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**Subslug:** [Interview with Abulfaz Elchibey, president of Azerbaijan,  
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 VSYAKAYA VSYACHINA, Krasnodar; place and date not given:  
 ``Elchibey: ``When Peace Comes, We Will Also Learn To  
 Smile''`]

**FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE:**

1. [Interview with Abulfaz Elchibey, president of Azerbaijan, by Yelena Semenchenko, correspondent for the newspaper VSYAKAYA VSYACHINA, Krasnodar; place and date not given: ``Elchibey: ``When Peace Comes, We Will Also Learn To Smile''`]
2. [Text] Not two hours had passed after the landing of the aircraft at Baku airport when the pleasant coolness of the palace of the president of Azerbaijan embraced me. I was met on the fifth floor by Gulshad Zarbaliyev, the young but very presentable secretary of the president: ``You will have to wait a bit. The president is busy. I will tell him you are here.'' Well, this gave me time to gather my thoughts and to look around.
3. ``You were very lucky; the president has not been receiving any of the journalists. You are one of the first.'' Gulshad again disappeared into the president's office, and afterwards the door opened wide and a well-turned voice proclaimed loudly: ``The president will see you.'' And, taking a step to the side, now more quietly, he said: ``You have half an hour.'' I nodded and crossed the threshold....
4. It was easy to talk to him. He did not overwhelm, and he did not try to appear better than he was, and there was none of the moralizing and imperious tone that is so typical of many leaders of high rank. In addition, he turned out to be an interesting interlocutor with an attractive nature. That is the impression I got

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of Abulfaz Elchibey—the new president of Azerbaijan, a well-built and smart-looking man 54 years of age, with a stubborn furrow across his brow and an attentive look.

5. His full name is Abulfaz Gadirgulu, the son of Aliyev (Elchibey). He was born in the village of Kelek, Ordubadskiy Rayon. He graduated from the department of Arabic philology of the faculty of Oriental studies of Azerbaijan State University (now BGU [Baku State University]). He is a candidate of historical sciences.

6. In 1963–1964, he worked as an interpreter in the Arab Republic of Egypt. After he returned to his homeland, he did graduate work, and then he taught at the university. During these years, he conducted explanatory work among the students and colleagues that was directed against the existing totalitarian system, for which he was arrested in 1975 by the KGB, and, after the court sentence, he served about two years in prison.

7. In 1977, he began to work in the Institute of Manuscripts of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, where he was a senior researcher for a long time.

8. He is the author of more than 50 scholarly works on Eastern philosophy, history, literature, and religion.

9. From 1989 to June of 1992, he was the chairman of the People's Front of Azerbaijan. On 7 June 1992, he was elected president.

10. Behind these few lines there is a whole life, full of adventures and suffering, doubts and hopes, and the bitterness of defeat and the joy of victory.

11. We know something more or less about the leaders of the other republics, owing to the press and television. But for many Russians, Elchibey is still a mystery. He rarely appears on the screen, or in the press, either. Indeed, he does not like to give interviews. In Azerbaijan, he is considered to be a leader who is out of the ordinary for the East, and it is believed that he will lead the republic out of chaos.

12. Well, as the saying goes, we will live, and we will see. But in the meantime, we are sitting in the spacious office of his residence, and we are talking about life.

13. [Semenchenko] Mr. Abulfaz, you are a scholar and a candidate of historical sciences. Were you not sorry to leave science for the sake of a political career?

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14. [Elchibey] I have not left it forever. While I was still working in the academy, I always thought about how to change society and our entire life for the better. And therefore, I had to choose science or politics. Yes, I had to sacrifice science. But this is temporary. And so, after a number of years...let us say, 20 years, when I get old, I will leave the political arena, and I will return to scholarship. It is not without reason that Aristotle said that the word combination "young philosopher" is rather rarely encountered. A philosopher should "go through life," absorb humanity's accumulated experience, and only then will he "mature" and become wise and be able to teach others something, to help them, and to indicate the path that has to be followed.

15. And when you think about it, science is not forgotten. I use all of my knowledge and all of the accumulated experience now in my new work. In the academy, I was engaged in the history of philosophy, and, now, let us say, I am getting to know the philosophy of history and life.

16. [Semenchenko] Do science and politics take up a lot of time? Does the family help you in some way?

17. [Elchibey] I prefer that no one interferes in my work, especially relatives. My wife, Galima, is busy with all of the household chores, and she is bringing up the children—a son and a daughter. If you have this in mind, then, yes, this kind of support helps me.

18. [Semenchenko] How often do you give gifts to your wife?

19. [Elchibey] Not often. Somehow, this is not a tradition with us. I do not consider a birthday to be a holiday, but I do celebrate 8 March—a wife should have at least one day a year that is beautiful.

20. [Semenchenko] But what, in general, is your attitude toward women?

21. [Elchibey] For me, this is a miracle of nature. A very great miracle—frail, frequently unpredictable, beautiful, and very often with great willpower that sometimes we men do not have enough of. Do you know how many women came out on the square on 15 May to defend democracy during the coup attempt? And in January 1990, thousands of women raised the flag and attacked a tank in order to defend their children and the republic! That is willpower and spirit for you!

22. [Semenchenko] Are you a one-woman man?

23. [Elchibey] I have never asked myself such a question. I like

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beautiful women, as I do everything beautiful in nature, and the main thing for me, of course, is the family.

24. [Semenchenko] Do you have any pastimes?

25. [Elchibey] I simply do not have time for them. I like nature very much, and when free time is available (but this happens so rarely), I like to go to the zoo. I can look for hours at the panther and the cobra-my favorite animals. There is something in them that is so proud, independent, graceful, and powerful that attracts one. I like flowers. Previously, I liked equestrian sports, but now, unfortunately, there is no time for this.

26. [Semenchenko] And where do you like to take a vacation?

27. [Elchibey] It has been several years since I have had one. Perhaps this will seem strange to you, but I have not been to a health resort or a health center once. I know Sochi, Pitsunde, and the Riga seaside or Varna only secondhand. And if I do get five or six free days in the summer, then I spend them in the village with relatives.

28. [Semenchenko] Are you rich?

29. [Elchibey] Rich? It depends on what you have in mind. Until I became president, I did not even have my own apartment; we lived with my brother's family. I do not even have one now-I live in the residence. I was unable to accumulate money during my years of work in the academy. And if you divide my current salary among the four members of my family, then you will see that it also is not that much. But if you take friends, then, yes, I am a wealthy person. I am surrounded by good people. The People's Front movement simultaneously surfaced and trained many individuals.

30. [Semenchenko] Incidentally, how much did you make previously, when you worked in the academy, and how much do you make now?

31. [Elchibey] As chief researcher, I received 1,500 rubles [R], and now-R25,000. I have a small family, by our standards-a wife and two small children-but large expenditures are required in today's life. My wife does not work. Therefore, from a material standpoint, I have nothing to complain about. There were many problems that previously unsettled our family (you yourself know that one and a half thousand rubles for four is meager, R375 per person, and what can be bought for such money?) and that are now resolved.

32. On the other hand, it is even somewhat awkward before my people. I, it turns out, am provided for on this day, but a majority of the

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people of Azerbaijan still live poorly. It grieves me morally when another family does not have a piece of bread. Previously, when I was receiving little, it was as if I were equal with everyone. But now I am terribly uneasy, and this will be so until the standard of living of our people is raised. But in the meantime, there are about a million people unemployed in Azerbaijan. And believe me, we are doing everything so that in the course of a year to a year and a half at least half of these people would find work and could buy themselves a piece of bread, and so that at least there would be no hungry people. To feed the people-this is now one of my main concerns. I know what it is to be hungry. My father died in the Great Patriotic War. I was very small then. We lived poorly, and there were people around me who were just as poor and hungry.

33. [Semenchenko] Mr. Abulfaz, two months have passed since the day of the presidential elections. How do you feel in your new role?

34. [Elchibey] I will not be evasive. It is very difficult today. I have a great responsibility.

35. First, for Azerbaijan, it was necessary as fast as possible to create the kind of moral, psychological, spiritual, and political conditions for it to pull out of the anarchy and chaos that could lead to civil war. It was not very long ago that outright battles were being waged in the streets of Baku and other cities. People were afraid to go out of their homes in the daytime and to sleep at night. Misfortune could occur at any minute; but we pulled out of this chaos. On the whole, the situation is stabilizing in Azerbaijan (of course, excluding Nagorno-Karabakh, but this is a special subject). At least there will be no civil war, when brother kills brother, on the verge of which Azerbaijan had found itself.

36. Second, refugees from Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh began to stream into Baku from all sides. Imagine, 200,000 refugees from Armenia into Azerbaijan; moreover, there were 20,000 Russians and 10,000 Kurds from Armenia. In addition, refugees were added from Karabakh-200,000-and 50,000 Meskhetian Turks from Central Asia. A total of about a half million refugees ended up in Azerbaijan. This has been very difficult for the republic. It was necessary to get their lives going somehow: with housing and with food products. We are doing everything at least to ease their life somewhat. And now the situation is gradually stabilizing. Many people have already found work. We will continue to help them in the future as well.

37. Of late, there has been a decline in all sectors in Azerbaijan: in the economy, in culture, and in the military sphere. It was necessary, first of all, to stop this decline. And we did this.

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38. There was no meat, sugar, and butter in Azerbaijan. Now, when you go into stores, there already is meat and sugar for coupons. We released butter at a free price, but it is very high, and not everyone can buy it; therefore, to put a stop to the high price, it is necessary to give people their guaranteed grams at a low price. Then the free price will not go any higher. That is, in this way, we will institute price regulation. Of course, under conditions of market relations, a protracted regulation of prices is not permissible, but at the present stage, this is a solution. We are working on this right now. During the year, the government plans to issue subsidies for food products, although this is not easy; but then we will ease the life of the people at least a little. And so we will gradually move to market relations.

39. We carried out several reforms, and we adopted several laws. A reform is going on in education. Until now, everything was moving along according to the old pattern. Bribery and corruption were flourishing in enrollments. Seventy to 80 percent of the students enrolled in a technical secondary school only with the help of bribes. Now, the situation will change. Examinations will be given in the form of tests. The calculation of grades, competition, and enrollment will be accomplished with computers.

40. [Semenchenko] But were you offered bribes when you were teaching at the university?

41. [Elchibey] No, never.

42. [Semenchenko] Why? They knew you would not take them?

43. [Elchibey] Obviously. Those around me knew very well what I thought of bribes. When I was not yet married and was teaching at the university, I tried to set aside a little for poor students. I had one student who did not even have a raincoat during winter. I helped students like this. I bought things with my own money and gave them as gifts. After all, as the saying goes, I had been in those same shoes myself: In my student days, I did not have a coat or a raincoat for five years.

44. [Semenchenko] And they accepted this help?

45. [Elchibey] At first they refused; they were embarrassed. I tried to find the necessary words. But later I persuaded the dean's office to give such students material help from the treasury of the dean's office and the rector's office, or through the trade unions.

46. [Semenchenko] Do you have shortcomings?

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47. [Elchibey] Of course. But are there really any people without shortcomings? I, for example, am frequently rebuked that I am too soft.

48. [Semenchenko] Is this really a shortcoming?

49. [Elchibey] For a leader, yes. I am trustful; therefore, it is easy to deceive me. It is easier for me to trust and then be deceived than to express my distrust to someone and thus insult a person who subsequently proves to be very honest. Life itself will judge who is right and who is not. And a bad person, sooner or later, will be punished by life itself.

50. [Semenchenko] Tell me, Mr. Abulfaz, are you superstitious?

51. [Elchibey] Superstitious? No. My favorite number is 13. I adore black cats, even when they cross my path, and I do not believe in spilled salt, nor in empty pails.

52. [Semenchenko] But what do you believe? Maybe in love, "flying saucers," a life hereafter, the "abominable snowman"?

53. [Elchibey] Well, "flying saucers" and "abominable snowmen" belong, in my opinion, in the category of journalistic sensations. As for an afterlife, or what is associated with the cosmos, then man, who over so many centuries has tried to delve into the unknown, the incomprehensible, and the mysterious simply has a need for some kind of superstition; in any case, about 15-30 percent of his brain specifically needs it. If there are no "flying saucers" tomorrow, we will come up with something else. For example, that trees walk at night, and a meteorite that landed from outer space was transformed into a horrible monster. Everything depends on fantasy.

54. [Semenchenko] And in horoscopes?

55. [Elchibey] That is another picture. Astrology relies on hypotheses that in turn are based on scientific knowledge. But, after all, out of 10 hypotheses, two to four are true. There is nothing amazing in the fact that horoscope predictions of many people come true. And, then, who compiles them? Primarily people who know astronomy very well, and who have a very well developed, as it is usual to say, sixth sense, and it is true that astrologists call it something else.

56. [Semenchenko] What astrological sign are you?

57. [Elchibey] Cancer. I was born in the Year of the Tiger.

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58. [Semenchenko] If one believes the horoscope, you are a brilliant person. Robespierre, Louis XIV, Agatha Christie, and Beethoven were Tigers. Astrologist Pavel Globa has predicted: This year will not be easy for Cancer; he will have to endure difficult opposition, a struggle, and changes in his personal life. In general, there will be many kinds of dramatic situations. But Cancer will survive everything and will come out the victor. In my opinion, a lot has come true for you.

59. [Elchibey] Well, thanks to Globa....

60. [Semenchenko] You have the fingers of a musician. Incidentally, do you play any kind of instrument?

61. [Elchibey] A little. The tar. This is a native instrument, a type of guitar. I tried the piano, but I did not turn out to be a pianist.

62. [Semenchenko] Mr. Abulfaz, are you not afraid that at some time you will undergo a metamorphosis, which frequently happens with people of high rank: That is, after getting to power, after a certain time they forget why they are sitting in their chair, and are transformed into tyrants, or into a weapon of tyrants?

63. [Elchibey] I am not afraid. I have defined my path clearly, and I have set a clear goal—the freedom of Azerbaijan, a democratic Azerbaijan. And I will achieve this goal. But I will never start to defend my chair with weapon in hand, if the people are disappointed in me (not a small group of conspirators, but the people of Azerbaijan). Questions like this have to be resolved in a democratic way, as it is done in civilized countries.

64. [Semenchenko] Are you a happy person?

65. [Elchibey] Yes. Much for which I have fought and about which I dreamed has been realized.

66. [Semenchenko] Then why do you smile so rarely? And why do you look so gloomy on television? After all, you are not like this in life at all. There is, it seems, an entire science dealing with how and when state leaders should smile. It is thought that a smiling president is liked by the voters more. Look at Reagan, Bush, Kohl—the impression is that they completed courses on Hollywood smiles. Even Yeltsin smiles.

67. [Elchibey] It is not the time for smiling. Every day, 10–15 persons perish in Azerbaijan. A fratricidal war that is not needed by anyone and in which no one will win has been going on with the

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Armenians for five years. After several years, people will begin to wonder: Why have we been killing each other? Like in the Iran-Iraq war. They fought for 10 years, but they cannot tell exactly why even now. And Moldova? And Yugoslavia? And Georgia? How many more "hot spots" will there be like this? When will we come to our senses? Whole nations can perish because of the shortsightedness of some politicians. It is necessary to endeavor somehow to correct today's situation and to direct it into peaceful channels. Otherwise, our progeny will not forgive us.

68. But, when peace arrives, then we will learn how to smile.

69. [Semenchenko] By the way, what do you think of Mutalibov's statement that he wants to return to Azerbaijan?

70. [Elchibey] Yes, he wants to return to Azerbaijan as a common citizen. But, in my opinion, there will be no Azerbaijan for him. For the reason that he will have to answer for his actions. For the tragedy of Khodzhal and for the Baku massacre. He did a lot of harm to Azerbaijan in the last two years.

71. [Semenchenko] You spent some time in prison for your own democratic convictions. Was it not terrible?

72. [Elchibey] Terrible? No; after all, I was not the only one who ended up there. And then, for the democrats in those years, prison was the same as "chicken pox" (do you know this children's disease?): All you have to do is go through it, and you immediately build up an immunity.

73. [Semenchenko] Which of the current politicians do you sympathize with?

74. [Elchibey] I understand Snegur's difficulties, I appreciate Kravchuk's mind, and Yeltsin is a powerful politician and a talented person. I sympathize with ex-president Gamsakhurdia, because it is, precisely he, a former dissident, who began to build democracy in Georgia. Of the foreign leaders, Bush, Reagan, and Kissinger-intelligent, benevolent, and pleasant in contacts with people.

75. \* \* \*

76. Our conversation was interrupted by the telephone. And while the president was talking, State Secretary of the Republic Panakh Guseynov, who half an hour ago had received two Baku residents who had returned from Barcelona with gold Olympic medals-judoist Nazim Guseynov and gymnast Valeriy Belenko-now joined our conversation; he explained: "There is news from the front. One more Azerbaijani

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village has been liberated."

77. Panakh Guseynov was one of the creators and leaders of the People's Front of Azerbaijan. Therefore, he and Elchibey are bound by a lot of things.

78. [Guseynov] You will not believe, after all, before meeting Mr. Abulfaz in 1986, I was one of the most orthodox and inveterate monumental Marxists. Before enrolling in the history faculty of the university in 1975, do you know what I did? I wrote a letter to the government with a request to send me to Vietnam to fight for communism. But then, later, after I became a student, I heard a lot about Mr. Abulfaz from the boys and about his persecution, but I was skeptical about his idea concerning the freedom of Azerbaijan. And only then, later, after meeting him, did I realize how greatly mistaken I had been. Incidentally, after meeting Elchibey, many people changed their views on life.

79. "Ah, who has not made a mistake in his youth?" laughed the president, who had already completed his telephone conversation, and I noticed for the first time how a smile suited him. Our interview was also coming to an end. While scheduled for half an hour, we had talked for a whole hour, and could have talked even longer, but.... the president had a tight schedule and many more meetings for the day. And then I asked him the final question:

80. [Semenchenko] What does your name, Abulfaz, mean, and why did you choose precisely the pseudonym Elchibey; after all, your real name is Aliyev.

81. [Elchibey] Abulfaz is an Arab name, and it translates into "the father of science and prosperity." But Elchibey: El is people, elchi is loving, favorite of the people, ambassador of the people, and bey is a respectful particle. It can be translated as a person speaking on behalf of the people, expressing their interests.

82. [Semenchenko] Thank you, Mr. Abulfaz, for the interview. And may everything that you have planned that is good and right come true.

83. [Elchibey] And I in turn want to wish the residents of the Kuban and all of Russia peace and prosperity. We have always been friends. May it be that way in the future as well.

84. And with these words, the president presented the newspaper VSYAKAYA VSYACHINA and its readers with his autograph.

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