

Oskanian in End-of-the-Year Interview

In what has become an end-of-the-year tradition, Armenia's Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian gave a lengthy interview to Kentron Television's Urvagits (Outline) program hosted by Commentator Petros Ghazarian.

During the interview, the Minister was asked questions about international as well as domestic issues. He discussed regional and global issues, including the recent assassination of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, condemning that act. He also analyzed Armenia's foreign policy successes and challenges. Minister Oskanian drew some parallels in the self-determination paths that Nagorno Karabakh and Kosovo have crossed. He pointed out that just as the international community finds unacceptable a reversal of Kosovo's status to that before the outbreak of hostilities in 1999, so with Nagorno Karabakh, the people of Nagorno Karabakh find unacceptable a return to their Soviet-era status, under Azerbaijani jurisdiction.

And in response to a request for the Minister to assess the past year, Minister Oskanian summed up these 10 accomplishments and events of significance:

First, that in 1997 there were no setbacks either in the form of international documents or developments.

After the May parliamentary elections, Armenia's reputation was enhanced with the positive assessment of the elections by the international community, and Armenia's standing in Europe and the international community was elevated. The minister emphasized this point in the context of the upcoming presidential elections, insisting that Armenia needs to maintain this standing by conducting good elections because this gives Armenia an advantage in the region, as being more democratic and more advanced in political and economic reforms.

Despite the geopolitical challenges, it was possible to maintain favorable conditions for Armenia's continued double digit economic growth.

Despite unfavorable developments in the region, peace and stability, albeit fragile, was maintained in the region.

This was the year when projects of regional significance came to a culmination: the major phase of the Armenia-Iran gas pipeline was completed. Other significant projects moved from the conceptual phase to planning such as the oil refinery, the railroad with Iran, uranium extraction, and a new nuclear power plant.

The European direction entered a new phase as implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan began.

The US government's Millennium Challenge Program commenced with the first significant investment tranche.

Armenia has remained actively engaged in international organizations, and worked to advance Armenia's policies as well as reforms of those organizations.

With traditional friends, Armenia not only maintained bilateral ties but, in the region and beyond, also further developed and deepened those ties.

Finally, there was continuing progress in the negotiations over Nagorno Karabakh, but more significantly, on important issues such as the legal status of Nagorno Karabakh were not only reinforced in the negotiating document as a main element, but also became part of the discourse in the international community.

Minister Oskanian will refer to some of these same themes in his annual first-of-the-year press conference to be held in the first half of January.