro-governmental Party "Ana Vatan" consider that despite much done by the country's President, national safety and interests of Azerbaijan in the context of existing geo-political reality can be subject to new threats. The main danger, in their opinion, lays in the militarization of region caused by intensive militarization of Russia, Iran and Armenia. What steps should Azerbaijan take: to accelerate armament or is there an alternative of escalation of militarization in neighbouring countries?

Continuation of Abkhazian-Georgian and Russia-Chechen conflicts may also pose a lot of dangers to national interests of Azerbaijan.

The geo-political situation, to a large extent, is determined by balance of powers and a policy of the specific states. Experts made a brief comparison of various countries' policies and objectives in the South Caucasus.

According to the overwhelming majority of experts (80 percent), Russia's attitude toward the process of Azerbaijan's collaboration and further integration into NATO will be negative. Indicated among motives and reasons for such an attitude were following: this process will undermine Russia's imperial ambitions, claims, its aspiration to dominate in the region, will accelerate the process of Russia's losing the region from its sphere of influence and interests, will become a stumbling block in the way of continuation of Russia's policy labeled as "divide and rule", which Russia pursued in our region for centuries, and will eventually weaken its influence and authority here. "Russia is apprehensive of the appearance of this Alliance right under its nose". In this case, it will not be possible to preserve its influence on regional countries by the military and political pressure and militarization.

On the contrary, some experts (around 20 percent) believe that Russia will still be interested in progressive integrative processes in the region, as the latter is caused by objective factors, which, in turn, are dictated by the requirements of the new times and brought about by the unity of geopolitical space, by the fact that any smart country is interested in a real, dynamic and sustainable development of its neighbors. Countries pursuing common interests will no longer be a source of instability in the region.

According to experts, the response of Iran towards the further rapprochement of Azerbaijan with NATO will be extremely negative for the following reasons: this process means an objective strengthening of the West's military and political positions near its boundaries, growing concerns over the augmenting influence and economic expansion of Turkey, and through it of the USA, in this geopolitical region; weakening of its own positions and influence in the region; invigorating sovereignty and military capacity of Azerbaijan is unprofitable for Iran from the political standpoint, as it will be contrary to Iranian core interests. Iran is being interested in Azerbaijan's weaknesses - "why have a strong neighbor?"

Such an attitude is also explained by Iran's hostility, rivalry towards Azerbaijan, its reluctance to see Azerbaijan free, integral and economically developed, because this will promote separatism in the Southern Azerbaijan (The Northern Iran). This is also preconditioned by such factors as the aspiration to apply religious pressure on Azerbaijan.

Experts, basically members of the national parliament (Milli Məclis), stated a lot of claims to Iran. The basic their discontents were the following: In the present context friendly, good-neighbourhood relations of Iran with Armenia, and especially cooperation in military area, completely not understandable, acceptable for us. As experts also noted the Azerbaijani people living in territory of Iran and being citizens of this country have a lot of problems of national-cultural character, and for years they are not solved. Experts suppose that recent threats from capital of Iran addressed to Baku and Tbilisi only will push these countries to the accession into the military organization of NATO, without which they in front of even Iran are practically vulnerable and defenseless.

In general, the attitude of Turkey towards this process will be certainly, unequivocally positive, as it is interested in peace and stability in this region, elimination of sources of tension in the vicinity of their borders, and peaceful co-existence of their neighbors. Therefore, it meets the strategic interests of Turkey to achieve socio-political development of this region. The political and economical influence of Turkey in the region will also be considerably invigorated.

Experts suppose that being a democratic country Turkey does not have any imperial claims and ambitions and developed Azerbaijan will maintain certain cooperation and alliance relationship with Turkey, and in future can expand the processes of integration with the West via Turkey. Development of many-sided relations with Turkey is the bridge to NATO for us. "Turkey is a gate into NATO".

Others think that once the influence of Russia in the region weakens, a gradual alienation from it will be taking place in parallel with rapprochement towards another regional leader - Turkey as "the magnitude pole" of the region. Thus it was marked, that we do not want to see this country as the "second senior brother".

Experts gave their explanation of motivation of support and the positive attitude, reaction of the West to the process of Azerbaijan's integration into Euro-Atlantic structure. They pointed out on political, economic and strategic aspects.

Among political ones are the achievement of stability and predictability of the region, common interest in weakening Russian and Iranian positions and interests in the region and, contrary to this, expanding and growing role of the West, strengthening of Azerbaijan and Georgia, impetus to the development of Western-style democratization and West-oriented democratic system in these countries. These processes, first of all, imply peace and stability in the region, disappearance of troubled territories, and resumption of military cooperation with Western countries, facilitation of opportunities for cooperation and integration with the West.

In economic sense this means the appearance of economically strong states, with which it is possible to maintain mutually beneficial market relations, mastering the resources of a new region, realizing the advantages of investing in a stable region, having security guarantees of transport communications and oil pipelines, ensuring the dominance of western capitals and technologies, enjoying the benefits of dealing

with predictable subjects. It was also indicated that the USA will support the integration because of the energy projects.

Another evidence of the positive motivation is the fact that the West, where the processes of military-political integration are ongoing very intensely, has to a full extent perceived all the advantages of cooperation and integration.

Experts mentioned the most important factors for the establishment of a lasting peace and stability in the region.

It was mentioned that Nagorno Karabakh conflict is the most serious factor preventing or blocking possibilities for the normal political and economic development of Azerbaijan, which is already challenged by the difficulties and crises of the transitional period. Peace, stability and security are needed for its steady development. Settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict is the highest priority, key issue for Azerbaijan. Without solving this conflict it would be impossible to build a democratic society and sustainable social-economic development and recovery in Azerbaijan, to provide security and normal living standards for citizens.

The continuation of this unresolved, "frozen" conflict has a strong negative impact on the regional economic cooperation and the promotion of global projects. This conflict became not merely the real threat to territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, but at the same time the main source of instability in entire Caucasian region. Resolution of this conflict would make possible the creation of a regional security system, the promotion of integrative links.

But now this conflict undermines joint European efforts aimed to render assistance to the South Caucasian countries. The situation in this region is in the focus of attention of European community, in their major political agenda.

Over the past few years, this conflict has slightly stabilized, acquiring a form of a "cold war". The current situation of "neither war, nor peace" is an extremely unpredictable and uncertain. Standstill increases the danger of renewed fighting. There is still the possibility of new military actions. The cease-fire regime is often broken by shootings on the line of combat.

Therefore, it is imperative that Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and its disastrous consequences need to be resolved.

The resolution of this conflict is prevented by such factors, as interest of foreign countries (46 scores), social-economic problems (29 scores), incapacity to find solution of problems (25 scores), a lack of willingness of authorities to resolve conflict (22 scores), presence of a large number of subjects interested in the conflict (21 scores), enemy image, negative stereotypes (18 scores), absence of negotiation process at the various levels, absence of stable and functioning format of negotiation (17 scores), absence of willingness of all conflicting parties to resolve conflict (2 scores). Also other reasons were mentioned: "mentality" approach in ways of political thinking and behaviour of our nations, defeat of peoples' democratic forces, corruption.

The different alternatives for the settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict were proposed.

For 60% of respondents peaceful resolution of conflict is preferable, because "peaceful means of settlement of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict are not yet expired", "peaceful potential is not still expired", "this way is the more acceptable and satisfactory". By doing this, experts noted that it should be done "only with the aid of negotiations", "through compromise and mutual concessions", "achievement of a political agreement, which would satisfy both parties", "through political negotiations in favor of Azerbaijan". Some persons perceive peaceful way as unavoidable mean, due to "under modern conditions military solution to the problem would be negatively perceived by international community".

Economic tools and methods of conflict resolution are also regarded by some respondents as an efficient. Also experts underlined the important role of democratization, creating democratic system, putting into practice the politics of human rights protection, taking into account a national minorities rights for conflict resolution. Another experts described in detail the advantages of stage variant of conflict settlement unlike paket variant.

At the same time, a quite small number of respondents (16 percent) not seeing prospects for peaceful resolution, predict possibilities for increasing confrontation, point out to the possibility of military solution in case when it will not be possible to settle the problem by peaceful means ("military way of

conflict resolution is a final way", "this depends on parties positions, if they will come to any agreement – peaceful solution in this case, if they will not come to any agreement – military way is not ruled out", "only in a military way, through military influence", "war, and then a compromising solution", "only by force".

And, at last, 24% of respondents support for military-political way: "resolution of conflict as it is within the framework of international law could be only military-political", "through a combination of diplomatic efforts with a simultaneous strengthening of the military potential and the army", "military pressure", "military-political measures".

According to overwhelming majority of experts in any case the settlement of this conflict will be achieved on the basis of preservation of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and state sovereignty, respect for its constitutional norms and by way of provision of Nagorno-Karabakh with a high autonomous/self-governance status within Azerbaijan.

The importance of observing the OSCE Lisbon Summit principles and implementation of 4 UN Security Council Resolutions, as well as the fundamental norms and principles of international law was underscored.

Also enumerated were such conflict resolution elements, as withdrawing Armenian troops from occupied territories, abiding a national minorities rights, together with a more active role of international and other mediator organizations and an interest on part of Western countries and Russia in a soonest settlement. The role played in the process of settlement by parties to the conflict themselves was also pointed out.

According to the great majority of respondents, a complete and final resolution of this conflict is feasible only in distant future. Till now, in spite of enormous efforts of various mediation missions, this conflict has not found its solution, positive outcomes. The Minsk group of the OCSE does not have any new suggestions and ideas on the resolution, while all previous suggestions and ideas were rejected either by Azerbaijani or Armenian sides.

Currently multiple models and variants of the conflict settlement are being discussed, analyzed and put forward in the region by mediators, outside specialists and even the conflicting parties themselves. These cover the issues for solving the legal and political status issues, such as a "common state" and "maximal, broad degree of autonomy", exchange of territories, different forms of sovereignty and self-government, federative relations, etc.

Nevertheless, there is a steady increase of public' disappointments about the inability of the ruling elites and mediators to solve the intractable Nagorno Karabakh problem.

The issue whether regional integration will lead to the solution to conflicts or the other way round turned out to be rather disputable.

The huge majority (84%) of experts suppose that the conflict should be resolved first, and newt comes the regional integration. They excuse their position by the following arguments: countries in a state of war can not carry out economical collaboration and integrate, this is nonsense, it is better to solve disputable issues and then to integrate, while we in a state of war, we can not collaborate, there is no logic in it due to we have war and conflict between us.

This group of experts believes that only solution to conflicts will enable to undertake a real integration, as integration is a secondary process and it is more important to resolve all territorial disputes and conflicts on a fair and mutually acceptable foundation. If, however, there are long-standing armed conflicts and aggression on part of one country to the other, integration is practically out of question. It can take place only after steadfast and reliable peace agreements are concluded and a long-term peace established in the region.

Just only 8 percent of experts agree with an idea that initially should be integration, and then – conflict resolution. They presume that economic collaboration between conflicting countries under certain circumstances could lead to conflict resolution, economic interest will bring about activization of forces interested in conflict resolution in all regional countries. It was indicated that it should not be the integration of any kind, but one that would lead to the formation and strengthening of peace process. Integration should be carried out not as self-goal ("integration for the sake of integration"), but should have

a clear direction. There has to be a well-thought strategy and tactics of integration steps promoting peace, stability and security in the region considering the interests of all states.

Sixteen respondents regard these processes as in a parallel: "these two processes must go in parallel, mutually invigorating each other", "only in this case is it possible to achieve social and economic progress", "it is not correct to wait conflict resolution and then to start integration, but, on the other hand, it is not good to postpone conflict resolution and deal with economy".

3.2 Azerbaijan's Role in the Modern System of International Relations

Experts identified Azerbaijan's role in the modern system of the international relations and in the South Caucasus region.

First of all, experts emphasized uniqueness of geo-strategic position of Azerbaijan, which is located on a crossroads of transport communications from the North to the South, from the West to the East. It transforms its territory into arena of severe competitive struggle in all spheres between regional powers (Russia, Turkey and Iran) and superpowers (USA).

Azerbaijan is on crossing of spheres of influence of the various states and coalitions of states. Therefore it anyhow should take into account presence in region of geo-political and economic interests of such powers, as the USA, the Great Britain, other countries. Our country is also traditionally included in an orbit of interests of oil-producing countries of the East, the Arabian world.

By virtue of the important geo-political location, arrangement and rich natural resources, Azerbaijan is a place of "collision of interests" among the various states, which is, according to some experts, not good for the country.

Other experts' statements: Azerbaijan represents the biggest interest for NATO in the South Caucasus, according to its strategic potential. Even Georgia in this sense is considered as a part of the bridge which allows NATO to reach boundaries of the Caspian Basin. And it is also such factors, as Central Asia, Iran, energy resources of the Caspian Sea, a considerable part of strategically important the Great Silk Road. They suppose that among the countries of region Azerbaijan has the most serious geographical preconditions and economic potential from the point of view of prospect of the accession into NATO.

Thus, the dual and ambiguous geo-political position of our country is emphasized which is very beneficial, but at the same time our country is arena of an antagonism of different superpowers, external forces.

What are the most serious international problems and the biggest foreign policy issues currently facing Azerbaijan?

Experts specified that being under the conditions of the transitional period from one social-political system to another Azerbaijan has been facing with a great number of problems and challenges.

The country is experiencing the military Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno Karabakh, Armenian occupation of 20% of the territory of Azerbaijan, a huge number (about one million) of refugees and IDPs. It is obvious that for Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno Karabakh is one of the crucial problems caused by territorial claims of Armenia for this area historically and legally belonging to Azerbaijan.

Experts marked that the long-lasting Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is one of the most serious and complicated among all ethno-political conflicts in the South Caucasus region. This deeply rooted armed conflict caused a lot of troubles and sorrows for people, huge devastations of Azerbaijani social infrastructure and a great number of refugees, internally displaced persons and human victims.

It was stressed that the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict creates a huge problems for Azerbaijan which was forced into this conflict. Moreover, this conflict is the key factor preventing economic cooperation and promoting global projects in this region. It is obvious that it would be impossible to achieve stability and security in the South Caucasus, to build democratic, legal and civilized societies without solving this conflict.

Therefore it is extremely important to seize an opportunity to preserve the cease-fire and find possibilities for solution of this conflict by using various peaceful means.

There are official negotiations are taking place at the moment. For these negotiations to be successful, they should be supported by the public opinion in our two countries. But to achieve a mutually satisfactory outcome is not so easy, may even be impossible, at this stage because of an atmosphere of mutual distrust and suspicion, negative mutual stereotypes and "enemy images".

It was also noted that presence in the country of the huge number of refugees and, even worse, probability of their increase can lead to humanitarian catastrophe in Azerbaijan. The other characteristic of the country is a drastic social differentiation, polarization and marginalization of population, social poverty and political tensions.

Azerbaijan is the major link in the system of the regional communications and relations. This strategically important factor determines the priority direction of the Azerbaijani foreign policy in long-run perspectives.

Experts touched upon some problems and prospects for Azerbaijan's economic, political and military cooperation with other regional countries.

In opinion of great majority of experts (80 percent), the factor that Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is unresolved, determines division of cooperation in the region into "peers": Azerbaijan-Georgia и Georgia-Armenia. Mostly experts think that concerning relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia everything is good and normal, "our collaboration with Georgia has been developing". But some respondents (10 percent) assess the level of these relations as unsatisfactory. "We should have more close cooperation with Georgia for creating in future Common Market".

The majority stressed that presently between Azerbaijan и Armenia there are no relations because of conflict. There were also expressed such opinions, like processes are going on in terms of interests of a number of powerful countries, there is no presently any economic ties among regional countries yet, cooperation is still very weak because of economical weakness of the regional countries themselves. It is not possible to talk about any large-scale collaboration in the region while all ethno-political conflicts are not settled.

At the same time, the large majority of experts (around 70 percent) agree that cooperation processes are observed in our region together with certain elements, aspects and changes in these issues, though it is rather premature to talk of a comprehensive and broad integration.

According to experts, among the most visible and illustrative manifestations of integration processes are such factors as a broad range of Azerbaijani-Georgian relations: development of key principles for a strategic partnership and cooperation, coordination of economic policy principles, common policy in the area of communications, industry, versatile bilateral economic relations, agreements and contracts, in particular projects on oil transportation, construction and operation of pipelines, other projects in area of energy, communications, transport, trade and other common projects.

Many of these are implemented within other more global projects, such as TRACECA, Great Silk Road. Many responses also contained such forms of unity as GUUAM, which represents a type of cooperation among Georgia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova.

Mentioned among examples of integration contacts were links among regional countries in the area of mass media, exchange of current information, attempts to establish a common information zone, contacts in the area of science, certain facts of cooperation in the humanitarian field, contacts and joint projects on the level of non-governmental organizations, people's diplomacy, dialogues and meetings of peace-loving forces.

More than half of specialists think there are certain and even quite considerable socio-economic and political harbingers for regional integration. First of all, it is the very real and objective situation in regional countries, which necessitates the establishment and expansion of mutually beneficial contacts primarily with the closest neighbors.

Secondly, it is the aspiration of governments of these countries, especially Azerbaijan and Georgia, to seek long-term solutions meeting their national interests, to pursue an active foreign policy aimed at establishing equal and stable partnership relations, to strengthen their economic and political positions.

Thirdly, experts were talking of the tremendous potential of these both countries which can be fully materialized only if involved with an extensive network of international relations, joining effort with other regional countries and creating favorable environment for internal development.

What should be the "algorithm" of the regional integration process? The process of a real integration with first start with the economy, resumption of economic relations and their further deepening, as well as trade relations, those in the area of business and private enterprise. These will be followed by the process of involvement with international and regional projects in the area of transport, communications, energy and ecology. Simultaneously, the rapprochement of legislative spheres of regional countries will be taking place, in particular, in the area of trade and investments. An important role is to be played by contacts in the field of science and culture. The process of integration will be accompanied with an active role of people's non-governmental diplomacy.

All economic and other forms of cooperation must be substantiated by relevant political agreements. Obviously, an important condition for implementation of all agreements is the establishment of peace and stability in the region.

Experts specified the regularity consisting that potentially self-sufficient countries in case of realization of this potential always aspire to carrying out relatively independent foreign policy. Among the states of the South Caucasus Azerbaijan and Georgia, unlike Armenia, to some extent potentially are economically self-sufficient countries.

Among other things, Azerbaijan has large, even according to the country measures, of natural resources and a convenient geo-politic location, and Georgia has ports. These factors should involve foreign investments in the given countries. Namely under these circumstances it is necessary to search for the basic roots of problems in relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia, on the one hand, and Russia, on another.

It was emphasized that Azerbaijan's role in the modern system of the regional and international relations will immeasurably increase due to implementation of the large-scale oil projects.

Experts particularly stressed that necessarily should be implemented the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan export oil pipeline (BTC) project, even after the termination of military actions in Iraq, because it is so urgent as well today. They mentioned that construction of this oil pipeline has been started with purpose of diversification of ways of delivery of oil from Caspian and Central Asian regions to Europe. In fact, the single way always has a lot of minuses. For example, we had only one gas pipeline, and Russia uses it as the political lever: as soon as there are any political problems, under different pretexts they block gas for us. Presently, at least, two gas pipelines, and possibilities for similar pressure almost do not remain.

It was mentioned that BTC is an only alternative way and if something happen with one oil pipeline, another one will help. So, there are no bases to doubt in its importance. Experts, mainly representatives of governmental officials, ruling elite, expressed confidence that the BTC oil pipeline will work by all means, as well as a gas pipeline which is planned in parallel with it.

Unconditionally positive impact of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline construction on conflict resolution in the region was noticed by 60 percent of interviewed experts, for "this is an important event not only for economic, but also for political life of our region", "situations aroused by BTC pipeline will foster and promote peace and stability".

Economic profit was stressed by 90 percent of experts: pipeline construction will lead to strengthening of economic potential of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. A quite large group of specialists (around 60 percent) consider that BTC pipeline construction would have positive impact on the region as whole. Pipeline will become strategic road connecting Caspian and South Caucasian region with Euro-Athlantic space of peace, security and wealthfare, promote practical integration of this region into this space.

But at the same time only just a few respondents were characterized by negative perception of this project. Representatives of ecological NGOs expressed their concerns related to ecological issues, negative consequences of this project, nonprofitability of this route, etc.

Nevertheless, the quite disputable was question regarding what exactly is it more in this project - geopolitics or economy? Majority mentioned that from the very beginning more spoke about geopolitics, but today the economic components of the project occur on the foreground. Though, one can not to deny the essential political underlying context. It is known how many problems now with projects of transportation of energy carriers through Iran. There were projects through Afghanistan to the South and other projects, which much cheaper, but for the political and geo-political reasons they today cannot work, especially in full force.

According to experts the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan export oil pipeline (BTC) and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzrum ("Shakh-Deniz") gas pipeline should create of energy corridor that should connect Caspian Sea Coast to Turkish Mediterranean, to provide oil and gas for European and US markets.

The political significance of project has been recognized by the US Government that indeed directly advocates continuing and expanding of export routes in its National Energy Security Policy. The project indeed depends on the political and financial support from the Western Governments and International Financial Institutions. According to the specialists from Azerbaijan State Oil Company the BTC option makes sense only if "free money" was offered by governments to build the line. Therefore, experts make conclusion that these contracts meet our national economic interests.

Majority of pro-governmental (60 percent) experts predict positive consequence of the oil contracts and the good possibilities of wealth stemming from oil projects. They have no doubt that these contracts will considerably contribute to the Azerbaijan economy and the benefits will be distributed widely among all social categories of people.

The representatives of the opposition parties have diametrically opposite opinions in this regard. As a whole they basically support this large-scale project, counting it as one of the basic means of an establishment of communications with the Euro-Atlantic space, an exit on world economy. But at the same time, they believe that will not be the significant economic gain for the majority of the population, all profit settles will be collected in pockets of the authorities, a ruling clan. There is also possibility that Azerbaijan will lose control of its own economic policy.

Some NGOs activists doubt of the necessity of the project of BTC. In their opinion, while it is not known what will give this oil pipeline to Azerbaijan in political and economic aspects. We need to know all particulars of constructions which should take place only in case if the positive aspects will prevail. Concerning the political element they declared that in case of a lining of the oil pipeline the resolution of Karabakh problem in interests of Azerbaijan also will be improbable, under big question mark.

Human rights activists noted that while presently oil pipelines of Baku-Supsa and Baku-Novorossisk exist, there is no necessity in construction of BTC. Moreover, the population of the country will not receive any benefit from the given project. As to transportation through BTC Kazakhstan oil, that it, in opinion of experts, is inadmissible as will serve the reason of reduction of price of the Baku oil.

Heads of some NGOs also expressed their doubts concerning an effective utilization by authorities of Azerbaijan the future incomes of an oil revenues. In turn, representatives of the State Oil Company declared impossibility of a suspension of action agreements on BTC oil pipeline. They denied also assumptions that this project is unprofitable for Azerbaijan.

Experts also specified the important role that NATO could play in protecting Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline in the territories of the countries concerned. Their forces will be directed for protection of the BTC oil pipeline and the matter is that Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan by a mutual consent already came to intention to create a special forces for protection of this large-scale project.

3.3 Prospects for Azerbaijan-NATO Relations

Experts interviewed mentioned different types of contacts and collaborative links with NATO which are more effective and preferable, in their opinion, for Azerbaijan.

Different ideas are stated in connection with Azerbaijan's prospective accession to NATO. Generally, an issue of prospective membership of Azerbaijan in NATO is considered as an extremely complicated.

As a whole, the vast majority of experts (about 70 percent) support the idea of membership of Azerbaijan in NATO.

Reasons of those analysts who support the many-sided integration of our country with the West are quite diverse. Vector of development of Azerbaijan, as political scientists mark, obviously specifies that membership in such organization as NATO should be on the agenda. Azerbaijan should not stop the attempts to appear in the structure of NATO which has been very seriously transformed in recent years.

Issues concerning the consequences of integration with NATO were among major aspects of expert survey. Experts were asked about the effects that our membership in the Alliance would have. Generally speaking, the answers indicate rather considerable optimism.

Experts presume that the admission of Azerbaijan to NATO will result in the various advantages. Therefore, there should be a number of incentives for cooperation and potential integration in future.

According to many (more than 60 percent) analysts, the integration of Azerbaijan into NATO is a guarantor of reliable security of our state, both in military and political terms. Thus, the country will be strongly connected to the western system of security. In case of absence of such anchor the country will constantly be in the center of historical competition between the West and the East. And Russia will continue to talk about own geopolitical interests which to a large extent contradict similar interests of the West.

It is well-known, that the principal role of NATO is to provide a "security umbrella" for all its members. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization membership was supposed to provide Azerbaijanis with a feeling of safety, where as NATO was to gain an important ally, thus extending the area that would become "predictable".

According to Azerbaijani experts, the Euro-Atlantic integration of a country that has already signed the declaration should become a pledge of its state independence, territorial integrity, national security, democratic development. "With the expansion of NATO and development of our links with this organization, the role of Azerbaijan in the region will substantially grow". Our country makes active and effective steps for achievement of a task in view of the planned purpose.

It was assumed that NATO membership would minimise the risk connected with a given country becoming involved in an internal or external conflict. Our country actively began to looking for a guarantor of its safety. Our safety could enormously increase through the inclusion of Azerbaijan into the Western countries' framework of defence. NATO accession will lead to defending the Azerbaijani state and to willingness to participate in state defence structures.

Experts assumed that major threat to Azerbaijan's independence mainly comes from the North and South. One should not forget that Azerbaijan needs NATO as much as NATO needs Azerbaijan. "Cumulative power and resources can be at our disposal". Implementation the given project will give us the same prospects, as participation in OCSE, CE or EU, but with only a difference that block NATO gives also an opportunity of military protection in case of aggression from one or another state.

Some experts (persons of culture, journalists, public activists, religious figures) also rely on the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict with participation of peace-making forces of NATO that can be a compromise variant for all sides involved in the conflict.

Military officers particularly stressed the points related to army and its armaments, situation in army. It seems that taking actual benefits into account the following effects can be achieved: an increase in the spending on the Azerbaijani defence capability much more than the present level, increase of budgetary expenses on army, some opportunities for the Azerbaijani armaments industry, increase of foreign subsidies for the modernization of Azerbaijani army, reinforcement of the Azerbaijani army through the modernization of armaments and the improvement of training, stationing allied troops in our country, and, as a result of the above-mentioned, enhancement of Azerbaijan's position on the international scene.

From the point of view of the military officers, the entering of Azerbaijan into NATO will create conditions for maintenance of equipment of our army with modern and highly effective armaments. Our army will be equipped with the military form under the standard of NATO. The system of administration similar with Turkish has been incorporated which, in turn, meets NATO requirements.

The small group (8 percent) of experts supposes that it is possible to make the decision on reequipment of army, however with regard of liquidation, overcoming occupation of the Azerbaijani territory it is perceived as risky action.

The aim of Azerbaijan's membership in NATO, apart from factors connected with the satisfaction of Azerbaijanis aspirations and their sense of being a "part of Europe and Western world", was mainly political. One of the main elements of that, in experts' opinion, would be decisive of the Azerbaijanis to be members of the "club of rich and prospering countries".

Some experts suppose that the process itself is important, not result. It will mobilize potential of the country.

As a positive sign was mentioned becoming associative member of the Parliamentary Assembly of NATO, inter-parliamentary organization of legislators from the member countries of the NATO Alliance as well as 19 Associate members. The Assembly provides a critical forum for international parliamentary dialogue on an array of security, political and economic matters. Its principal objective is to foster mutual understanding among alliance parliamentarians who represent a broad spectrum of political parties. "Now we have a right to speak, raise our voice to protect our national interests, to exchange ideas with representatives of other countries".

Experts noted that NATO takes a special place in the Azerbaijan-West political paradigm. The Azerbaijan-NATO links have increased in particular with the "Partnership for Peace" Program.

Among negative consequences of Azerbaijan's NATO accession were mentioned some kind of limitation of the independence, limits the independence of decision processes of a given political entities, that our state entities should consent to subordination in a voluntary way, or against will.

Thus, it does not seem so real to expect Azerbaijan to enter NATO in the near future. It is necessary to consolidate the efforts in this direction.

As this process of integration of Azerbaijan into NATO is difficult enough and long-term, and also can take many years, the basic emphasis should be given on expansion of cooperation and interaction with this influential and authoritative organization in order to raise internal standards of the country, to implement necessary reforms and to comply these parameters with NATO standards and requirements.

These relationships must be developed in a high speed. As to Azerbaijan's integration to NATO that depend on the developments taken place throughout the world and region. On the other side, Azerbaijan's entrance to NATO might excite a serious disagreement in Iran and Russia. Nevertheless, in experts opinion, independently on Russia's and Iran's will Azerbaijan will become a NATO member.

The experts' answers indicate "very cautious optimism" regarding the prospective integration of Azerbaijan into NATO.

Azerbaijani experts enumerated a number of factors that could either help or hinder the working more closely with NATO.

They clearly realize that there are a lot of deficiencies in meeting the NATO criteria. It was noted that for joining NATO considerable increasing of a appropriate level of social, political, economic, military spheres, state building in the country is necessary.

It was emphasized that the primary condition for joining NATO is a high level of democratization and pace of democratic development of the country. These elements of democracy include a freedom of speech, free and fair elections, struggle against corruption, the observance of civil rights, etc.

To achieve Azerbaijan's accession to NATO it is necessary to implement democratic reforms in the country. Azerbaijan should pass through democratic-political processes to enter this organization. NATO member-countries are model states not only in the military sphere, but also from the democratic angle.

Experts representing opposition political parties ("Musavat", "Popular Front", "Azerbaijani Democratic Party"), some human rights-oriented NGOs and public movements, particularly insisted on a lack or even absence of democratic reforms and freedoms in the country. "It is not understandable how this non-democratic, authoritarian country can pretend to become a member of the club of democratic countries". In this regard, some experts mentioned also underdevelopment of civil society that leads to the lack of civilian control over army.

Some political scientists estimate, for example, the Secretary General of NATO, Lord Robertson's statements during his visit to our country in May 2003 about elections as a reminder to the ruling elite of Azerbaijan that plans concerning integration into structure of NATO a priori assume democratization of our society, strengthening of the civil control over armed forces, which could be considered as very positive fact.

They declared that forthcoming Presidential elections, a degree of their democratic nature, will considerably affect the international image of the country. However, there are a lot of doubts that elections will be fair and transparent. A total falsification, a juggling of results is expected.

At the same time, representatives of the ruling Party "Yeni Azerbaijan"- "New Azerbaijan" and some pro-governmental Parties ("Ana Vatan"- "Azerbaijan is Our Motherland" Party, "Azerbaijan Namina Alliance"- "Alliance in the Name of Azerbaijan") practically did not mention any problem of democratization. They believe that our country, fast enough and successfully, advances towards democracy and that in this sphere there are insignificant shortcomings. In any case, they cannot be an obstacle in our path to NATO.

Other problems stem from the economic situation in the country, paces and efficiency of market reforms. Despite a huge inflow of foreign investments into our economy, in particular, oil and gas sphere, there are many unresolved problems in the sphere of free business. Many experts paid special attention to very high level of corruption in Azerbaijan at the all levels of a bureaucratic ladder, pyramid - from top to down.

In experts opinion, the adequate estimation of democratic and economic potential of Azerbaijan is an indicator, parameter of the further grow of that interest from NATO to Azerbaijan. But, nevertheless, it is only the potentiality, as experts mark. Transformation of this interest into a practical plane assumes, certainly, extremely serious economical and social-political changes in Azerbaijan itself.

All the above-mentioned problems, as viewed by experts, depend on Azerbaijan itself, and in its capacity to overcome, solve these problems for the certain period of time. But there are extremely serious problems which depend not only on the country and its government.

What are, in experts' opinion, the obstacles that particularly prevent integration of Azerbaijan into NATO?

The overwhelming majority (around 90 percent) of experts consider the unresolved Nagorno Karabakh conflict as the basic obstacle in a way of the accession of our country into NATO. In opinion of political scientists, the factor that the given conflict is unsettled till now is dominating in this case. These experts are convinced that until the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict will be found, Azerbaijan will not be admitted by NATO on no account, "the doors of this influential organization will be closed for us".

They are sure that integration into the Alliance is the dictation of today, however, it is impossible since there are disputable territories and territorial conflicts. As MPs noted, the very existence of uncontrollable territories also poses a huge problem for the integration.

Another substantial obstacle, in military specialists' and political scientists' view, is the lack of the military doctrine and the concept of national security. They reminded that if the state aspires to enter any military organization, it should necessarily have military doctrine and the concept of national safety. If these factors are absent, to speak about the inclusion of Azerbaijan into NATO meaningless.

The extremely important elements of entering NATO are conditions and potential of the national army. Estimations that were made by some independent military experts were in general not very much optimistic and promising in this regard. They specified that we should considerably improve condition of the Azerbaijani army, which differs, to a larger or smaller extent, from the standards of modernity and high level of professionalism. As one expert noted, official evaluations and statements on these complicated issues are too far from the reality. It seems for them that the delay in our admission to NATO has something to do with the present and potential condition of the Azerbaijani Army.

It was also emphasized that the army is a part of a society, and, if we want to improve situation in the national army we should primarily improve a general situation in all our society. Experts also repeatedly emphasized that army is one of the most important element of state system. But, at the same time, the state enters Alliance, not the army. Therefore, in order to achieve our goals to enter into this Alliance, we supposed to promote cardinal reforms in all spheres of society, to urgently overcome unsatisfactory condition of all our society.

The rather big interest is represented with prognostications of the Azerbaijani experts about possible terms of the integration of Azerbaijan into NATO.

Some independent political analysts, sociologists and freelance journalist (around 20 percent) are convinced that Azerbaijan would enter NATO by 2005. On the contrary, official persons and diplomats are more constrained and cautious in their assumptions.

For example, several representatives of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs marked that the issue on the concrete terms does not yet stand on the agenda. Making comments on forecasts of independent analysts, that Azerbaijan becomes a member of NATO by 2005, they expressed doubt that they possess the sufficient information in this regard. The competent high-ranking respondent from Armed forces of Azerbaijan has declared during interview that the entering of our country in the near future in NATO is only a dream, "this is Utopia!"

A part of experts (15 percent) believe that prospects for Azerbaijan's integration into NATO are rather uncertain and it is time only to prove the correctness of the choice.

Meanwhile, the majority (over 60 percent) of the interviewed believe that Azerbaijan is needed, at strong will and favourable conditions, a minimum of 5-10 years. A Presidential spokesman stressed that it is essential to be guided, first of all, by strategic interests of the country, and avoid emotional, tactical, immediate reactions. Nevertheless, sooner or later, the accession of our country into NATO should take place, as our region is of great strategic importance for this influential organization. In the long run, everything will depend upon the political vision and the so-called "geopolitical culture" of our country.

Some political scientists stress that if Azerbaijan is willing, and someday will decide to enter NATO, it will be necessary to "blame" for that not Azerbaijan, but someone who pushes us there. Naturally, Azerbaijan cannot exist without entering into any system of international, collective security. Armenia is included into the system of security of Russia. Russia also suggests us to enter such kind of union. But how can we participate in it, if the problem of occupied territories has not been solved yet?

Among a small group of religious activists and leaders there were those who, besides unacceptability of this idea for them, consider it also impossible to join the organization because the West does not want us "because we are Muslims". They think that to a large extent entering of Azerbaijan into NATO is impossible in the future for these reasons.

Survey has revealed that there is a rather big (about 18-20 percent) group of politicians, representative of various political parties, who categorically oppose pro-Western foreign policy drift of our country. Major arguments and judgments of those Azerbaijani politicians who do not support integration, rapprochements of our country with the West, are the following.

For example, leaders of "pro-Azerbaijani" political movement ("Vahdat-Unity", Social-Democrat and Islamic parties) consider that pro-Western foreign policy does harm to the country. As they said during interview, until Azerbaijan conducted consecutive struggle for its independence, it was profitable for USA, as disintegration of the USSR was beneficial for them. But now USA's plans have changed. Azerbaijan just represents some interest for them as jumping-off place to conducting operations against Iran and Iraq. "And, in general, where there is a Muslim state, there the USA generate and support dictatorship", - as one of our respondents has emotionally noticed.

Some experts also mentioned possible negative consequences of entrance into NATO. Among them there were issues connected with the restriction of the independence of the Azerbaijani army that Azerbaijani soldiers could be sent abroad, to the areas of conflict ("it is better for them to deliberate our territory from Armenian forces"), as well as increase of taxes and deterioration of living conditions.

The representatives of some opposition parties marked that it is not the secret for anybody that in the country there are some governmental officials, bureaucrats who do not wish Azerbaijan would be a member of the European, Euro-Atlantic structures. Under such circumstances, it is much easier by tough, administrative methods to manage the country, to limit democracy, to violate fundamental human rights and basic freedoms, and, certainly, it is hard for these people to accept requirements and standards of the Council of Europe or NATO. Judging by their words, they stand for integration with the Western institutions and entities, but in practice they pursue absolutely different policy.

There were other explanations of negative attitudes towards membership in NATO. According to some diplomats, to establish and develop military-political cooperation with NATO it is not so necessary to enter this organization. An eloquent testimony is the cooperation of the Alliance with Kyrgyzstan or the presence of NATO military bases in Japan, other countries, not members of the Alliance. "No membership, but the result is the same".

There were experts (political scientists, representatives of Social-Democrat Party, journalists), who expressed an extremely cautious estimations and forecasts regarding Azerbaijan's prospective

membership. If we are really aspiring to become a member of NATO we should think over it in the most serious manner. It is necessary to carefully thrash out and precisely determine, whether it is valid, to what extent beneficial for our country, how far it is really favourable for Azerbaijan in strategic, political and military sense. Azerbaijan, before making a decision on foreign policy, with whom to deal today and tomorrow, should consider it very thoroughly.

Objections by some politicians and public activists (in particular, members of Azerbaijan Communist party and representatives of the national-cultural associations) against integration and attempts of Azerbaijan to join NATO Alliance were predominantly considered to be contrary to our national, state interests. In their opinion, Azerbaijan should mainly be oriented not to the NATO, but to Russia. They expressed the disagreement with opinion that entering into NATO would enable Azerbaijan to protect itself from Russia. Nowadays in Russia, as they emphasized, is generated and dominates the democratic climate.

At the same time, another group of experts (around 40 percent) think that there is no reason to worry that Russia would try to block our integration into Western political, economic and security institutions. "We should overcome fear that usually is not articulated, but constituted an important element of elite and public opinion in post-Soviet states of attempts at the restoration of political, imperial influence by Russia".

Thus, it was stressed as well by many experts (more than 60 percent), even those, who basically support idea of the inclusion into NATO, that it is very important to consider a position of Russia when adopting the given crucial decision. Some experts expressed concern that it may aggravate tension and mutual misunderstanding in bilateral relations with this powerful regional country.

In objecting to our integration into NATO, some critical remarks about this organization were also expressed. Besides, experts mentioned that currently NATO experiences very serious crisis. Opinions have been expressed that now there are no strong order and discipline in this Alliance. One of experts has reminded that was a time, when on a world scene there was Soviet Union, there was a severe discipline and order within NATO structure. They think that a real background for this kind of the criticism.

Among some specialists there is a unanimous opinion that we will not become NATO members within the next five years, because we do not meet their requirements. Also they explain their negative point of view by the fact that armaments with which the Azerbaijan army is equipped is not Western, but the Russian's production.

During interview of experts has been found out that their opinion of profitability and possibility of the integration of Azerbaijan into NATO has been polarized. Sharp division into opposing camps was predominately produced by political and ideological preferences of interviewed. Under circumstances of such political polarization are created preconditions for polarization of opinions on such strategic, state-importance issue as membership in NATO Alliance. In this case political sympathies and preferences began to prevail over nation-wide problems. But it is clear, at the same time, that these views and assessments are mainly based on their political platforms and programs. Of course, as opinion leaders, they could have a certain impact on the public opinion.

Experts (governmental officials, analysts, military experts) mentioned a lot of positive facts of mutual cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO. Representatives of official establishment and diplomats basically are satisfied with a present level of relations with the Alliance, considering that we have normal cooperation. "We perfectly well understand that the process of entering is not through the empty declarative statements, but it is necessary to meet standards - market economy, democracy and civil society. The only statements one can not be limited. Integration into NATO should be carried out in practice, instead of in words. We do not hurry up yet in NATO. This is a logically consistent position". They enumerated a lot of specific examples of the certain steps and actions undertaken by Azerbaijan since 1996 towards development of cooperation with NATO within the framework of "PfP" Program.

On the contrary, some politicians and political scientists suppose that current level of NATO-Azerbaijan relationships is not satisfactory. Experts think it is necessary to raise the level of relationships between NATO and Azerbaijan, as at the moment it is not acceptable.

3.4 Strategic Priorities for Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

Experts singled out positive and negative aspects of the current foreign policy of Azerbaijan and the decision-making process in this field.

Some experts (10 percent), critically enough, reflected about modern foreign policy of our country. For example, in the opinion of political scientists and the heads of several public organizations, the government of Azerbaijan takes inadmissibly passive stand on the issue of integration with NATO. The experts prove this point of view that in Azerbaijan there are no yet the conceptual documents determining the strategic purposes. "Unfortunately, - as mentioned one of the specialists, - in Azerbaijan there are no authorized, accepted concepts of foreign policy, national security, as well the military doctrine".

Experts emphasized that there is no comprehensive document which usually determine the strategy of national development. Many conceptual documents, which normally are accepted by either the Parliament, or Security Council of the country, and define the strategic goals, in Azerbaijan are absent.

Some experts, mainly independent analysts and freelance journalists (10 percent), are not satisfied with activity of our diplomatic representatives in the various countries and the international organizations, specifies presence of the certain lacks, defects in personnel selection in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a number of shortcomings in the work of consular, analytical, legal, economic-administrative and other departments in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

However, not all respondents completely agree with such statements. Some acting diplomats marked positive processes in activity of the foreign policy office that received slow, but irreversible development for last years. They figuratively noted that the top of iceberg is seen, while its basic latent part is under water only. It is impossible to judge foreign policy of the state, its diplomacy just by visual parameters of functioning of the uneasy mechanism of foreign policy office of the country.

It was pointed out that in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan there is a heavy and scrupulous work on development and realization of the basic strategic line of the foreign policy concept of our state, that is permanently produced, encouraged by active, dynamical and scientifically-based activity of the country leadership.

Experts-diplomats mentioned that adoption of the law on diplomatic service brings professional sense in the activity of the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and our embassies abroad. The legal base of activity of foreign policy representations of Azerbaijan has practically been created, that in many respects promotes systematization of their functioning in all areas.

These measures along with the deepening of analytical aspects of diplomatic services result in the activity of work with the influential international organizations, and also with representatives of foreign policy structures of the countries playing an active role in political and economic processes in our region, could not have ended "in vain".

Experts expressed their judgments concerning foreign policy performance. Overall, experts suppose the Azerbaijani government is quite well managing its foreign policy, i.e. dealing with international problems and handling relations with other countries around the region and the world.

They guess that the Azerbaijani government is dealing quite well with the following international problems and issues: participating in the struggle against international terrorism (8.5 scores), relations with West (7.3 scores) and relations with Russia (6.4 scores), security and political situation in our region (5.7 scores), homeland security from terrorism (5.4 scores), settlement of Nagorno Karabakh conflict (3.5 scores).

By the way, experts mentioned the same five foreign policy problems that Azerbaijan is facing these days: settlement of Nagorno Karabakh conflict, homeland security from terrorism, participating in the struggle against international terrorism, improving the relation with West and Russia, security and political situation in our region, as the most serious international problems and the biggest foreign policy issues currently facing Azerbaijan.

Thinking about the long term, they selected the ones that they feel is the urgently important - settlement of Nagorno Karabakh conflict (9.3 scores) and improving relations with the West (8.9 scores) and Russia (8.8 scores).

The experts also rated how well the Azerbaijani government is handling relations with the following countries: Georgia (8.6 scores), Turkey (7.8 scores), USA (6.8 scores), Russia (6.7 scores) and Iran (5.5 scores). This effect has also been mirrored in the jump in the average leadership's approval rating (7.9 scores vs. 6.8 scores) found in the second stage of expert opinion survey in compared with the first stage.

Mentioned among concrete results of these improvements were agreements, contracts and strategic partnership with USA and Russia, attracting foreign investments, growing trade volume with neighboring countries. Other steps and initiatives of Azerbaijan have been pointed out: GUUAM agreement, cooperation within the CIS framework, cooperation with countries of Central Asia and republics of the Northern Caucasus, accession to various regional and international organizations.

A vast majority (over 80 percent) of experts suppose that Azerbaijan has already undertaken a whole number of considerable steps in the direction of the regional development and integration.

What are the real results, in experts' opinion, of initiatives and steps for Azerbaijan? First of all, they are reflected through such indices as strengthening of the national independence, pursuit of an independent foreign policy, invigoration of political and economic policies, promotion of the country's political authority, growing prestige both in the region and worldwide, a gradual and dynamic integration with the world community, expansion of mutually beneficial bilateral and multi-lateral international economic relations, achievement of an equal and mutually beneficial strategic partnership, strengthening of cooperation with such an important regional countries as Turkey and Georgia.

In particular, referred to that Azerbaijan's international contacts have a positive effect on the internal socio-economic development of the country as well, in terms of achievement of a relative socio-economic and political stabilization, creation of a more favorable and positive emotional background, a suitable moral and psychological atmosphere for hopes and social expectations. Among positive facts are the vivacious trade contacts, especially in borderline areas, and development of contacts among nations.

At the same time, it has been indicated that the real results of all these initiatives are not very palpable due to a multitude of reasons, while the immense available potential of the country is not being fully realized. It was highlighted that real results of our foreign policy initiatives are still quite ineffective and not too noticeable, that it is premature to talk of any results.

Despite all the above-mentioned achievements, it is not surprising while the Azerbaijani general public has reacted to the onset by expressing more support of our foreign policy, perception of the Azerbaijani foreign policy by experts remain consistently cautious or even negative. Experts displayed much more criticism on most issues, leaders and their policies.

One of the main mistakes - incorrect definition foreign policy conditions, when Azerbaijan overestimated abilities of the countries which could support us, and on the contrary, thoughtlessly underestimated capacities of external support from Russia. But sooner or later Azerbaijan, as the strongest in military-political term country of the South Caucasus, will solve the problems to own advantage. The portion of experts who foresee a positive development of Azerbaijan is considerably greater than the number of experts thinking differently.

Experts specified the key optimal strategic parameters of Azerbaijani foreign policy.

According to experts, it is necessary to solve the uneasy tasks with the least losses and the least risk for well-being of the country. This is the basic dilemma for the country for the time being.

For example, the members of the Parliament, policy- and decision-makers, business and labor leaders do not expect any dramatic changes in foreign policy orientation of the country in the foreseeable future.

The majority (around 70 percent) of elite strongly suppose that change of a movement to the direction to the Euro-Atlantic space – is not favorably to Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan, in their opinion, is not the big and strong enough country, capable to carry out complimentary politics pleasing to interests of all international and regional actors.

Therefore, we should designate precisely the foreign policy strategy and development of Azerbaijan, which is predetermined on the way of integration of the country into the Euro-Atlantic political and security space. In this context, our most reliable partners are the USA, Turkey, the countries of Western and the East Europe.

Among most frequently mentioned assumptions for the next 5-10 years were the following: safeguarding Azerbaijan's national security and joining NATO should be priorities for the government of the Republic of Azerbaijan. According to approximately 70 percent of experts, joining to this Alliance will be coinciding with our national interests. The course of rapprochement with the USA and NATO primarily has been designated as the basic purpose of the country and was pointed out that our country should move in this direction despite of numerous difficulties on this way.

Also was such proposal (12 persons) as fully uniting and creation of the common state with Turkey. The idea of strengthening cooperation with the countries of Europe and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEP) system has been also expressed (14 persons). Some experts suppose that our country will be able to play a more important and powerful role as a regional leader in future. Almost half believe that Azerbaijan should be more closely linked with the West rather ally itself with Russia and the CIS.

Meanwhile, some experts expressed scepticism on this occasion. Here there is a contradiction between an official orientation to the West, automatically supported by a political top of opposition and prosperous layers of the population of the country and hopes of ordinary people, who build own policy in compliance with their own economic interests. But these interests lay in the other area - in a direction of rapprochement with Russia. "We are neighbours with it anyway, it is closer for us, and the West is too far" - a leitmotif of many statements and comments of this group of experts.

Until recently, it seemed that official Baku has applied to the previous system of foreign policy balancing between Russia and the West, even it was stated that a policy of the Azerbaijani authorities may become more pro-Russian, rather than pro-Western.

And basically, there were preconditions to that: turned into reality the beginning of strategic partnership of Baku and Moscow in the view of changes in the course and obvious warming of relations after Vladimir Putin's coming to power in Russia. Last year's summit with signing various very important agreements seems for many analysts to be a sensational fact of signing in February this year an agreement on cooperation in military sphere with Russia, many counted it as a sharp turn on 180 degrees in the foreign policy of Azerbaijan.

Specialists in the area of international relations, political scientists believe that in order to improve Azerbaijan's foreign policy, reinforce its international status, it is essential to be actively engaged in the struggle against international terrorism. It was mentioned that this war, which had started already in the world against terror and its sponsors, directly touches upon Azerbaijan and can lead to further changes in the orientation of the country's foreign policy.

3.5 Azerbaijan's Integration into Euro-Atlantic Structures: Challenges and Opportunities

Experts have attached much attention to the prospects and factors hampering integration of Azerbaijan into European institutions, especially, factors preventing the process of socio-political development in Azerbaijan according to democratic model.

It was mentioned that building a democratic and civil society based on the rule of law has been determined in Azerbaijan as a strategic and priority task. The politics of integration with European community and West institutions has been officially proclaimed in the country.

For a long period, Azerbaijan was a part of Soviet totalitarian system and had not tradition of functioning democratic institutions and civil society. Since gaining independence, some first elements of democratization of public life, such as various political parties, public movements and associations, relatively free mass media, have been emerged. Nevertheless, the very initial steps towards democratization made apparent the extremely slow, contradictory and inconsistent character of this process. The transitional Azerbaijani society faced with sizeable difficulties and challenges.

According to majority of experts (more than 60 percent), the democratic institutions and civil society in the country are not sufficiently developed. The laws and regulations are not properly abided at the all social levels. It was mentioned that nowadays the problems of democratic transition have become a subject of very intensive discussions in political midst and mass media. There is a broad spectrum of opinions on

necessity and desirable level of democratization, role and place of democratic values in the life of Azerbaijani people.

They repeatedly stressed the necessity of considering international "measurement" of the given problem for Azerbaijan. A degree of country's democratic advancement has not only the important consequences for its internal development, but also affects an image of this country abroad, an attitude to it on the part of civilized international community.

In order that Azerbaijan could successfully be integrated into complex structure of the international relations, to adapt to leading tendencies of universal civilizational process, it is necessary to adopt the most of achievements of the West in building a democratic society. Now for this purpose there are good opportunities, as for the last some years our contacts with the countries of the West have really extended and intensified.

It has been underlined that the West aspires to play more active role in encouragement of democracy in our country, as stability and steady democratic development promote economic cooperation, guarantee safety of its investments, in particular, in large-scale long-term energy projects.

Experts stressed conditions of the accession of our country to NATO. If our country really aspires to be integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures, it should be guided not only and not so much by conditions of admission into Alliance, but on those requirements which NATO applies to the present and prospective members in the future.

In experts' opinion, requirements to prospective members of NATO, in particular, in connection with their military component, will be based on their ability to have means for protection of their own territory and the population. Protection includes defense, but this is a broader concept which means completely guaranteed control over the own borders. Therefore, our country should work very hard and intensively on these problems to meet these standards.

According to elite opinion, Azerbaijan's integration with NATO has to be interpreted as a mean towards democratization and economic development and not vice versa, otherwise integration will not be sought at home but only abroad. We also need psychological readiness, appropriate state of mass consciousness and psychology for this accession.

At the same time, a quite large group (around 40 percent) of experts understands quite well that NATO is not a panacea. Judging by results of our conversations with key informants it is possible to ascertain that now in Azerbaijan there is a certain level of euphoria and "psychology, a syndrome of dependence" regarding this Alliance, when the solution of the country's paramount problems is assigned to others, including this organization.

According to some political scientists, even if Azerbaijan enters NATO, neither this organization, nor integration of our country in the other European structures, will foster the resolution of the Karabakh problem. Otherwise, internal democratic transformations of the country are necessary to achieve this purpose.

Many experts noticed that hardly the membership of Azerbaijan into NATO will help solve the Karabakh problem. We must initially try to put an end to the Karabakh problem and then it would be possible to claim membership in NATO, - have declared these specialists. As one expert emotionally exclaimed, "neither American, nor British soldier will fight for Shusha or Agdam, we should do our business there ourselves".

According to Azerbaijani experts (diplomats, political scientists, governmental officials, members of parliament, political leaders), membership in NATO places serious obligations and demands the certain guarantees before all countries concerned, including our country. Experts fully realize that from now on it will be more difficult to join NATO, and, moreover, immediate admission to this organization is impossible.

During many years Azerbaijan openly demonstrates a course on rapprochement with NATO and the subsequent accession into this defensive union. However, it is required to be recommended to look in the eyes of hypothetical partners as the stable democratic state with the advanced economy, let alone a high level of professionalism of armed forces.

Military experts in their analysis concerned with an issue of military reform in armed forces. They declared that military reform in our country should be carried out in order to become a member of NATO.

Carrying out reforms in the Azerbaijani army is urgently necessary. We should have more effective professional army on contract basis, increase defense spending, to improve strategy and military force structure.

Experts (governmental officials, diplomats, military officers) highly estimated joint military training past in Azerbaijan with the countries of NATO "Cooperative determination - 2001". They are rather satisfied with the fact of carrying out in Azerbaijan military trainings. Their main purpose, results are achieved: partnership of Azerbaijan with the countries of NATO has become stronger. If cooperation with the Alliance is successful, it will have the great impact on the strengthening Azerbaijani military capacity.

Experts paid a maximum attention to the issues of national security and respectively to the strengthening of Azerbaijani army.

According to experts' judgments, in the modern world no one country even possessing a huge military potential, including such country as the USA, cannot guarantee alone its own safety. Therefore problems of architecture of the international security are very important and burning for any state, let alone such newly independent state as Azerbaijan. In experts' opinion, Azerbaijan and as a whole the South Caucasus today are a "white spot" in the international system of security.

Moreover, three countries of this relatively small region have actually found themselves under various conditions of security. For instance, Azerbaijan and Georgia, unlike Armenia, today are not members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Azerbaijan and Georgia are members of GUUAM which recently began to pay a substantial attention to regional security issues. But Armenia is not a member of GUUAM. This situation in itself generates a set of challenges and difficulties.

In political scientists' opinion, security of Azerbaijan can be provided on the basis of three major principles. First, it is the general economic and political development which includes achievement of economic prosperity and political stability on the basis of democratic institutions. As experts consider, this aspect is a core element because, on the one hand, eliminates internal threat to security, decreases considerably the possibility of destabilization of political situation, civil disobedience, military revolt, and on the other hand, creates a necessary basis for the following steps for security.

Other principle is the modern strong army providing reliable protection of Azerbaijani boundaries. However, in this issue there are certain problems which are connected by the fact that Azerbaijan is surrounded by the countries which in tens times surpass its military potential - Russia and Iran.

And, consequently, the third aspect of security of Azerbaijan, in opinion of experts, should become participation in the military-political unions and alliances, and acquiring of safety guarantees on the part of the international community. Our country necessarily should enter to any system of security which is vitally importance for it.

In the opinion of experts, European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Azerbaijan in political, economic and military-defence structures have to become our priority task. One of the strategic priorities of Azerbaijan in the future should become the accession into these entities. Azerbaijan is considering partnership and bilateral dialogue with NATO as the basis of future integration into Euro-Atlantic security system. Presently this process goes slowly, but the course is already taken on that cooperation and accession.

It has been underlined that today NATO is some kind of a magnet of security for Azerbaijan, which has already expressed the desire to join an Alliance after a while and to receive protection against threat to territorial integrity, and also oil platforms and pipelines.

According to governmental officials, just now we have headed for performance of those initial requirements, which are applied to the future members of NATO. We take just the first steps. It was mentioned that not armies join NATO, but the states as a whole. It means for us performance of the certain requirements in the legislation, an economic and legal life, defense, information sphere. It is very well understood that NATO can not afford inclusion in its structure of inexperienced and weak countries. "Membership in the Alliance in the future will differ rather appreciably from such membership in the past", - military specialists and diplomats hold.

Experts noted that all the requirements which are planned to be applied to the prospective members of an Alliance, have become much tougher. For Azerbaijan, the question of territorial integrity has not

been solved yet. Besides, the army should be brought into conformity with standards for admission into NATO.

Experts noted increased attention on the part of NATO toward South Caucasus. Majority of them welcome a growing interest of NATO towards the strategically important South Caucasus region.

The high-rank diplomats reminded that Azerbaijan already participates in different programs of NATO, "mainly in order to learn, find out about this organization, to become closer to it". Experts expressed the consent with opinion that Azerbaijan is of interest for NATO. They frequently pointed out that NATO and Azerbaijan have mutual strategic interests, that "we both need each other". They noted that highly appreciate trust to Azerbaijan, which is shown by officials and independent experts of the states which are members of NATO.

Experts mentioned issues concerning "PfP" program. According to the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, cooperation of Azerbaijan with NATO is carried out for the time being within the framework of the "PfP". "To speak about something else early yet, - diplomat said. - But Azerbaijan is pleased with the current level of cooperation. It is quite enough for the time being".

In experts' words, the Azerbaijani party fulfills all the tasks and obligations arising from this program of NATO. At the same time, they mark that if in the future there will be a need of participation in other programs, Azerbaijan will, for sure, take part in the ones. According to diplomats, "in the future the question of full-fledged membership of Azerbaijan in NATO can be considered, and there is nothing reprehensible in it. In Azerbaijan, there has been already achieved political consensus towards accession of our country into Euro-Atlantic defence structures".

Interesting were judgments of experts concerning alternative opportunities for Azerbaijan to ensure security. In order to guarantee our security, as was mentioned by some experts, there are three ways. These were offered to consider seriously other alternative opportunities of entering our country, for example, in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) made of the CIS members under the patronage of Russia. Though, it was stipulated that this way is practically closed for Azerbaijan because of Armenia's involvement in it. The second way is the integration into NATO structures, but this group of experts guesses that there is no need in orientating exclusively towards NATO.

The third way is to keep neutrality. Concerning the third way - observance of neutrality - the experts just specified some benefits of this position because of our location on a crossroads of various external influences and pressures. The status of the neutral state looked attractive enough and acceptable for this group of experts (9 persons). Though, some doubts were expressed that during this difficult period it would be hardly possible to keep neutrality to a full extent, "this is not a real thing". We have just a virtual opportunity of gaining the status of a neutral state.

What are the experts' attitudes to the possible stationing of foreign military bases in Azerbaijan? How do they regard prospects for deployment of military bases of NATO in Azerbaijan?

The survey has shown that this subject is complex and sensitive enough. Opinions of experts on this issue were diametrically divided.

Some political scientists, activists of public organizations and politicians suppose that stationing of military base of NATO in Azerbaijan is possible, but not in the near future. They think that in long-term prospect it is quite possible. They expressed opinion that it is desirable that region of the South Caucasus, on the contrary, has gone on the way of demilitarization and withdrawal of all foreign armies and bases from territories of the states of region. It was emphasized that Azerbaijan is more interested in demilitarization of region, in withdrawal of all foreign bases and settlement of conflicts, than on the further militarization of region.

But not everything depends on desire of Azerbaijan. If the presence of the Russian military bases in territory of Armenia will be kept, and Yerevan will continue to insist on the territorial claims to our country,

it will force Azerbaijan to search for the alternative military support, capable to balance military support of Armenia on the part of Russia. They think that in this case stationing of NATO armies in our territory is a quite logical and natural step.

Some experts (20 percent) expressed their "pro" towards these bases. Some government officials of various ranks declared the expediency of stationing in Azerbaijan of NATO bases for a number of reasons.

Some Azerbaijani politicians and militarists spoke as well about the possibility of deployment of foreign military bases in the country.

Unlike diplomats, independent experts are more free and flexible in their estimation and forecasts in this regard. They think that aggressive actions on the part of Iran are one more justification that Azerbaijan needs in NATO military bases capable to protect not only our country, but also economic and political interests of the West in this region. The opportunity of placement in the future of a military contingent of NATO in Azerbaijan, as the interviewed experts consider, can be conditioned by external factors, such as necessity of carrying out of antiterrorist operation, with due regard for deployment of Russian military bases in Armenia.

There is a group of experts (high-rank officials), who are categorically against establishment of NATO bases in Azerbaijan. They suppose that this act will further aggravate the already precarious situation in our region. They explained that in their view stationing of NATO bases in the Azerbaijani soil would not guarantee security to the country, because any military bases would pursue only their own goals. It is, therefore, naive to think that NATO would protect Azerbaijan from Armenia, they said during interview.

The arguments of those, who are opposed to the stationing of NATO bases in Azerbaijan, are as follows: NATO places the bases in either country according to its strategic plans, and these bases have no relation to security issues of the given state.

According to other group of experts (30 percent), NATO is not going to place in Azerbaijan its bases and this subject is artificially inflated. Anyway, Azerbaijan should not to aspire to stationing these bases on its territory in order to avoid its turning into a zone of military rivalry between the various states.

A similar position is stuck to by some governmental officials. By virtue of its important geo-political location and rich mineral resources, Azerbaijan is a place of "collision of interests" of the various states that is not good for the country. Therefore, an idea to create another center of military confrontation is not productive, as experts noted. Hence, "we are against deployment of any military bases on the territory of Azerbaijan" - told an official during the interview. We prefer to see the native land demilitarized, with the strong national army, but not at the expense of placement on the territory of Azerbaijan of military bases of NATO, Turkey or any other state.

Diplomats and officials basically consider that stationing in Azerbaijan of NATO bases today is unreal. Though, they presume that stationing in Azerbaijan military bases of NATO in the future can not be excluded. We have established cooperation with NATO by taking part in some actions within the framework of the North Atlantic block. But it does not mean that NATO tomorrow will place its bases in Azerbaijan.

The representatives of opposition Communist Party and opposition left-wing pro-Azerbaijan forces (Social Democrat Party, "Vahdat") are categorically against stationing any army on the territory of Azerbaijan, except for national one. They consider that we do not need the help of any block and any country. Their arguments were also that it is not good idea to irritate additionally Moscow.

According to a member of Social Democrat Party, stationing of the Western armies in Azerbaijan may seriously aggravate the situation in region as a whole. "It is clear that pursuing its own interests, the USA is seeking to provide safety of BTC oil pipeline". A representative of the Islamic Party emphasizes their full aversion of probable deployment of forces of NATO in Azerbaijan. In the opinion of Islamists, Azerbaijan should declare its neutrality and refuse accommodation on the territory of armies of any states.

This group of experts declared unacceptability of this scenario for Azerbaijan. If so, pro-Azerbaijan forces by meetings, pickets and other mass protest actions will act very resolutely. Today, representatives of these parties speak about their firm intention to resist such a decision of the government by all lawful means. Communist Party will also by all methods protest against any attempts to transform Azerbaijan into "proving ground". "By doing this, we shall protect the state interests of our country". It is worthy to note that communists and Islamists have much in common in their strict anti-NATO attitude.

Some experts (20 percent) consider that stationing of bases of NATO in Azerbaijan depends on Baku itself. Azerbaijan is the state which is engaged in carrying out antiterrorist operation. Therefore, if Azerbaijan really wishes to strengthen its positions, it can gain stationing of NATO bases on its territory. It will considerably strengthen positions of Azerbaijan in the region. "It will become some kind of political

support and in this case nobody can make aggressive actions against Azerbaijan", - one of the key-informants noted.

International system is experiencing a serious test for its ability to effectively oppose such a common menace, as international terrorism. Right after the tragedy of 11 September, the Euro-Atlantic community has set up the anti-terror coalition that Azerbaijan joined from day one.

Azerbaijan is an active member of antiterrorist campaign. Participation in the antiterrorist coalition is a major way of protecting its own safety. Qualitatively, there is a new stage of struggle against aggressive separatism and terrorism.

Lately, we have witnessed a gradual change towards the recognition of the Euro-Atlantic integration of the country as the best way to guarantee the Azerbaijani national interests and security.

Political leaders and activists realize that Azerbaijan will be able to better stand up for its national interests if included, not excluded from NATO, that the membership of Azerbaijan in the organization as the sole collective defence system in Europe, will provide it ample opportunities to consolidate its positions in the international arena.

Part IV. Results of Mass Media Content-Analysis

As is known, with the great capacity of ideological and psychological influence on public consciousness, mass media directly or indirectly predetermines thoughts, attitudes and feelings of the large groups of people. Under present conditions, mass media plays an important role in promoting various political values and views in the society.

The mass media is a mirror, adequately or distortedly reflecting current international events and processes, collecting, generalizing and "preparing" different opinions and judgments and giving them appropriate estimations. At the same time, mass media itself actively forms foreign policy attitudes and orientations, presenting them under the certain angle.

The public foreign policy awareness to a large extent depends on what ideas, values and attitudes mass media tries to disseminate, propagandize and even thrust among broader sections of public.

Over the period of September 2001 - February 2002 and September 2002 - February 2003, we conducted the monitoring and analysis of the content of most read Azerbaijani press and analysis of the content of the most popular national TV channels.

The main aim was to examine the effects of mass media (newspapers, television) on the process of the public foreign-policy orientations and preference formation.

4.1 Effect of Mass Media on Public Foreign-Policy Preferences and Stereotypes

Note that 10 most read popular newspapers representing three basic categories: 1) official, pro-governmental newspapers ("Khalg Gazeti", "Yeni Azerbaijan", "Bakinskiy Rabochiy"); 2) neutral and independent newspapers ("Zerkalo", "Echo", "Ezhednevniye Novosti", "Azerxeber"); 3) opposition newspapers ("Yeni Musavat", "Azadlig", "Novoye Vremya"), have been examined.

In total in monitoring have been involved 10 names of newspapers totaling to 483 issues. Each third issue of the newspaper has been analyzed.

Selected for the analysis from electronic media were also state-owned AzTV-1 and "ANS" independent television channels.

Table 28. National Newspapers Monitored and Analyzed

N	Title of Newspapers	Affiliation	Number of issues	Number of materials	Information and commentary	Articles and analytical reviews	Interviews
1.	"Khalq Gazeti"	Official	78	160	127	16	17
2.	"Yeni Azerbaijan"	Pro-governmental	48	75	35	14	26
3.	"Bakinskiy Rabochiy"	Official	17	33	20	5	8
4.	"Yeni Musavat"	Opposition	63	171	118	27	26
5.	"Azadlig"	Opposition	15	49	19	15	15
6.	"Novoye Vremya"	Opposition	74	115	44	42	29
7.	"Zerkalo"	Independent	77	165	96	33	36
8.	"Echo"	Independent	80	209	111	57	41
9.	"Ezhednevniye Novosti"	Independent	15	52	15	18	20
10.	"Azerxeber"	Neutral	16	59	44	7	8
	In total		483	1088	629	234	225

As the units of analysis there were selected materials and news stories that contained the notions "foreign policy", "international relations" and "NATO", accompanied by the various words and phrases, such as "cooperation", "relation", "accession", etc., associated with the subject.

The analysis showed that the foreign policies' and international relations' coverage is about 8-12% of the Azerbaijan's press activities. It is remarkable that in the local newspapers a topic of "NATO" (average frequency 38.1%) was touched upon more frequently than "international relations" (34.5%) and "foreign policy" (27.3%).

As a whole, the information on the issues was variously presented in the monitored newspapers.

Examining a correlation between the importance and insignificance of the categories mentioned in monitored articles, it is necessary to note that if the topics "foreign policy" or "NATO" were covered in either article, this means that the article was, in most cases, was central.

It should be underscored the broad pluralism of views was presented by our local national newspapers.

Indices on the number and form of the publications on the matters of current foreign policy are provided in the Table above.

As for assessment of country's foreign policy, the official press is full of laudatory articles about foreign policy which is "consecutive", "wise" and "thought over". The same is true of the state TV.

Official, pro-governmental newspapers portray foreign policy exclusively in positive colors. They prefer to focus on "our country's great diplomatic successes" or critical material on foreign policy of other countries.

Reporting on some complex situation in international relations, they try to attract public attention and thus prove that it is "our diplomatic efforts and initiatives" that makes it possible to improve the situation step by step. Also, they are eager to convince general public that international position of Azerbaijan has been getting better year by year.

As is evident from material of monitoring, there is a sharp contrast in the way governmental and opposition media assesses the foreign policy. While the former tend to give a positive or balanced assessment, the latter mainly give a negative picture, feedback.

Opposition editions raise the foreign policy problems and deficiencies much more often than pro-governmental ones. The proportion of critical materials on foreign policy in opposition papers exceeds 80%, while in pro-governmental it barely reaches 10%.

Pro-governmental papers touch upon particularly acute, disputable and sensitive issue less frequently and mainly present their publications in a softer and more neutral, balanced and even official status. The dominance of negative assessments of foreign policy issues in all analyzed opposition papers is not surprising.

Discreet or sharp criticism was observed in some statements by oppositional and independent analysts. Their main point of view is that we have no consecutive, thought over foreign policy, it is a lot of jumps here and there, no well-defined line in this regard.

Independent publications mainly take an intermediate position, "somewhere in between". The proportion of publications in such neutral newspapers is not in favor of authorities. For example, "Zerkalo" newspaper regards the foreign policy of the authorities as positive or generally positive just in 11 articles, neutral in 8 and negative in 17.

The situation with electronic media represents an almost precise repetition of the tendency discovered with newspapers. The relatively independent "ANS" TV pays more attention time to the foreign policy problems as a whole. Channel AzTV-1 covers these problems mainly by spreading official information about visits, speeches, meetings and lobbying for the position of the authorities. The second place in their programs is held by analytical stories and information about the situation abroad.

As a matter of fact, electronic media are more moderate than independent newspapers, while the official channel AzTV-1 declined from mentioning a single negative fact, report on the topic. The official line tries to avoid any critical and pessimistic materials about prospects for Azerbaijan foreign politics.

The manner in which information about these issues are presented mainly is biased or neutral at the best. It is seldom possible to read or hear objective, complete, trustworthy information. Moreover, considerably radical part of opposition press uses politically incorrect statements and considered that the way out from a situation is possible only by means of force, strong-willed pressure on the government, protest actions. On the whole, as monitoring has shown, Azerbaijan's media is, to a greater extent, linked to the general political processes.

What type of materials, topics and themes of publications were covered by press? In 2001 – 2003, Azerbaijan's press mirrored the main trends in the country's foreign policies, namely, pro-Western orientation as a priority. West-oriented policies tend to form the basis of Azerbaijan's political concept. Press considers this option to be the optimum solution for Azerbaijan.

Media dedicated a great deal of space to official visits in Azerbaijan, statements of our leadership, commentary of governmental officials.

Media publications were mainly characterized by expectations of US military presence in the South Caucasus and the possibility of USA-Azerbaijan military cooperation. Among problems covered by the Azerbaijani media most often in the reviewed period there were the ones of abolition of the notorious Section 907 by the US Congress, international terrorism, Azerbaijan's participation in antiterrorist campaign.

The considerable attention was also paid to relations with Russia, Europe and USA, legal status of Caspian Sea, prospects of CIS, military-political cooperation between Ankara, Tbilisi and Baku. Quite close to this, was the topic of BTC construction published in multitude of materials.

Of analytical stories, the most popular topics were geo-political aspects of Azerbaijan location, regional dynamics, applicability of Western democracy to our mentality and peculiarities, European models of integration, Islamic factor in foreign policy, strategic interests of Azerbaijan. There are some analytical articles supporting the large-scale integration of our country with the West.

The Azerbaijani media reflect the existing uncertainty in the region, which is the area of opposition of subjects: Russia, the West, represented by the USA and NATO, Turkey and Iran. It is a common place to acknowledge the role of the USA as the most active agent on the regional scene. The West has been in the focus due to the Western oil companies' intensive presence.

The policies of USA and Europe countries cause some critical remarks, but by and large positive evaluation and expectation prevail. As far as Russia and Iran are concerned, most media have voiced negative assessment in regard to their position. The relations with Iran are presented as difficult. Only some official persons and some analysts, as well as intellectuals, spoke of possibly positive role of Russia and Iran.

From the media focus, Russia has been trying to preserve the superior role in the region. Majority of monitored media in Azerbaijan are unanimous in assessing Russia's military presence in the neighboring country, Armenia, as a threat for our security and the region's main concern. Media accuse Russian suppliers and the military presence in Armenia.

The recent events in Iraq are covered by Azerbaijani media only in a very positive light.

Situation around resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is evaluated as totally unacceptable, contradictory, negative assessment predominated. The recent tendency in Azerbaijan's press of 2002-2003 is to accuse the OSCE and other international entities for inability to solve this conflict.

Generally, Azerbaijani mass media cultivates the different stereotypes, "clichés" and images of the selected countries and international structures.

It should be noted that within the analyzed media, the stereotypes of countries' are generally positive, perhaps, with the exception of Russia, where the category of "affectively ambivalent stereotype" should more adequately be coined.

The biggest number of positive features was ascribed to Turkey, Georgia and Europe. The positive stereotypes are also those of the USA and Great Britain, "countries of stable democracy" and "high living standards" and at the same time they "are of interest to Azerbaijan".

When it comes to negative stereotypes, decidedly the most of them were ascribed to Russia and Iran.

What stereotypes take root into mass consciousness by mass media?

The stereotype of Russia is most complex: it consists of several positive elements ("developed science and education", "multiculturalism") and negative features – "it wants to keep control over our country", "it is very nationalistic", "there frequently rights of Azerbaijani people are oppressed". In comparison with analyses carried out earlier in Azerbaijan the tendency of gradual improvement of the Azerbaijani image of Russia should be noted.

The more frequently mentioned positive stereotypes of Europe by local mass media: "it is a sample of democracy, advanced market economy and prosperity", "we are a part of Europe", "we are on the road to Europe", "West brings progress for us", "we need European integration", "we should expand scientific, cultural and business ties", "this is a magnet for our compatriots who want to emigrate there", "Western influence should be acknowledged as beneficial in a situation Azerbaijan is facing Russia' empire-oriented policies".

Among negative stereotypes were the following: "we have not enough in common", "we will not be able to reach them", "they look down at us", "they will never count us equal partners", "we have our own mentality, they are Christians, and we – Moslems".

The following features were ascribed to the USA most often: "wealthy and strong country", "the strongest superpower, dominates all over the world", "our strategic partner", "the guarantor of democracy all over the world", "informational technology, progress and democracy", "imposes democracy by force", "the global gendarme, policeman", "it is interested in our oil, not in democracy", "applies to us the politics of double standards", "notorious stability more important for them than real democracy".

Turkey is described in absolutely positive manner: "one nation - two states", "we have much in common", "cultural ties, communications", "it is our unique protection against enemies", "they are our defenders", "protects us against aggression from outside".

Iran is mainly: "our neighbor, but treats us not in a friendly manner", "behaves aggressively, threatens us", "pro-Armenian, supports Armenia against us", "violates rights of Azerbaijani people", "unfair position concerning Caspian Sea", "Islamic fundamentalists". Georgia is: "excellent, good relations", "our strategic partner", "it is friendly with us country", "good personal friendly relations of our two Presidents", "badly treats our compatriots, violates their rights".

4.2 Mass Media Concerning Azerbaijan's Accession to NATO

The Azerbaijani press presents the image of NATO as mainly military-political organization, though the former stereotype "NATO soldiery", "aggressive block" has long got out of use.

As our survey has shown, ordinary people do not always distinguish between military, political and peace-making aspects of the activity of this organization, which are still latent for mass consciousness.

In fact, practically all monitored Azerbaijani newspapers quite often and in details cover many events concerning expansion of relations of our country with this organization. As to concrete spheres of these relations, which were mentioned in newspapers, a greater part of materials and articles deals with the category of political and military relations. These involve articles on military and security problems in the

region, as well as problems of democracy and protection of pipelines. Peace-making, scientific, ecological and emergency spheres in general were less often mentioned in the investigated newspapers. Only in some newspapers there was information, which has been subdivided in a topic "scientific communication".

Of more frequently mentioned topics on Azerbaijan-NATO relations were the following: state of Azerbaijan-NATO cooperation, visits of NATO officials to Azerbaijan, memberships in NATO Parliamentary Assembly, prospects for Azerbaijan's accession to NATO, joint training, stationing of military bases, bilateral relations with various NATO countries, participation of Azerbaijani troops in peace-keeping operations, military reform, security of Azerbaijan, military protection of BTC.

This topic is interpreted under different angles, in particular, prospects for Azerbaijan's accession to NATO. Generally, the idea of entering into this Alliance is approved by local media.

As a whole, the majority of newspaper articles support idea of membership of Azerbaijan in NATO and propagate advantages of this accession. All governmental and the majority of independent newspapers stand up for the accession. Hence NATO is viewed as the future guarantor against a potential intervention. Cooperation of Azerbaijan with NATO also to some extent guarantees our security.

In many newspapers the entrance of Azerbaijan into NATO is demonstrated as major factor of the safety of our state, both in the military and in the political aspects. The newspapers especially emphasize that cooperation to maintain stability, to deliver energy resources, to use the territory of Azerbaijan for communications, may be successfully realized with the admission of our country in NATO only.

In this regard local newspapers are completely in agreement with an official position of our state: integration into the system of the Euro-Atlantic security and into NATO is one of priorities of foreign policy of Azerbaijan.

Press stressed necessity for joint trainings with NATO which, in its view, stimulates process of the creation of the system of regional security. Holding the NATO's trainings in Azerbaijan are depicted as very important for us because it would contribute to the development of bilateral relations, stimulate the development of NATO-Azerbaijani relationships.

Media backs up the deepening of relations within the "Partnership for Peace" Program. Media have not indicated any substantial negative aspects and unsolvable problems in country's relations with NATO.

Meanwhile, a newspaper "Novoye Vremya" strongly opposes the admission of Azerbaijan into NATO. The newspaper persistently propagandizes the extremely negative image of NATO.

From the point of view of Azerbaijan's relations and prospective integration with NATO, it is interesting to recognize the general stereotypes of NATO that are typically disseminated by Azerbaijani press. Azerbaijani press basically applies such notions as "ally", "partner" and even "strategic partner". The most frequently used term (127 times) is "partners".

Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the results of the sociological survey:

In general, tangible changes in mass foreign-policy consciousness of the Azerbaijani population have taken place in recent years. This process is preconditioned by cardinal social-political transformations in Azerbaijani society.

The transition from "Soviet" outlook towards new foreign-policy awareness is quite a complicated process of the adoption of a new system of views, attitudes and values, developing a new conceptual mechanism for understanding and evaluating the international reality.

The considerable liberalization of public opinion has taken place in the sphere of foreign policy and international affairs. Such a psychological atmosphere has been formed when people have started freely expressing their political views.

Presently a considerably increased extent of public interest in foreign policy issues has been observed. The amount of available information about foreign policy has sharply increased. In the country there is a diversity of sources of information about international life and relations. Among the more popular sources of information on international affairs is mass media. The role of mass media in the dissemination of this knowledge is invigorating. At the same time, the survey has detected a lack of information and systematized knowledge about the foreign policy of Azerbaijan among respondents of the

various social groups. Some respondents expressed interest in gaining new and comprehensive information about international affairs.

The survey made it possible to identify the variety of basic characteristics and parameters of Azerbaijani public opinion on foreign policy.

In general, mass foreign-policy consciousness is characterized by the versatility of ideas, attitudes, motives and interests. Foreign-policy consciousness of modern peoples eclectically combines various elements: openness, stereotyping, conservatism, inertness of thinking, non-competence, emotionality, inconsistency, romanticism, naivism, selectivity of perception, tolerance. At the same time, some elements of new thinking, rational and realistic mentality, are observed.

The survey has discovered a wide pluralism of opinions of various aspects of international development and foreign-political life of the society. Note that different social groups differently interpret occurring events and the processes in the international relations. There are a lot of divergent views and visions, even ambivalent, mutually contradictory and exclusive, concerning foreign-political development of Azerbaijan, its place in changing international structure.

The level of interest of ordinary people in issues of foreign policy and international affairs is rather high. Citizens began to realize importance of foreign policy for their social-political life and the country's future development. Just an insignificant part of them is rather skeptical of foreign policy issues. The considerable majority approves the current Azerbaijan's foreign policy.

This notwithstanding, the public opinion has not become yet the important factor of the social-political life. According to survey, it renders rather weak influence on foreign policy process. The civil society is actually alienated from this process. There is a lack of genuine public debate on foreign policy issues, and particularly on the Azerbaijani policy towards the Euro-Atlantic structures integration.

The comparative analysis has revealed that beliefs of decision-makers and opinion-leaders considerably differ from those of the general public. The basic characteristic of elite opinion is a sharp political polarization on the issues concerning the idea of membership of Azerbaijan in NATO and prospects for deployment of military bases in Azerbaijan. Thus, the survey explored the differences between the foreign-policy platforms of the representatives of various parties. Experts are in a certain level of consent regarding prospects for regional development in the South Caucasus and possible terms of the integration of Azerbaijan into NATO.

This scheme mainly represents rather rational, realistic and pragmatic approaches and an example of an unbiased thinking and unprejudiced analysis. This found its parallel in experts' attempt to portray the international and regional realities as complicated and multi-dimensional as it is, to analyze the diverse trends and factors in the development of the ongoing processes.

It is possible to ascertain actually quite certain tendency towards increase of the degree of pro-Western orientations among the Azerbaijani population. Most people consider integration into various West, European institutions as the best option for Azerbaijan. The general public perceives the accession into the Euro-Atlantic structures and cooperation with the highly developed countries in economic, political and military sphere as the best guarantee for maintenance of Azerbaijan's national interests. The other best choice for Azerbaijani respondents is cooperation with NATO. People are gradually gravitating toward Turkey and NATO. A good rating is seen for Turkey and Georgia.

Thus, pro-Western line officially proclaimed by the government has basically been supported by ordinary people. Meanwhile, about one-fifth declare that our country should seek a balance between the two "centers of powers". Some circles of the population are still uncertain about their country's geopolitical orientations.

Presently in the country there is not a broad and stable public consensus concerning foreign policy priorities. Rather consolidated consensus is on such basic issues only, as pro-Western orientation, attitudes to Turkey and Georgia, cooperation with NATO, construction of BTC. Meanwhile, there is no public consent on relations with Russia, terms of admission into NATO, stationing of foreign military bases, ways of resolution of Karabach conflict.

As for the dynamics of public sentiments in Azerbaijan, it is possible to ascertain some decrease of previous euphoria concerning the West and step-by-step increase of the level of positive perception of Russia.

The dominating in the Azerbaijani society is the public support and approval of the expanding sphere of Azerbaijan-NATO cooperation. The respondents attached particular importance to the political, diplomatic and military aspects of Azerbaijan-NATO collaboration: security and stability issues, strengthening of army, investments and access to global market, country's international status, democratic development.

The absolute majority of respondents suppose that the relationships between Azerbaijan and NATO have improved in recent years. Respondents practically have not specified any serious, unsolvable problems in sphere of our mutual relations.

These circumstances create a favorable social-psychological ground for expansion of such cooperation, for realization in practice of a broad range of the various programs and actions. It is very important in terms of maintenance of public support for the foreign-policy actions aimed at the development of bilateral contacts with the Alliance.

In contrast, a certain apprehension is observed concerning the rapid changes taking place in this area of cooperation. Some small groups are worried of closer cooperation with the said entity. Neutral enough, a public position concerning this Alliance is also strongly pronounced by people.

Although Azerbaijani people are well-disposed in general toward NATO and desire closer ties with the Alliance, they do not necessarily approve all types of its activities.

Majority of respondents generally supports the idea of future membership of Azerbaijan in the NATO structure. The entry into this organization is perceived as a good opportunity to strengthen international status of the country, improve democratic standards and guarantees of our security. Such a high level of support for NATO membership is very encouraging and should be exploited accordingly.

Meanwhile, this support is stipulated by a number of conditions. Some respondents expressed concern in this regard. Thinking that integration with NATO is desirable in principle they worry that it will deteriorate relations with Russia and Iran.

Expert opinion poll indicates a decided political will to join NATO shown by a considerable part of the elite. Some politicians and mass media representatives are trying to present the situation as a compulsory choice "either with NATO or Russia". An example of a typical, wide spread stereotype among the Azerbaijani population and among elite to some extent is the understanding that the possible membership in NATO would lead to worsening of our relations with Russia and Iran.

Despite the fact that closer ties with NATO are generally favored and welcomed by people, the majority of respondents is not very much optimistic about the membership in this organization.

The study revealed insufficient awareness of the prospects, benefits and advantages of cooperation with NATO, the privileges and the obligations arising from Azerbaijani membership in the NATO collective defence system. The NATO membership terms for Azerbaijan are not very clear for Azerbaijani public. People basically are inclined to see these terms in a very far and distant future only.

Public opinion is giving a quite high assessment to the role of NATO in the modern world and the Alliance's impact on international affairs. People impart quite a noticeable role to NATO and even an outstanding influence in the South Caucasus region. But, at the same time, they point out some negative aspects of NATO activity in the region and foresee potential problems in this regard.

Basically, the public is prone to view this Alliance as a military and security, rather than a political, organization. For example, in the minds of two-fifth of respondents there dominates an idea of Azerbaijan-NATO collaboration as the strongest tool of the resolution of Nagorni-Karabakh conflict, restoration of territorial integrity of our country. In all probability, this idea is highly idealized by our local public or imposed by politicians and mass media.

Overestimated expectations concerning the mission of the organization are high and wide-spread among the Azerbaijani public. Limited and distorted information on NATO, its institutions and membership requirements may produce highly unrealistic expectations connected with Azerbaijan's admission to NATO. Meanwhile, unmet expectations may cause frustration and disappointment.

As a whole, the concept of "NATO" is positive, though inconsistent and ambiguous enough. An image of NATO in the mass consciousness remains to be predominantly limited or distorted. There is a group of people who are absolutely unaware of this organization and its activity. Just very few respondents have a clear understanding of the nature of this Alliance.

Our findings suggest that high level of support is combined with some misunderstandings, which seem to be twofold: little awareness of the concept of "NATO" and its major activity and mission. These misconceptions might be the result of limited information and also the outcome of political manipulation for propagandistic ends. The lack of precise information leads to false perceptions about this organization and easily generates stereotypes and prejudices.

Azerbaijani general public is very sensitive to the issues related to the conflict with Armenia over Nagorno Karabakh. The problems of Armenian aggression against our country and ethnic separatism undoubtedly are of primary concern for citizens of Azerbaijan. People are not very much optimistic about the prospects for the settlement of the conflict. Moreover, the external problems are perceived by Azerbaijani people through the prism of this unresolved conflict. People's attitudes to either country closely depend on latter's official positions and actions regarding this conflict.

The survey data demonstrate a certain dependence of people's foreign-policy orientations on their socio-demographic status. Manifestation of foreign policy preferences in various social categories has its own peculiarities. Among the parameters that considerably influence the existing subgroup differences in the patterns of perception of foreign policy issues one should mention the age, education, occupation. Note that such factors account for statistically significant differences.

Recommendations

Probably the most important recommendation is to attain social and political consensus on the foreign policy of Azerbaijan, and particularly, the prospects for Azerbaijan-NATO relations. The crucial decisions in the foreign policy should be made on the basis of the public consent, taking into account opinion of the country citizens. The problems of foreign policy strategy must be solved in a democratic way, through a mutual dialogue.

It is important to hold a broad open public discussion among various group of interest, as well as among political and public figures. This is an important step for the expansion of channels of influence of public and elite opinion on foreign-policy makers. It strengthens the role of civil society in the process of making and performing foreign policy that, in the end, will raise a level of democratic development of the country.

Information and awareness campaigns should be launched as an important source of information on NATO and Azerbaijan-NATO collaboration. The awareness of the process of Azerbaijan's cooperation and prospective joining NATO has to be generally improved.

It is important to achieve a better understanding of NATO among the Azerbaijani broad public and the elite. Citizens are supposed to make a conscious choice, clearly realize all benefits and disadvantages of entering into NATO, which is likely to gain from this membership. The information policy should be aimed at achieving a better understanding of the balance between advantages and obligations of the country as a member of the collective defence system.

People-oriented information should be based on the main principles of NATO as a political-military organisation, the history of the Alliance, the main current and future tasks, the present and the future Azerbaijan's role in NATO. The broad public, media, NGOs and business groups should be more informed on NATO integration process. The impartial information would be very beneficial for overcoming stereotypes and prejudices.

The primary task is to build a well-informed public opinion on these crucial foreign policy issues. Political propaganda in this regards should be honest and unacceptable for any manipulations with public opinion for the sake of political dividends.

The timeline of the prospective integration process must be made clearer. Although it is impossible to pinpoint the actual date in which Azerbaijan will gain NATO membership, the length of the process may be estimated more realistically. More information is needed to update general public on the progress made in the process in which Azerbaijan finds itself. People must be certain on how much has so far been accomplished, and how much has still to be done. Besides clarifying the timeline of the integration process, it is also important to shed some light on the implications of NATO membership for Azerbaijan.

The pace of the integration process substantially depends on Azerbaijan, not on NATO. Therefore, the campaign ought to focus on the economic, political, judicial and military reforms to be carried out by the government in order to prepare the country for integration into NATO. It is important to emphasise that the integration begins in Baku and ends in Brussels, not vice versa.

It is essential to achieve the more active and comprehensive coverage of these issues in mass media. They have to take upon itself the responsibility of notifying the Azerbaijani public of the cooperation developments around NATO, successes and failure in this regard. Political and public discourses should be permanently in the focus of their attention.

It would be desirable to publish special and popular literature on international relations in Azeri, to provide informational support for public organizations, associations, research and informational centers engaged in international affairs. It would be useful to produce more TV programs on this topic with the participation of prominent specialists, political figures and diplomats.

During an awareness campaign, below-shown methods can be used: TV programs and documentaries, pamphlets and brochures containing simplified information to address a larger audience; newsletters, lectures, workshops, round tables and trainings can address the needs of more specialized, target groups.

It is necessary to focus on scientific aspects of the implementation of foreign policy, strengthening its analytical-prognostical component. Also, it is topical to take into account the assessments of specialists and experts in decision-making. There is a great need in the permanent sociological monitoring of the situation and processes in this sphere, cross-national, comparative studies of the public and elite opinion influence on the relevant foreign policy formation. It is advisable to carry out trend surveys on the public perceptions of the international relations, to study the influence of the mass media and interest groups on public attitudes.

The successful communication strategy in regard to the Azerbaijan's cooperation with NATO has to be based on an integrated system, including regularly carried out public opinion polls and expert judgement studies. This system should provide information both on the public perceptions and the vision of the elites. The results can serve as a feedback for the political decision-makers. A comprehensive analysis on the positive and negative effects for Azerbaijan of cooperation and accession into NATO should be carried out. The results of this analysis ought to be made public.

* * *

The processes ongoing in the sphere of international relations are extremely complicated and changeable. This research is an attempt to have a closer look of this picture. Our task is not only to conduct the survey, but also to exchange ideas and experience, give impetus to the beginning of a professional dialogue over the problem of a sociological study of foreign-policy orientations in Azerbaijan.

Hopefully, the research results may be of interest for analysts, practitioners, specialists involved in the foreign-policy analysis in the post-Soviet context, especially, in the issues related to the South Caucasus. They might serve as a certain empirical base for a comparative analysis of geo-political situation in other post-Soviet countries.

To sum up, I hope that this research will contribute to the better mutual understanding between both the Azerbaijani public and NATO audience.

Annex A. Endnotes

1. The NATO attaches a great importance to the issue how it is perceived in the various countries. This organization tries to create the appropriate positive, favorable "image" to be attractive and acceptable in view of the public and elite of these countries. We can see it by the example of the large amount of individual and collective researches within the framework of NATO Research Fellowships dedicated to namely these topics: 1) 2001-2003, Vasil Sikharulidze, "Public Opinion Trends with Regard to NATO in Post-Soviet Countries during the 90's", Georgia; Natalia Strelchuk, "The NATO's Enlargement and Problem of National Security of South-Eastern European Countries: the Dynamics of Stereotypes' Development in Social Thought", Ukraine; 2) 2000-2002, Stelian Tanase, "One Year After NATO Bombardments in Kosovo. Security Issues, Common Policy Approaches and Public Perception", Portugal;

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2. Three consequent meanings of percentage provided in the report are the following: the first is the average data of two conducted stages, second – data of the first stage of research (September 2001 – February 2002), and at last, the third is the data of the second stage of research (September 2002 – February 2003).

3. In some questions respondents were allowed to select several answers at a time, therefore, the total number of obtained answers may exceed 100%.

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