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RUSSIA AND AZERBAIJAN

An Interview with H.E. Mr. Vasily Istratov Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to Azerbaijan

September 18, 2008
Baku, Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan in the World: What in your view is the central core of relations between the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan?

Ambassador Istratov: One can answer that question quite simply: our countries are neighbors and even more than that have had a common history for much of the last several hundred years. Those experiences to a remarkable degree define the character of our relations. Our leaders have frequently pointed to our relations as

those between the very good neighbors, and only a few days ago, Azerbaijan's president Ilham Aliyev said that the relations between our two countries are a model of relations between neighbors.

AIW: How have relations between Azerbaijan and Russia evolved during the post-Soviet period? How do you rate the level of these relations at present? What directions in bilateral ties have been most successful and where is additional attention needed?

Amb. Istratov: First of all, I am pleased to say that our relations have evolved in a positive direction. In fact, now it is possible to say that our ties are considerably better than ten years ago or even eight years ago. At an earlier stage, there were problems, in large measure because mistakes were made by both sides, but thanks to the efforts of diplomats, politicians, representatives of public opinion, and what is most important, the leaders of our countries, over the last eight years a great deal has been done for the establishment of stable and normal relations between our countries. And even over the course of the slightly more than two years I have been professionally involved in dealing with the Russian-Azerbaijani relations, a relatively short period, I have seen real progress.

It is of course impossible to say that politically relations between Russia and Azerbaijan have risen as far as they possibly can, but that they are developing successfully and that our countries are satisfied with their current level is a fact. One may argue that our political relations are ahead of our relations in other spheres. However paradoxical it might seem, relations between our law enforcement agencies are very good. Moreover, the ties between the defense ministries are developing quite successfully.

Cultural ties represent a direction which also continues to develop, something entirely natural because our peoples were in a single cultural space for so long and because culture does not depend on the efforts of politicians.

The same thing can be said about economic ties. In the course of the last two years, while I was here, we stopped trading gas which had constituted one-third of our trading relationship. But despite that, the trade turnover between our two countries grew the following year, and this year, it grew again. Of course, it is possible to say that politicians played a role in this, but only in part. In fact, the main cause is quite simple: our countries are neighbors who are interrelated, and to the extent that in both Russia and Azerbaijan, there has been significant economic growth, this leads to a growth in trade as well. That Russia is the basic trading partner of Azerbaijan with respect to imports is natural. And although there have been no breakthroughs in the last two years in terms of for example infrastructural development, bilateral trade continues to grow.

As to shortcomings, I would mention at least one. Though our presidents have recently pledged to reach a USD 2 billion level in bilateral trade, which is definitely good, the level of mutual investments is still very low. In fact, Russian investments in Azerbaijan are taking place and even growing quite rapidly, but they are coming not as Russian, but as for example Cyprian, British, or even Austrian. And again the reason is very simple: at present, we lack an agreement on the mutual protection of capital investments. This is connected with one very specific question which up to now has not been resolved and which prevents the Russian business from directly investing in Azerbaijan. That question has to do with the so far unresolved issue

about the property of the current embassy of Azerbaijan in Russia. This issue is rather of technical nature, for there is a political will, but due to some legal problems the question is still unresolved.

AIW: Russia is one of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group. Why then did Russia vote against UN General Assembly resolution 10693, which was adopted in March of this year?

Amb. Istratov: The answer to this question is quite simple: Russia voted the way it did precisely because Russia is a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group. All the co-chairs voted against because in the unanimous judgment of the co-chairs, the resolution needed additional work. But because Azerbaijan presented it as a final version, the co-chairs voted against. By the way, all the co-chairs clearly stated that on the issue that is most important for Azerbaijan – that of its territorial integrity – they had not changed their position at all. Thus, I would say that the reasons for the vote were again more technical than political.

AIW: How do you think the recent events in Georgia will affect the evolution of regional and international security? Might these events trigger a fatal erosion of the fundamental principle of the supremacy of law in international relations?

Amb. Istratov: Unfortunately, one has to acknowledge that now after these events no one is better off than they were before. As to the question of the supremacy of law, the question immediately arises as to which law. The erosion of the supremacy of international law as laid down after World War II began somewhat earlier, not on August 8. One should remember the Kosovo precedent and not only that. Unfortunately, the situation after August 8 did not become better because the leadership of Georgia did not live up to its obligations on the status of peacekeepers and the use of force in the region.

As a result, the situation changed, and our president Dmitry Medvedev has repeatedly stressed that the world became different place after August 8. However, the way in which it became different is not yet clear. We are still in the process of comprehending the scope of changes brought in by the recent events in the Caucasus. What is clear though is that things became different not only in Georgia, around Georgia, and within the region but far more broadly as well. It became clear that the unipolar world that existed after the end of the Cold War turned out to be unworkable: it was incapable of dealing with crises in various parts of the world, including the South Caucasus. That is one of the conclusions that were made as a result of the Georgian crisis.

But I repeat yet again, the process of recognizing the direction in which we are moving after the Georgian events is not over. It will be quite complex, difficult and take longer than a week, a month, or perhaps even a year. And like with any development, there will be both positive and negative consequences. Let's see which of them predominates as we take a step forward and perhaps a step back. One can only hope that the international community and the countries of the region will be able to use the current situation in order to make the maximum number of steps forward.

AIW: How do you think the recent events in Georgia will affect the further development of relations between Russia and the countries of the South Caucasus in general and with Azerbaijan in particular?

Amb. Istratov: The events in Georgia have made Russia's interest in ties with our partner Azerbaijan even greater. And because Azerbaijan is the largest country in what was earlier called the Trans-Caucasus, it has played a major role in the region earlier as well and that too increases the mutual interest of Russia and Azerbaijan in developing relations.

AIW: What is your assessment of Turkey's recent call for a Platform of Caucasus Stability and Cooperation? What do you see as its chances for success? Might it in the future replace the OSCE Minsk Group as the venue for peace talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia?

Amb. Istratov: Let's begin at the end. No one is seriously thinking about doing away with the Minsk Group, even if someone proposes a supplement. The Turkish initiative is interesting but it is not entirely new; a similar idea circulated in the 1990s. The question arises, of course, as to who would be the participants, as one should not ignore one of the regional countries' discontent about its being left aside the proposed framework. One way or the other, this proposal should be understood as one of the first attempts at comprehending the way the post-August 8 situation changed in the region. The attempt is indeed interesting, as sheer details of it allow arguing that the world has indeed changed. That same idea in 1990s looked slightly differently, and was less viable at that time. So I assume there will be discussions to explore how this platform might develop. At least, there has so far been no one saying that it is impossible.

AIW: Why has this proposal attracted more attention as a possibility than its earlier versions?

Amb. Istratov: The events of the beginning of August are responsible. A decade ago, this idea would not have been offered except after consultations with Washington. Now it has been proposed independent of the United States. I am not saying this is the single new element, but it is undoubtedly an important component.

AIW: What is the state of energy cooperation between Azerbaijan and Russia? What influence have the Georgian events had on this sector?

Amb. Istratov: Energy cooperation between our countries is important because both of us are exporters of oil and gas. And consequently, as exporters, we are on the same side relative to importers. As recently as two years ago, Azerbaijan was both an exporter and an importer, but now it is an exporter alone. As a result, relations between our countries are changing. Indeed, the fact that at present Russia, instead of suggesting buying gas from Azerbaijan or rejecting gas to it, offers to buy the Azerbaijani gas indicates that our countries now are partners in an entirely different sense than they were some three or four years ago. As to the impact of the Georgian events on this, it is still difficult to tell. They will definitely affect it but just how is still unclear.

Frequently, we hear talk about diversification. But that term has two meanings: diversification from the point of view of the consumer and diversification from the point of view of the producer. The consumer needs a maximum number of incoming channels while the producer needs a maximum number of outgoing ones. But to identify the vector which will predominate here is still impossible. I have my own views but it is still too early to share them.

AIW: What is your assessment of the current level of cooperation concerning the North-South corridor and how do you see this project developing in the future?

Amb. Istratov: The North-South corridor is an extraordinarily attractive idea especially given the countries at each end, Europe on the one hand and the countries of the Persian Gulf, India and Pakistan and even further afield, on the other. The potential volume of this route is also enormous and certain to grow. Consequently, the main question is whether the countries involved will work in unison together or compete. There, the chief difficulties are not connected with Russia or Azerbaijan. One should also stress that the North-South corridor is not an alternative but an overland supplement to the sea trading route.

AIW: How do you see the CIS evolving after the Georgian events and Georgia's decision to withdraw from this organization?

Amb. Istratov: The CIS suffered from Georgia's withdrawal, but it will not cease its existence as a result. How one evaluates the implications for the organization depends on the way one views it. If one considers the CIS only as a mechanism for a civilized divorce, then the departure of Georgia may be viewed as something that is likely to be a trend. But if we talk about the CIS as a place for cooperation on the territory of the former USSR, then the space of the USSR exists and will continue to exist regardless of whether politicians want it or not, just as there are countries in which one could still feel the imperial borders that ceased to exist in 1918 or countries where it is still clear where the 1939 borders extended regardless of decisions politicians make at different forums. Viewed from this perspective, the CIS will continue to exist.

Just as in the European Union, people speak about different rates of integration, so we in the CIS speak about different levels of cooperation. Some are closer, others less so. Within the CIS, there are some arrangements for only two or three countries, and there are others for all the members. Such variety will always exist. And consequently, the departure of one of the countries will not strongly affect the picture for all the others. I recall, for example, that Azerbaijan entered the CIS relatively late, and nevertheless, the CIS existed without Azerbaijan. I am not saying that all were happy about that, but nonetheless the organization existed. Thus, just as the CIS existed without Azerbaijan, it will exist without Georgia if Georgia will leave it.

AIW: You have compared the CIS with the European Union. Do you see the future of the CIS resembling that of the European Union?

Amb. Istratov: The CIS if indeed it ever develops in the way the EU has will not do so quickly. But just how it or indeed the EU will develop is far from clear and predictions are thus quite difficult to make.

AIW: What in your view ought to be the next steps in relations between Azerbaijan and Russia?

Amb. Istratov: Nothing dramatic is required; we simply need to continue to move forward along the course which we have been following in recent years. And then we will step by step – and quite quickly – come out on a new level of cooperation and find new directions of cooperation as well. Our countries need one another and

actively cooperate, as anyone can see with an unaided eye. In the first two months of his presidency, Dmitry Medvedev found time to come to Azerbaijan, and now, despite the beginning of an election campaign Ilham Aliyev found it possible to fly to Moscow. Thus, our cooperation continues regardless of objective complications such as these. This shows the level of mutual interest which exists.

As far as specific steps are concerned, I would mention the need to agree on the three parts of our borders which have not yet been delimited. That question is the single knot in our relations which must be untied. But at the same time, this step is a largely symbolic one and will not affect our relations very much. To resolve this and any other problems, the chief thing is the political will of both presidents. That exists, and this is no small thing.

AIW: Based on your extensive diplomatic experience, what advice would you give to Azerbaijani diplomats on how to improve their chances to defend and advance the interests of Azerbaijan abroad?

Amb. Istratov: First of all, one needs to approach the country one is working in or on with sympathy. Over the course of my 17 years in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I was first involved with the Supreme Soviet and with the Duma and I related to them with sympathy. Then I was involved with the United States, and I related to the US with sympathy, then to Ireland, then again to the United States and now toward Azerbaijan. Without this, one will not achieve anything. If one approaches another country professionally but without sympathy, nothing good will come of it.

One also needs to attempt to understand people. I always tried to understand and sympathetically relate to Americans. And now I try to understand and with sympathy relate to Azerbaijanis. One needs to try to understand people's mentality, which may be both so different from and so similar to one's own, and one can do this best by considering those aspects which unite people.

A diplomat also has to study languages, and that is a shortcoming I suffer from because in fact I have not mastered Azerbaijani. For more than two years, I've made several attempts but beyond a very minimum level, I have not been able to advance, and as a result, I blame it on my age. But one must study languages.

One also must study the culture and history of the country one is working in. But the chief thing, I would say, is to approach one's task with an open heart and the desire to make things better because a diplomat by definition should try to improve things.

**CENTRAL CAUCASO-ASIA:
TOWARD A REDEFINITION OF POST-SOVIET CENTRAL EURASIA**

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The disintegration of the Soviet Union not only resulted in the rise of a group of new independent states but to their integration into newly defined geopolitical areas. In recent years, the term Central Eurasia, which refers to Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, has been attracting attention as a distinct geopolitical area.

There are at least two ways to think about the Eurasian continent in geopolitical terms. The first one focuses on its European and Asian geographic dimensions in its geopolitical vision of the continent (e.g. Brzezinski 1997). The other approach, which arises from a Eurasianist conception of the region, drawing mainly on geography (Bassin 1991, p. 14), equates Russia with Eurasia (Lewis and Wigen 1997, p. 222; also Hauner 1994, p. 217), an idea that has become popular and much debated in the post-Soviet period (Hauner 1994, p. 222).

The Russian geopolitical school's vision of Eurasia thus embodies Russia's old imperial ambitions, and consequently, those who speak about Central Eurasia in terms of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan leaving aside such territories like Afghanistan, Northern Iran, the Northern Caucasus, Northwestern China, Cashmere, and the Tibetan Plateau are reflecting a Russian understanding that others have disputed (Weisbrode 2001, pp. 11-12).

Some geopolitical studies still follow the Soviet tradition and define Central Asia as including only five former Soviet republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, a definition that leaves out Afghanistan, Mongolia, and adjacent areas (Naby 1994, pp. 35-36). Another term, Greater Central Asia, is sometimes applied to the five former Soviet republics plus Afghanistan (Starr 2005).

"The Caucasus" as a geopolitical term appeared when Russia conquered the region. It was divided between "the Trans-Caucasus," the area south of the main Caucasus ridge, and "the North Caucasus," the area to the north of the ridge. The North Caucasus is now part of the Russian Federation, whereas the Trans-Caucasus is the portion south of it to the edge of Russian imperial expansion. After the USSR disappeared, the term "Trans-Caucasus" was replaced with the more correct "South Caucasus," with Russian writers alone using the former.

Viewed from a non-Russian perspective, the Caucasus includes not only Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the Russian North Caucasus but also northeastern Turkish areas (the ills of Agri, Ardahan, Artvin, Van, Igdyr, and Kars) and the northwestern parts of Iran (the ostanha of eastern Azerbaijan – Ardabil, Gilyan, Zanjan, Qazvin, Hamadan, and Western Azerbaijan) (Ismailov and Kengerli, 2003).

That division reflects the reality that all these regions have been populated by Caucasian peoples from time immemorial.

From this it follows that the Caucasus region consists not of two parts as the Russians insist but of three: the Central Caucasus (made up of three independent states – Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia); the Northern Caucasus (consisting of Russia's autonomous units bordering on the Caucasus), and the Southern Caucasus, which covers the parts of Turkey bordering on Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia (the Southwestern Caucasus), and northwestern ostanha of Iran (the Southeastern Caucasus) (Ismailov and Kengerli, 2003).

If we proceed from the fact that the eight countries discussed here form two sub-regions – the Central Caucasus and Central Asia – the larger region, which includes both sub-regions, should be called the *Central Caucasus-Asia* (in Russian, *Kavkazia*), as this preserves the term "Central" as the key one for both regions, while the new term "*Caucaso-Asia*" (or "*Caucasasia*") (Papava 2008).

The newly coined term "Central Caucasus-Asia" reflects a conceptual idea of the interests of strengthening the local countries' state sovereignty, which, in principle, contradicts the spirit and idea of Russo-centric Eurasianism. And this implicit pro-Western vector better suits the interests of these countries for stronger sovereignty, greater democratization, and the expansion of a market economy.

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WHY AZERBAIJAN'S NEW CONSULATE GENERAL IN AKTAU MATTERS

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More than any other country in the world, Azerbaijan views its consulates and especially its consulates general as equal in importance to its embassies and permanent missions abroad, not only because of the key role the former play in promoting Azerbaijani identity inside the republic and beyond but also because of the greater freedom consulates often have in reaching out to non-governmental actors in key countries. That makes the opening of the Baku's consulate general in Aktau, Kazakhstan, last month an important event.

Since regaining its independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has opened consulates general in Istanbul and Kars in Turkey, in Tabriz in Iran, in Los Angeles in the United States, and in Saint Petersburg in the Russian Federation. Now, on the basis of a decree issued by President Ilham Aliyev on May 1st of this year after nearly two years of discussions in Baku and Astana about the possibility of doing so, the Azerbaijan foreign ministry has opened a consulate general in Aktau.

The new consulate general is headed by Rashad Mammadov, who earlier headed the consular affairs department of the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Moscow and then headed the Azerbaijan foreign ministry's consular affairs department. And he will be responsible for dealing with the more than 6,000 Azerbaijanis who live in Western Kazakhstan and with Kazakh citizens, businesses and government institutions throughout the western third of that country.

Described in that way, one might be tempted to conclude that this consulate general is unlikely to play a significant role. But there are three reasons why such a conclusion almost certainly would be a serious mistake. First, as already noted, Azerbaijan has always viewed its consular missions as central to defining the national identity of Azerbaijanis at home and abroad. Indeed, some of the most important decisions of the 1918-1919 republic focused on the way in which consular work could serve a nation-building function.

Second, there is the tradition of activism by Azerbaijan's consuls and consuls general since 1992. In many of the countries where Azerbaijan has a consulate general, the consuls generally play a role equal to or on some occasions even greater than Azerbaijani ambassadors do, either because the cities in which they are located – Istanbul, Los Angeles and St. Petersburg, to give the three most important – are sometimes more important politically than the national capitals for Azerbaijani

interests or because these cities – Kars and Tabriz, for example – are centers of Azerbaijani life outside of Azerbaijan.

And third, Aktau not only combines both of these characteristics, but it is, in the words of Azerbaijan's ambassador to Kazakhstan Latif Gandilov, is "the gates to Central Asia. For Azerbaijanis, Kazakhstan begins with this city," and consequently, with the establishment of this consulate general, "Aktau will be Kazakhstan's third diplomatic city, after Astana and Almaty," making it no surprise that Baku should appoint one of its most senior officials to that post. That is especially the case because of the enormous size of Kazakhstan making a single diplomatic post and even a single diplomatic center impractical for many issues. [1]

As is true of all diplomatic missions abroad, what Azerbaijan's consulate general in Aktau will do will be driven by decisions in Baku and by developments in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and the regions of which they are parts. But there are five policy areas where this consulate general seems certain to play a major role, and it is worth establishing this checklist even though other items may soon be added and some of these may not be as important in the near term as they appear today.

First, the consulate almost certainly will play a key role in helping to promote a closer economic and even security relationship between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. In the wake of the Georgian war, the rules of the game governing relations in the Caspian basin are in a state of flux, and Aktau, because of its location, will play a potentially greater role in dealing with issues like the flow of oil and gas from Central Asia to the West and the demarcation of the Caspian seabed.

Second, the consulate is likely to help promote the flow of workers from Azerbaijan to Kazakhstan and from Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanis settled in Kazakhstan in massive numbers in Soviet times, and the skill sets of Azerbaijanis and Kazakhstanis fit together so well that consular work will tend to promote economic integration, the foundation for political cooperation in today's world.

Third, Aktau is likely to be involved in efforts to combat the flow of drugs and the trafficking of human persons from Central Asia toward the Russian Federation and the West. Because many of those involved in these activities either go through Aktau or the consular region for which it is responsible, the Azerbaijan consulate general is likely to assume a much higher profile not only within Kazakhstan but in those international organizations concerned with these matters.

Fourth, this consulate, even more than the Azerbaijani embassy, will likely be involved in promoting the shared Turkic identity not only of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan but of the other Central Asian states as well. Indeed, it can be expected by its existence alone to become a symbol of those historical cultural ties.

And fifth, the consulate is likely to prompt Kazakhstan to open consulates in Azerbaijan and other countries, and other countries, in the first instance, the Russian Federation and the Central Asian states, to open more consulates not only in Kazakhstan's "third capital" but elsewhere as well.

Consequently, an event that received relatively little notice even in the media of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan and almost none at all anywhere else is likely to have an enormous and extraordinarily important set of consequences, something that makes Azerbaijan's decision to open this representation all the more significant.

Reference

[1] <http://news.trendaz.com/index.shtml?show=news&newsid=1286227&lang=EN>.

TURKEY AND RUSSIA JOCKEY FOR POSITION IN THE REGION

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The military conflict between Russia and Georgia has opened the way for Turkey to increase its role in the South Caucasus, not only because of its own skillful policies but also because both Moscow and Washington want it to, albeit for different reasons. And what is most remarkable is that this transformation of the roles of the various players in the South Caucasus has been most visible in the evolution of the relationship between Turkey and Armenia, two countries long at odds that many felt could never reach an accord.

The failure of the OSCE Minsk Group to move toward a resolution of the Karabakh problem has, in the wake of the Georgian war, led both Moscow and Washington to welcome Turkey's offer to play a role on this question, the first lest it lose even more influence in the region and the second lest a reignited Karabakh war threaten its access to Caspian basin oil and gas.

Armenia appears to welcome Turkey's intervention in this regard not only because it promises to move the talks ahead but also because it would open the Turkish border for Armenian goods. But Yerevan is constrained by the Armenian diaspora which insists that every country, including Turkey, must recognize the events of 1915 as genocide. Only if the diaspora shifts its position on this will real progress be possible, and consequently, it is not surprising that the United States is seeking dialogue with various parts of the Armenian diaspora abroad about the utility for Armenia of a Turkish role in resolving the Karabakh dispute.

But however that may be, the negotiations behind the scenes between Ankara and Yerevan began in July 2008 in Switzerland, well before the Georgian events. And it is important to note that Yerevan did not make the recognition of the events of 1915 as genocide a precondition to these talks.

For not Turkey but Armenia is subject to a blockade and in difficult economic circumstances, Turkish move to engage in talks with Armenia have been most likely prompted by the influence of the United States, the final goal being the opening of the border between Armenia and Turkey.

The opening of that border and the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries would give "a green light" for American and Western expansion into Armenia. That is something opposition leader Levon Ter-Petrosyan has been waiting for. His last declarations of a desire for constructive relations with the

authorities and his refusal to call for their ouster are maneuvers with an eye to the Turkish-Armenian talks.

The United States would like to see Ter-Petrosyan as president of Armenia but to make that happen will require more than just talks with Turkey. It will require massive economic assistance to get Armenia out of its current slump. And that in turn will require the inclusion of Armenia in regional economic projects like the one that Turkey has proposed.

With the opening of the border with Turkey, Yerevan will be able to reach out to the world directly and thus free itself from its forced dependence on Russia. But before Armenia can expect that to happen, it will have to withdraw its forces from the seven regions of Azerbaijan that it has occupied beyond the borders of Karabakh. From the point of view of the Kremlin, this needs to take place with the participation of Russia and under the pro-Russian presidency of Serzh Sargsyan lest Moscow's position in Armenia weaken.

How this will play out depends not only on how each of these players sees the other but on others besides. And consequently, what would appear to be a simple vector in the relations of the countries of the South Caucasus this time as so often in the past may go in entirely unexpected directions and undercut the policies of one or more of the governments that are trying to arrange things to their liking.

A CHRONOLOGY OF AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

I. Key Government Statements on Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

In his speech to the UN General Assembly session, Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov says that "issues which cause disagreements in the region must be regulated by peaceful means on the basis of dialogue, the norms and principles of international law, and mutual respect" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131843.html>).

In a press release following his meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, President Ilham Aliyev is quoted as saying that "we live in this region and will live in this region; we are neighbors, and no one is departing this region" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/130625.html>).

President Ilham Aliyev tells visiting deputy speaker of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation Svetlana Orlova that "bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Russia are successfully developing in various sectors" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131637.html>).

Ramiz Mekhtiyev, the head of the Presidential Administration, says that Azerbaijan is the most stable country in the South Caucasus (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/130821.html>).

First Vice Speaker of the Milli Majlis Ziyafat Askerov says that there is no need to change the format of the OSCE Minsk group (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/130713.html>).

II. Key Statements by Others about Azerbaijan

Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan says in a September 23 op-ed in the *International Herald Tribune* that "as the process of normalizing Turkish-Armenian relations moves ahead, we must not spare our efforts to find a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem" (<http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/09/23/opinion/edbabacan.php>).

Israeli Ambassador to Baku Arthur Lenk says that the close ties between his country and Azerbaijan are based on five basic sets of interests, including the existence of communities in both countries with ties to the other and shared views about strategic cooperation (<http://www.anspress.com/index.php?nid=88676>).

Goran Lennmarker, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Special Envoy for Georgia and OSCE PA's Special Representative for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, says that "the independent countries of [the South Caucasus], Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, as concerned parties should hold talks on the settlement of conflicts in the Caucasus" (<http://www.today.az/news/politics/47699.html>).

US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza says in Baku that the United States will resume its cooperation with Russia in the Minsk Group after Moscow fulfills its obligations in Georgia, that the resolution of the Karabakh dispute will be based on the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and that "after the events in Georgia, the United States will always stand alongside Azerbaijan" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/130891.html>).

III. A Chronology of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

29 September

NATO's international exercise Cooperative Longbow / Lancer 2008 is launched in Armenia under the framework of Partnership for Peace (PfP) and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI). Azerbaijan's forces, like those of Turkey, Georgia and the Russian Federation, will not take place in these exercises (<http://www.anspress.com/index.php?nid=90093>).

A working group of the International Conference on Border Affairs meets in Baku to discuss problems Azerbaijan and other countries face in defending their borders (<http://news.trendaz.com/index.shtml?show=news&newsid=1307494&lang=EN>).

Turkish President Abdulla Gul reassures Turkish diaspora organizations that Ankara will not open the border with Armenia "until the occupied Azerbaijani lands are returned" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131858.html>).

27 September

The co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group release a joint statement welcoming the constructive atmosphere of talks with Azerbaijan and Armenia in New York (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131749.html>).

26 September

After the meeting of the Azerbaijan and Armenian foreign ministers, Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan says both support Ankara's proposal for a platform of security in the Caucasus (http://www.analitika.az/articles.php?item_id=20080926092337066&sec_id=8).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov meets with Ambassador Mark Lagon, the director of the US Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131527.html>).

25 September

President Ilham Aliyev receives visiting deputy speaker of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation Svetlana Orlova (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131637.html>).

President Ilham Aliyev receives visiting Turkish Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Shahin (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131638.html>).

24 September

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov meets with his GUAM counterparts at the UN General Assembly session in New York (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131413.html>). He also meets with Romanian Foreign Minister Lazar Comanescu (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131409.html>).

23 September

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov meets with the foreign ministers of Croatia, Luxemburg, Georgia and Ukraine at the UN General Assembly session in New York (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131290.html>).

22 September

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov meets with his Turkish counterpart Ali Babacan at the UN General Assembly meeting in New York (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131173.html>).

21 September

Iranian Ambassador to Baku Nasir Hamidi Zare says that Tehran "is conducting talks with Armenia and Azerbaijan and offering both sides itself as a mediator in the regulation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131138.html>).

Azerbaijani officials and commentators react to a suggestion by Armenian President Serzh Sargsian that Baku could win over the Armenian community of

Karabakh by investing there and in Armenia
(<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131210.html>).

Russian Ambassador to Baku Vasily Istratov says that "the deterioration of relations between Russia and the United States will not affect the format of the [OSCE] Minsk Group" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131123.html>).

19 September

President Ilham Aliyev receives awards from the Council of the Commanders of Border Forces of the CIS Countries
(<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131007.html>).

Bernard Fassier, the French co-chairman of the OSCE Minsk Group, pays a visit to Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131006.html>).

Foreign minister Elmar Mammadyarov while in London meets with British Foreign Secretary David Miliband and the British foreign ministry's special representative for the South Caucasus Brian Fall (<http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=88917>).

Ruslan Aushev, the former president of Ingushetia, arrives in Baku at the invitation of the Azerbaijani Union of Veterans of Afghanistan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/131016.html>).

18 September

President Ilham Aliyev receives visiting US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/130857.html>).

Defense Minister Safar Abiyev receives visiting US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/130845.html>).

The defense ministry announces that Azerbaijan's military doctrine has been prepared and will be adopted this year
(<http://www.day.az/news/politics/130844.html>).

17 September

President Ilham Aliyev tells a group of ambassadors from Islamic countries that he received on the occasion of Ramadan that Baku is "interested in the further all-sided development of relations with Muslim countries"
(<http://www.day.az/news/politics/130763.html>).

President Ilham Aliyev receives Andres Herkel and members of his PACE delegation who arrived in Azerbaijan to observe the presidential election
(<http://www.day.az/news/politics/130742.html>).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov meets in Brussels with Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the EU commissioner for external relations and European neighborhood policy (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/130746.html>).

Azerbaijan officials meet with the members of NATO in Brussels in "NATO plus Azerbaijan" format to discuss the implementation of IPAP (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/130752.html>).

16 September

President Ilham Aliyev holds a one-on-one meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in Moscow.

Defense Minister Safar Abiyev tells a delegation of the Assembly of the West European Union that the OSCE's Minsk Group has been working for 15 years without producing any results (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/130662.html>).

U.S. Ambassador to Baku Ann Derse says that events in Georgia show that the time has come for resolving all conflicts in the region (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/130605.html>).

Note to Readers

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