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AZERBAIJAN AND LITHUANIA

A Conversation with H.E. Mr. Kestutis Kudzmanas
Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania to Azerbaijan

February 25, 2009
Baku, Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan and the World: What do you see as the central core of the relationship between Lithuania and Azerbaijan?

Ambassador Kudzmanas: It is difficult to separate out just one element of what is an evolving and multi-faceted relationship. All of our cooperative ties – cultural, political and economic – are interrelated and reinforce one another. I can say that over the last two years, cultural ties between our two peoples have grown particularly well, with regular exchanges of arts and artists in both directions. Culture is a universal language, and these exchanges help us to understand one another better. This year, we have another occasion to learn from each other:

Lithuania marks its millennium as a country, with Vilnius serving as the cultural capital of Europe. And at the same time, Baku has become the cultural capital of Islam. That is an interesting parallel and one we should think more about.

Until very recently, both of our countries were focused more on their internal relations than on their external developments at least when it came to foreign affairs. Lithuania long had as its goal membership in the European Union and NATO, and now that we have achieved those goals, we are working to expand other ties. Lithuanian businessmen have found a common language with the businessmen of Azerbaijan, and I am sure they will each learn to "speak" it better over time. Evidence of that is provided by new plans to build Lithuanian mini-factories in Azerbaijan for food processing and milk products, facilities for which Lithuania has gained fame in Europe.

Political relations between our countries have also grown over the last two years. Bilateral visits, including at the presidential level, have increased, and we have signed more than ten different inter-governmental agreements. Your officers are studying at our military academy, and your border guards are drawing on our experience. But this cooperation is going in both directions: our veterinary, customs, and standards officials are working together. And our experience of accelerated integration into the EU and NATO is something many in Azerbaijan are interested in even if you do not at the end of the day plan to join either of them.

In this way, these three component parts of our relationship – culture, economics and politics – are indivisible, and this combination thus forms the basis of our relations. Yet another part of our relationship that I should mention involves tourism. Ever more Azerbaijanis are visiting Lithuanian resort, and the lines for visas at our embassy show the sharp growth in the interest of Azerbaijanis in Lithuania.

AIW: How have relations between Azerbaijan and Lithuania evolved during the post-Soviet period? What directions in bilateral ties have been most important and successful and where is additional attention needed?

Amb. Kudzmanas: Although our relations have grown consistently throughout the post-Soviet period, they were marked by a leap forward when Lithuania opened its embassy in Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan opened its mission in Lithuania. Before that, Lithuania covered Azerbaijan from Turkey, a reflection of our limited resources at the time. But as soon as our situation permitted it, Lithuania opened its embassy in Azerbaijan, a step dictated by the fact that Azerbaijan is the absolute leader in the region, thanks to the wise policy of the leadership of the country, you have been able to preserve stability in the country and kept Azerbaijan the most stable country in the Caucasus.

With the opening of the embassy, dealing with visas, information and other exchanges has become easier, and Lithuania is sharing its experience with Azerbaijan in various areas including integration with the WTO and EU. Now, that sharing has increased because Lithuania is a participant in the EU's "twinning" program in which a member state is to share its experience with a "twin" to the east. Among our efforts in this area are the building of the support structures for a parliament and the fight against corruption. And we are also active in promoting programs in public health.

AIW: In the course of your survey of the areas in which our two countries cooperate, you did not mention the energy sector, despite Lithuania's involvement in promoting

cooperation between the Caspian Basin states and Central and Eastern Europe. Could you say a few words about this process – not only where we are now but where we are headed?

Amb. Kudzmanas: I consciously avoided touching on this issue because it is so well known. And of course, in this area, Azerbaijan has the very greatest perspectives for the future. The first achievement which your president Heydar Aliyev made already at the beginning of the 1990s was that he turned the direction of pipelines from the Russian direction to a Western one by means of the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan route. The second major step in this direction which Ilham Aliyev wants to make is the linking of the petroleum resources of Central Asia to Europe via Azerbaijan with the Nabucco project. If he is able to do this, it will be an enormous achievement. And of course Azerbaijan now as never before is connected with Europe because the interests of the two coincide.

As far as Lithuania is concerned, it completely supports the cooperation of the European Union and Azerbaijan because the more oil and gas that flows to Europe from Azerbaijan, the easier it will be for us and others to negotiate with Russia. And therefore we greet the fact that Azerbaijan supports Nabucco and that Azerbaijan will serve as both a supplier and a transit country for it. There have been a whole series of energy support, but the one in Vilnius in 2007 played a key role because of the agreements reached there. As a result of one of them, the Sarmatia Project, it will be possible for Azerbaijani oil to flow in the direction of Baku-Georgia-Ukraine and further to Poland, and from there to Lithuania and other countries of Europe.

AIW: You mentioned Nabucco. How do you evaluate the latest conference on Nabucco held in Budapest in January? And what do you think the prospects are for Nabucco to be realized?

Amb. Kudzmanas: There are two aspects to this. From the side of Azerbaijan, there is a very definite interest in this project, in becoming a member of the consortium and a willingness to build a pipeline linking it with Turkmenistan. Thus from Baku's perspective the picture is perfectly clear. Unfortunately, from Europe's side, the picture is not entirely clear to the extent that political will, commercial risk and the interests of the companies involved are not always the same unlike in a command economy like Russia's where the government can impose a common approach. Indeed, one can even speak about a certain combination of Gazprom with the Kremlin and because of that I fear that the South Stream may be built before Nabucco. The existence of these two parallel projects has generated a lot of speculation, but ultimately Europe will need the supplies both can bring. Earlier, many people were concerned that there wouldn't be enough gas to fill Nabucco, but the discoveries at Southern Yoltan in Turkmenistan of an enormous gas field have largely alleviated those worried. But now a struggle has begun among Russia, Iran, Europe, China and even India and Pakistan over these reserves. In this situation, the European Union needs to display political will in order to push Nabucco forward, especially since at present, it stands last in line for Central Asian gas as a result of its inability to develop a common energy policy.

The time for talking is over, and now what is needed are some concrete steps toward the realization of Nabucco. As your president has said, if there is a pipeline, there will be gas. It is time to take the political decision to build it. I remember when the process of building Baku-Ceyhan began. At that time, critics said there was no point in building it because there wouldn't be enough oil. Now Iran and Russia are crying

the same thing about gas in the hopes of blocking the construction of Nabucco. But their complaints show precisely why Nabucco is needed.

AIW: Lithuania is one of the few countries which earlier were part of the Soviet Union but now are members of the European Union. Many people have suggested that there are numerous parallels in the two organizations. Do you agree with such assessments?

Amb. Kudzmanas: It is always possible to find parallels, but the very structure of the European Union is very different from the structure of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the common word in the two titles is very deceptive. In the European Union, there is a free market which didn't exist in the Soviet Union. In the European Union, on many questions the countries have to reach a consensus; there is no diktat from one country as there was in the Soviet Union. In the European Union, there are no repressive systems. The countries of Europe are proportionally represented in the European Parliament, in the Commission and in all other organs of the EU. The parallel thus can be seen only in that both - the one and the other - unified countries. But in the case of the European Union, this unification took place voluntarily while in the case of the Soviet Union that took place on a so-called "voluntarily forced" basis.

AIW: What do you think is the essence of the *Eastern Partnership* initiative advanced by Poland and Sweden within the EU and what future do you see for it?

Amb. Kudzmanas: There will be an Eastern Partnership summit in Prague in May of this year at which this initiative will be officially adopted. As far as my country is concerned, Lithuania very clearly sees its place in this initiative. Lithuania represents a living example of a country that left the Soviet space and quickly took all the steps necessary to become a member of the European Union. As a result, Lithuania is prepared to share within the framework of the Eastern Partnership initiative its experience with others. In a certain sense, Lithuania can serve for these countries as a kind of "expert" on the European Union, all the more so because since it was both in the Soviet Union and is now in the European Union, we find it easier to understand both worlds. Lithuania thus sees itself as a natural bridge between Europe and the post-Soviet space because our expertise is needed both in Brussels and in the countries of the post-Soviet space.

AIW: Lithuania has been an active supporter of GUAM and worked with it in the GUAM Plus format. What can you say about the current state of cooperation between Lithuania and GUAM? And how does Lithuania view the future evolution of GUAM and its own cooperation with that group?

Amb. Kudzmanas: If you look at a map, you can see that GUAM is a bridge between the post-Soviet space and the countries of the European Union. And Lithuania, just like Poland, sees itself as a natural extension of this bridge. That is because we are already in the European Union but we also are next door to you. This factor helps to explain out common interests in the transportation sphere. Between Klaipeda and Odessa is now running a high-speed train which we consider as a natural extension of the transportation corridor from Odessa to Baku and from Baku to the markets of the trans-Caspian region along the TRACECA Silk Road. But our cooperation is not limited to this, and we are actively involved in helping the GUAM countries reach European standards.

AIW: Lithuania has always expressed its full support for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Why then did it not vote in favor of UN General Assembly Resolution 10693, which was passed in March 2008?

Amb. Kudzmanas: We voted as we did because this reflected the common position of the European Union, but at the same time at all bilateral meetings, Lithuania has reiterated its unchanging support for the principle of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. But it should be noted that even at the UN, Lithuania did not vote against the resolution. It abstained. And because it abstained, it was able to prevent several European countries where there is a strong Armenian lobby from voting against the resolution. This was a compromise decision reached within the European Union between those who intended to vote in favor of the resolution and those who were going to vote against.

AIW: But France voted against the resolution...

Amb. Kudzmanas: Yes, France somehow departed from this common position. I cannot speak for France. Perhaps the influence of the Armenian lobby played a role. And perhaps France viewed this resolution as a vote of no confidence in the Minsk Group, one of whose co-chairs France is. In that case, voting for it would have been a vote against France.

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

Amb. Kudzmanas: At present, political relations and trust between the two countries are at a very high level. But on the other hand, I very much hope that there will be a big jump in investments both from Lithuania into Azerbaijan and from Azerbaijan into Lithuania. This will link us together even more closely. We in Lithuania are ready to provide special assistance of various kinds to Azerbaijanis who invest there. And Azerbaijanis have an interest in doing so because we are a gateway to the European Union.

AIW: Given your experience, what advice would you give young Azerbaijanis beginning their careers in diplomacy?

Amb. Kudzmanas: Above all, every diplomat represents his country and in this connection it is very important to be able to inform other countries about the best features of one's own. Azerbaijan has a large number of such attractive features and should be working hard to attract more tourists. It is a unique country, one with a sea, mountains, sub-tropical zones and so on. And Azerbaijani embassies can be a kind of propagandist for the country's tourist industry. That is very important because it can exert a positive influence on many other areas.

On the other hand, Azerbaijan has a unique chance through its embassies to present on a regular basis films and mugham music. In that way, you can show your great cultural heritage to the world and thus increase the level of mutual understanding.

And embassies are natural points for expanding economic ties between countries. Our embassy, for example, is always open for Lithuanian entrepreneurs traveling to Azerbaijan. Having arrived here, they seek advice and we try to help them in every way possible.

EASTERN EUROPE AS AZERBAIJAN'S BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

Paul Goble
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No other region of the world has played a greater role in Azerbaijan's foreign affairs than the states that some call the old Eastern Europe and others the New Europe – the band of countries between the Russian Federation in the east and the reunited Germany in the west. That was not something either those countries or Baku expected a decade ago and it is not something that many in either place fully recognizes now. But it is fair to say that in five important ways, the governments of this region now form an indispensable bridge to the future for Azerbaijan and her people.

First, because of geography and larger geopolitical interests, Eastern Europe represents the obvious transit route for the oil and gas that Azerbaijan produces and the petroleum products of the Caspian Basin and Central Asia that flow through its territory. While that accident of geography is not the most important of the functions this region performs for Azerbaijan, it is the one that not only has sparked the reciprocal opening of embassies and visits but also increasingly frequent and high level meetings on energy issues and the political structures such as GUAM and its adjuncts like Poland and Lithuania needed to create the conditions for the transit of oil and gas from Azerbaijan to Europe a reality.

In 1991, few would have predicted that Azerbaijan would have embassies in most of the countries of Eastern Europe and most of the East European countries would have missions in Baku, and even fewer would have forecast that there would be so many meetings of presidents, prime ministers, foreign and defense ministers, and other more junior officials, thus creating a network of contacts about energy flows and then other and ultimately more important issues. Indeed, policy makers in both Eastern Europe and Baku and even more those in capitals further afield not only did not expect this development but have not yet taken it fully into account.

Second, again in ways few on either side expected, the countries of Eastern Europe have served as models for the transition from communism. Most Western capitals assumed there was one model for how that should be done, and most people in Moscow assumed there was quite another. But each expected Azerbaijan to follow one or the other path. Eastern Europe showed that there are multiple paths, and its efforts both successful and less so to make the transition from communism to a more open political and economic system provided a kind of cafeteria from which Azerbaijan could and did choose.

Had there not been this range of routes offered by Eastern Europe, Baku would have faced a far greater challenge in moving from the past to the future. But by picking up on the policies of Warsaw or Kyiv or Vilnius, the Azerbaijani government was able to craft its own approach, one that drew on the East European experience both because the peoples and governments there had experienced Soviet

occupation and because they were not the old imperial center which many Azerbaijanis would and did distrust.

Third, and related to that, the Eastern European countries have provided a road map for how to develop relations with Moscow. These countries recognized a fundamental truth early on: geography is congealed history, and none of them is going to move physically however much it may move psychologically. That meant that these countries even before Azerbaijan did so had to develop relations not only with the West but with the Russian Federation, no easy task given the past but a balancing act that has made it possible for them to survive in one of the more historically difficult parts of the world.

Like his father and predecessor, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev is very proud of what he calls his "balanced" foreign policy, one that seeks to carve out a place for his country not by linking its fate to one side in the geopolitical game but rather by tilting now in one direction and then in another in order to maintain a "balance" among these competing forces. It is not an easy task, but it is certainly one that has been easier for President Aliyev because some of the governments of Eastern Europe pioneered that approach.

Fourth, East European countries increasingly play the role of spokesman for and even representatives of Azerbaijan in key European institutions like the EU and NATO, not because Azerbaijan is incapable of speaking for itself but rather because it may not ultimately choose to belong to either although it has obvious interests in both. And Azerbaijan's cultivation of these countries as its representatives and spokesmen has given it a boost internationally that many of the other post-Soviet states do not have.

In recent weeks, many people have focused on the role of intermediary that several East European countries have played for Azerbaijan with regard to NATO and even more have discussed the role the East Europeans are playing as interlocutors between Baku and the EU as that latter organization promotes its Eastern Partnership program. But despite this attention, few have underscored that it is those countries which like Azerbaijan have experienced the communist past which are now in a position to help others complete the transition to the future.

And fifth, the East Europeans have – and this is far and away their largest contribution for Azerbaijan – redrawn the mental map of Eurasia. Most East Europeans and certainly most Azerbaijanis in the past carried a mental map on which their country was located on the edge, in the East European case, on the far left side of the map, and in the case of Azerbaijan, at the bottom of the map. Now, the East Europeans are reforming that mental image, with themselves not at one end of the map but rather at the center, between the West and Moscow, and following in their wake, Azerbaijanis too are coming up with a new map in which Azerbaijan is at the center of a world they define rather than at the edge of one others have imposed. With the opening of each new embassy and the conclusion of each visit in both directions, that shift in mental maps is becoming ever more obvious and important, forcing people in both Eastern Europe and Azerbaijan, on the one hand, and other governments East and West, on the other, to understand these countries not in terms of old maps but in terms of new ones. And as the one and the other groups do that, the possibilities for Azerbaijan just like those in Eastern Europe will only increase, albeit with an increase in complexity with which all will be forced to deal.

AZERBAIJAN AND ROMANIA: AN ALLIANCE OF NECESSITY

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Since the end of communism in both countries, Azerbaijan and Romania have become allies of necessity, given their geographical and strategic locations and the common goals of their governments and peoples regarding both domestic development and foreign policy priorities. And that closeness, first underscored by the visit of Heydar Aliyev to Bucharest in 1995, continues to grow.

The two countries cooperate closely at the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE, where they are both members, and Romania has recently joined the EU and NATO, the two Euro-Atlantic institutions Azerbaijan seeks further integration into. More immediately, Romania is the only European participant in the TRACECA program, the modern form of the Silk Road in which Azerbaijan is vitally interested, and Bucharest is equally involved in promoting the construction of the 1400 km-long Baku-Constanta-Trieste pipeline to carry Azerbaijani and Caspian Basin oil to Europe. Moreover, Romania is also an outspoken supporter of NABUCCO gas arrangements.

Unlike many of the countries that emerged in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet bloc, Romania and Azerbaijan have embassies in the capital of the other, with Romania having opened one in Baku in 1996 and Azerbaijan having set up one in Bucharest in 2001. It is worth underlining that Azerbaijan's embassy in Romania was its first in Eastern Europe, itself a mark of the importance of bilateral ties.

Those government arrangements have been supplemented by people-to-people groups like the Azerbaijan-Romania Friendship Society established in Baku and the Romania-Azerbaijan Friendship Association established in Bucharest in 2001. Both are active individually and collectively in promoting relations between the two societies.

Romanian writers, like Mihai Eminescu, have been translated into Azerbaijani, and the works of Romanian diplomat Nicolae Titulescu, composer George Enescu, sculptor Constantin Brancusi, and others have gained new attention in Baku. And Azerbaijani works, including the Kitabi-Dede Korgut, the Koran, and various literary and scholarly works have been published in Romania.

Cooperation between academic institutions is also growing with various arrangements already having been made between universities in both countries. As a result, two Romanians have received doctorates in Azerbaijan and two Azerbaijanis have received the terminal degree from Romanian institutions. But that is just the peak of a growing pyramid of students from one country spending time in the other. One of the most important forms of cooperation involves military training for Azerbaijani officers in NATO courses in Bucharest. And starting from February 2009,

Romania took over from Turkey the mission of the NATO Contact Point Embassy (CPE) in Azerbaijan.

In all international forums, Bucharest has supported Baku on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, insisting that any resolution of that dispute must be based first and foremost on the principle of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Moreover, Romania is behind the Black Sea Synergy program that supports Azerbaijan's position and was adopted by the European parliament at the start of 2008. And at present, SOCAR has an office in Bucharest, the first of its kind in Europe.

During Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev's visit to Romania in September 2007, the two countries opened a special street in honor of Heydar Aliyev, featuring not only his name but a statue, measures of how close relations between the two countries now are and of how they are likely to develop in the future.

A CHRONOLOGY OF AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

I. Key Government Statements on Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

During an interview broadcast on Russian television, President Ilham Aliyev says that "today it seems to us that it is possible to find a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" because "there are certain hopes that Armenia will approach the question with more constructive and realistic positions. There are definite signals" (ru.apa.az/news.php?id=127541).

During a visit to Greece, President Ilham Aliyev reaffirms that if Armenia would observe international legal norms, including the recognition of the territorial integrity of existing states, it would be possible for the two sides to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict very quickly.

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov says in Kyiv that Azerbaijan is actively preparing proposals for discussion in the framework of the European Union's Eastern Partnership program ranging from questions of transit to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148544.html>).

Speaking at the Moscow embassy of Azerbaijan, Leyla Aliyeva, the head of the Russian representation of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, says that "the genocide of Azerbaijanis in Khojali is a tragedy forever written in the history of Azerbaijan as one of the most terrible and blackest pages." She adds that it is "very terrible that such a tragedy took place at the end of the 20th century but up to now has not found a political-legal and even more a moral assessment by the international community" (<http://www.day.az/news/society/148531.html>).

II. Key Statements by Others about Azerbaijan

Sergey Naryshkin, head of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, says during his visit to Baku that "Azerbaijan is our chief partner in the region both in economic and in political spheres. He adds that Moscow favors expanding

cooperation in these areas as well as in humanitarian and military areas (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148605.html>).

Ioannis Metaxas, the Greek ambassador to Azerbaijan, says that his government, which now chairs the OSCE, supports the Minsk Group's efforts to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute and believes that the dispute must be resolved on the basis of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148399.html>).

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki says that his government "recognizes the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan" and that Tehran wants to see "the development of trade and other economic ties with our neighbors." Saying that the existing situation in the South Caucasus is not "acceptable," he adds that Iran is ready to provide Azerbaijan "with all possible assistance" for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148386.html>).

III. A Chronology of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

28 February

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov says that the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied territories would benefit the Armenian economy first of all, adding that in his view, Baku must continue to "explain and show Armenia" just how much it would benefit from the opening of transportation and communication links and the growth of trade as a result (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148670.html>).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov receives Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin, who oversees the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict for Moscow. Karasin is in Baku as part of the Russian delegation led by Sergey Narshkin, the head of the Russian Presidential Administration (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148735.html>).

Latif Gandilov, Azerbaijan's ambassador to Kazakhstan, meets with that country's new deputy minister of foreign affairs, Konstantin Zhigalov, to discuss energy and transportation issues and expanding bilateral cooperation in advance of both the sixth session of the Azerbaijan-Kazakhstan intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation and the summit of Turkic-language states (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148712.html>).

27 February

President Ilham Aliyev receives the three co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group to discuss the latest moves toward the regulation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Earlier, members of the group meet with Azerbaijan's foreign and defense ministers (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148621.html>).

Dennis Rehberg, a Republican from the US state of Montana, has joined the Congressional Working Group on Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148642.html>).

26 February

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov meets with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodimir Ogryzko to discuss bilateral relationships and the future of GUAM. Mammadyarov is in Kyiv to take part in a GUAM ministerial (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148495.html>).

The Azerbaijani foreign ministry receives a Russian delegation for a round of consultations between the two diplomatic services. Among the topics they discuss are the status of Russian citizens in Azerbaijan and that of Azerbaijani citizens in the Russian Federation. This is the first such meeting of the two ministries since January 2007 (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148442.html>).

Moscow appoints Vladimir Dorokhin as its new ambassador to Azerbaijan. The Russian diplomat had been working as an ambassador for special assignments and earlier headed the ministry's department for cultural ties and UNESCO affairs. He replaces Vasily Istratov (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148516.html>).

25 February

President Ilham Aliyev sends a message of sympathy to his Turkish counterpart Abdulla Gul after the Turkish airliner crash in Amsterdam (<http://www.anspress.com/index.php?nid=105219>).

24 February

In advance of the 17th anniversary of the Khojali tragedy, residents of that city sent an appeal to the UN, the Council of Europe and the OSCE calling for international recognition of that event as an Armenian-orchestrated genocide against the Azerbaijani people (<http://www.anspress.com/index.php?nid=105101>).

23 February

President Ilham Aliyev receives Fridon Todua, the deputy chairman of the Georgian parliament (<http://ru.apa.az/news.php?id=128311>).

20 February

The Romanian embassy in Baku replaces the Turkish embassy as the point of contact between NATO and the government of Azerbaijan (ru.apa.az/news.php?id=128093).

Zbigniew Brzezinski, former US National Security Advisor, tells the Georgian media that the US "should be concerned lest Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan become victims of Russian-American dialogue" and that it "must do everything for the defense of these countries" (ru.apa.az/news.php?id=128003).

19 February

President Ilham Aliyev receives Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki and the two express satisfaction at the level of relations between the two countries (ru.apa.az/news.php?id=127957).

18 February

At the opening of ceremonies declaring Baku the "capital of the Islamic world" for 2009, President Ilham Aliyev says that relations with the Islamic world of which it is a part are an important component of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. He calls on the Muslim countries of the world to expand their cooperation and support one another through the OIC and ISESCO. And he stresses that "Islam is a religion of brotherhood and tolerance" (ru.apa.az/news.php?id=127786).

President Ilham Aliyev says that Baku is actively working to restore all historical monuments in Azerbaijan but "as a result of the occupation of Azerbaijani lands by Armenia, we cannot guarantee the complete preservation of our historical inheritance" (<http://ru.apa.az/news.php?id=127772>).

Atta al-Manane Bakkhit, the deputy general secretary of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, says that the Muslim world "stands behind Azerbaijan" with regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and will do everything it can to ensure that the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is respected (ru.apa.az/news.php?id=127769).

The Baku office of the OSCE supports the idea of forums to discuss proposed changes in the Constitution of Azerbaijan. The forums are scheduled for the first two weeks in March and will take place in four cities (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148249.html>).

17 February

During an interview broadcast on Russian television, President Ilham Aliyev says that "today it seems to us that it is possible to find a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" because "there are certain hopes that Armenia will approach the question with more constructive and realistic positions. There are definite signals" (ru.apa.az/news.php?id=127541).

16 February

President Ilham Aliyev visits Greece where he meets with his Greek counterpart Karlos Papulias, signs a series of bilateral accords on energy transit and security issues, and declares that if Armenia would observe international legal norms, including the recognition of the territorial integrity of existing states, then the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would be solved quickly.

Turkish Prime Minister Taip Erdogan says that Ankara will play an even greater role in the future in the development of Azerbaijani-Armenian and Russian-Georgian relations as it expands its foreign policy efforts in the Middle East and the European Union as well (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148000.html>).

Note to Readers

The editors of "Azerbaijan in the World" hope that you find it useful and encourage you to submit your comments and articles via email (adabiweekly@ada.edu.az). The materials it contains reflect the personal views of their authors and do not

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