EXPERT CONDEMNS ARMENIANS FOR BYRZA RECALL

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In the past year, the US didn't once "stick its nose" in the post-Soviet area and kept itself quite aloof, but at the same time it was always close to those CIS countries who wish to develop primarily with the assistance of the US. Yes, it's important for the future of Afghanistan that the US has close contact with the Central Asian countries, but there's no need to exaggerate all of this – America's problems today are domestic, deciding on future development, and, much as it might like to, the post-Soviet area cannot help in any way.

AZ.- The Armenian lobby got what it wanted: on Tuesday, President Ilham Aliyev received Matthew Bryza to mark the completion of his mission as ambassador. How can you explain the

paradoxical state structure of the USA, in which ethnic groups can block a decision of the White House?

YS.- It's not only in the US that the ethnic lobby works actively. Look at France, Canada and the Czech Republic! The question is the target of this hectic activity and its results. Now the election campaign in the US is in full swing and no one cares about anything except the candidates and their closest teams. Here is an example: when Obama was fighting for the White House three years ago, two out of three Americans were worried about what was going on in Iraq. And now, in two dozen debates of Republican candidates only one in ten Americans are interested in international affairs and that is only Afghanistan (and only because their relatives or acquaintances are serving there).

The fact that the ethnic lobby pushes its interests to the top has nothing to do with the ordinary citizens of the country. Moreover, not everyone even in the State Department knows that the envoy is leaving Baku, not to mention a wider audience. And yet, yes – this is the American system – congressmen are elected, not appointed by the authorities. And they do whatever is necessary for their voters (to be more precise, for their re-election). And the ethnic lobby assists them whenever necessary.

AZ.- In your opinion, how harmful to Azerbaijani-US relations are delays in the appointment of a US ambassador to Azerbaijan? How do you view the typical White House statement that this is a technical, not political issue?

YS.- On the one hand, yes, it is somehow a technical issue and it doesn't matter who the ambassador is – he doesn't define policy and is only an official executor (he is not the first figure in government). But this question is quite symbolic – it's not right to say that it doesn't matter who will be appointed and who dismissed. For example, the confusion over the appointment and recall of the ambassador leaves a bad taste in the Azerbaijani leadership. For the White House, it's just a bureaucratic game which has no importance within the US; for small countries, such "technical aspects" provide food for thought, quite possibly not the most joyful.

AZ.- Is there any premise to expect progress on a Karabakh settlement in 2012 when we didn't see any in the past year?

YS.- I think that concerning Karabakh, no concrete decisions – no breakthroughs or even decisions that give the slightest forward shift to resolution of the problem will be made in the coming year, if, of course, no military activities start again for any reason, which cannot be ruled out. Don't forget that the question of Iran is still "up in the air" for the US and 2012 is an election year in America. It's difficult to predict what will happen here and how, but it seems to me that a Karabakh denouement can happen when it is least expected because I don't see any logically explicable options for the peaceful and diplomatic settlement of the conflict.