**The International Conference on “Arab Countries after recent transformations: Social, Economic and Political changes”, which was organized by Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SAM) took place in Baku**

On 7-8 November 2013, the International Conference on “Arab Countries after recent transformations: Social, Economic and Political changes”, which was organized by the Center for Strategic Studies under the President of Azerbaijan, took place in Baku.

The conference started with the opening speech of the Presidential Administration’s Head of Department of Political Analysis and Information Provision Dr. Elnur Aslanov and was followed by the welcoming speeches of the Director of SAM Dr. Farhad Mammadov and the Head of Mission of League of Arab States in Republic of Turkey Amb. Mohamed El Fatah Nasiri.

Session one of the conference was dedicated to “Current political processes in the ‘Arab Spring’ countries” and was moderated by the Deputy Director of SAM Dr. Gulshan Pashayeva. The session started with the presentation of Amb. Mohamed Hatem Ben Salem on “Current political process in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt: Similarities and Challenges” and was followed by the President of the Moroccan Center for Strategic Studies and the African Federation for Strategic Studies Dr. Mohammed Benhammou’s “Security Issues in the Region”. Director of the Iraqi Group for Strategic Studies Dr. Watheq Salim Abdulqader Al Hashimi presented with “The Outcome of ‘Arab Spring' between the reality and the ambitions”. Chairman of the Algomhoria Center for Political and Security StudiesDr. Sameh Mahmoud Seifelyazal Khalifa presented with “The transitional period in Egypt after the revolution of June 30 at various levels”.

Session one continued with the participation of the Head of Foreign Policy Analysis Department at SAM Dr. Rovshan Ibrahimov. Three other speakers included Ambassador Richard William Murphy, whose topic was “American Perceptions of the Arab Spring”, Dr David Elliot Pollock, who spoke on “US policy in the ‘Arab Spring”, and the Research Fellow in the Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies Mr. Oytun Orhan, who shed some light on “Prospects for the Future of Syria and Implications for Turkey”.

Overall, the attention during the first session was paid to changes occurred in both domestic and foreign policies of the Arab states. The current political processes and developments were discussed. The attitude toward Syrian crisis in the Arab League, Turkey, Iran, European Union, United States and also, in the context of Russia’s policies was presented. The speakers touched on the newly formed governments, changing relations in the Arab world, regional security, economic and political developments. The geopolitical implications of the Arab Spring were assessed during the session.

Session two was dedicated to “Economies of the ‘Arab Spring’ countries: Current Situation and Challenges Ahead” and was moderated by the Research Fellow and Adjunct Professor at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy Mr. Taleh Ziyadov. Senior Fellow at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University Dr. Paul Rivlin presented with “Middle East economy after Arab Spring”. Professor of International Economics and Econometrics at the Department of Business Economics at the University of JordanDr. Taleb Mohammed Musa Warrad presented with “Arab Spring: Causes and Consequences”. Professor of Economics at Istanbul Commerce University Dr. Murat Ali Yulek tried to answer a question of whether Arab Spring could be an opportunity of economic transformation for Arab nations. The session continued with moderation of the Research Fellow of SAM  Mr. Mahir Humbatov. Advisor for the Middle East and Central Asia Department at IMF and Mission Chief for Azerbaijan Dr. Raja Almarzoqi’s topic was “Arab Countries in Transition: Taking Stock of the Economic Environment”. His presentation was followed by Dr. Mete Durdag’s analysis of economic implications of recent transformations in Arab countries, by Dr. Petr Havlik’s discussion on economic transitions in the Arab countries where he drew a comparative analysis with the CESEE countries. Dr. Riham Rizk from Durham University completed the session with her speech on “Post-revolutionary Arab Economies: Opportunities and Challenges for Corporate Social Responsibility”.

The second session was mostly about the ongoing peaceful struggle for economic development in the states affected by the Arab Spring. The role and concept of finances in the Muslim world were among topics discussed. The conference proved to have been a good platform for discussing a wide range of issues, including the challenges, which came to light as a result of the Arab Spring. The speakers tried to come up with predictions as to what the future for the Arab states could be.

Session three, which continued the next day, was dedicated to “Islam in public policy and the role of religion in the social, economic and political life of Arab countries after recent transformations” and was moderated by the Dean of the School of Public and International Affairs at Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy Dr. Anar Valiyev. The speakers included the spokesman of “Tagammu” party, whose topic was “Egypt has made an impossible”, Professor of History at the Faculty of Arts of Cairo University Dr Wageh Ateg, who spoke about problems of political Islam in Arab countries, and Director of the Republic Center for Security and Strategy Research Dr. Matz Muhy Abdulhamid, who spoke about Jihadist trends in Iraq.

The session continued with the participation of Adviser-expert of SAM Mr. Kamal Gasimov and included the presentations by Professor of philosophy at Cairo University and the Head of Egyptian Philosophical Society Dr. Hasan Hanafi Hassanein, the Muslim intellectual Dr. Tareq Mohammed Al Saleh Alsuwaidan, Dr. Maria Dolores Banon Castellon from Valencia University and Dr. Driss El Hani.

This session was aimed to discuss the implications of Islamic law, Islamic political and legal concepts in the public sphere of the post-revolution countries (particularly in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya). Analysis of “Islamic discourse” in the programs of new political parties was of particular importance. Are Islamic concepts used in the management or administration? Are there any proposals or practical applications of specific Islamic ideas and theories in the public policy? How did ‘Arab Spring’ change a role of religion in public sphere? What is the role and impact of Islamic law in transitioning ‘Arab Spring’ countries? How revolution affected and changed relations between religion, religious institutions and political participation in post-revolution Arab countries? These and other questions were discussed during the session.

The overall purpose of the conference was to discuss a wide range of issues related to the recent political processes and socio-economic challenges in the “Arab Spring” countries. This international conference considered drastic transformations in the field of political, social, and economical developments, as well as in the public sphere that have taken place after revolutions. What changes have occurred after the revolutions, and what new problems have arisen? What is the meaning and significance of Arab revolutions through the eyes of Arab officials, intellectuals and scholars, how do they understand these revolutions, what changes, outcomes and perspectives do they see, and how do they interpret and evaluate events and processes that have taken place in the course of the two years since revolutions? Through discussions of the above mentioned issues the conference dealt with the aftermath of the revolutions, and what is in store for the future of the Arab countries. Experts from Arab and other Middle East countries as well as Western world tried to discuss those and related topics and set the intellectual stage for understanding the current processes in the “Arab Spring” countries in particular and MENA in general.

The conference continued with the usual questions and answers session.

It could be said that one of the advantages of the conference has been the speakers’ usage of both English and Arabic. There will be published post-conference reports of the conference in both languages and will be sent to local and foreign organizations.