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School of International Affairs

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ROMANIA – THE NEW NATO CONTACT POINT IN AZERBAIJAN

An Interview with H.E. Mr. Nicolae Ureche
Ambassador of Romania to the Republic of Azerbaijan

March 10, 2009
Baku, Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan in the World: What is the state of political dialogue between Romania and Azerbaijan?

Ambassador Ureche: Romania has had a strong interest in developing relations with Azerbaijan from the very beginning, having been the second country (after Turkey) to recognize the Republic of Azerbaijan. In the years since that time, our two countries from their president down have had frequent and fruitful contacts, and this dialogue has boosted our bilateral cooperation.

Given recent developments in the region, Romania is committed to consolidating its links with states in the Caucasus. As an EU and NATO member bordering the Black Sea, Romania seeks enhanced dialogue and cooperation with the states in this region. It is playing an active role in EU initiatives including the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership, and Black Sea Synergy. Romania has been and will continue to be a reliable partner of Azerbaijan and to seek further development of our bilateral contacts and collaboration in multilateral settings.

AIW: What role do economic ties play in Romania's relationship with Azerbaijan?

Amb. Ureche: After political dialogue, which is at an excellent level, economic cooperation is our most important interest. Bilateral economic ties continue to grow, with a total turnover of 162.9 million US dollars during the first 11 months of 2008, up from only nine million US dollars in 2004. But we believe that our two countries have a great potential for expanding beyond our current level.

Later this year, the fourth session of our bilateral Joint Economic Commission will meet in Baku, and we expect it to lead to the further growth of economic ties. Our embassy is actively promoting trade and investment in Romania, and representatives of several Romanian companies will visit Baku later this year to meet with their Azerbaijani counterparts.

Azerbaijani exports to Romania are much greater than Romanian exports to Azerbaijan, and we would like to eliminate that imbalance. That will be difficult given the export of oil and derivatives from Azerbaijan to Romania, but we would wish to boost our exports to Azerbaijan to the extent we can.

AIW: How do you see the current economic crisis affecting our two countries and their relations?

Amb. Ureche: The economic crisis is affecting the countries in similar ways with the stagnation in real estate markets and banking beginning to spread to other sectors, leading to layoffs in many areas and thus affecting all of us. To combat these effects, we need to adopt a mix of approaches and to expand cooperation with each other. Romania stands ready for mutually advantageous cooperation with Azerbaijan which would extend beyond the oil sector, and we believe we can work closely together in a number of directions within the non-oil sector of Azerbaijan's economy, such as furniture, textiles, industrial equipments, shipbuilding, etc.

AIW: How do you see the role of energy cooperation in our bilateral relations?

Amb. Ureche: Energy remains important for both Romania and Azerbaijan. During the official visit of President Traian Basescu to Azerbaijan in October 2006, the two countries discussed the creation of a strategic partnership in this field aimed at covering all aspects of this cooperation. That commitment has been reinforced by all subsequent bilateral visits at all levels. Although there has been somewhat slower progress in this direction that we had hoped, we remain optimistic that our cooperation in energy will grow.

AIW: What other areas is Romania interested in developing its cooperation with Azerbaijan?

Amb. Ureche: Romania is also interested in expanding transportation connections between our two countries in order to increase the transit of goods from Caucasus and Central Asia via the Black Sea and the Danube to the Western Europe. In this context, Azerbaijan could help transform the Romanian Port of Constanta into a main gateway. Moreover, we share an interest in supporting the existing TRACECA projects and revitalizing the Silk Road. In addition, there are other areas for possible cooperation including agriculture, the food industry, construction and textiles.

AIW: Why did Romania seek the position of NATO Contact Point Embassy in Azerbaijan?

Amb. Ureche: Romania sought this position because of its commitment to supporting Azerbaijan's efforts to strengthen and expand its cooperation with the Atlantic alliance. We are confident that our efforts will contribute to the successful implementation of IPAP II as well as to better coordination of efforts between NATO and Baku to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan. We also want to contribute to providing the Azerbaijani people with more information about the tasks and objectives of NATO and its member states. And we look forward to building on the successful effort Turkey made in this capacity over the past 16 years. In addition, we hope to expand NATO discussions on energy issues, something Azerbaijan is naturally very much interested in as well.

AIW: What precisely is a NATO Contact Point Embassy and what does it do?

Amb. Ureche: Most people are not aware that the alliance does not have any embassies abroad, but as NATO has evolved, it became obvious that the alliance needs to be represented in countries where NATO has an interest. As a result, NATO in 1992 created a network of Contact Point Embassies, to support the work at first of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) and then that of that body's successor, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). Such embassies are not formal NATO diplomatic missions. Instead, they are one of several channels through which the alliance's policies are communicated to partner countries and, in the other direction, by means of which these countries can communicate with NATO Headquarters.

AIW: Could you describe some of the activities Romania is engaged in as a NATO Contact Point Embassy?

Amb. Ureche: Our major task is to help people understand the nature of NATO today. Disseminating information on that score is not easy, and I would like to take this opportunity to advertise the official website of NATO at www.nato.int and also to mention the existence of its Internet television channel at www.natochannel.tv. That task should make it obvious that we are concerned not just with the political elite but with journalists, students, academic specialists and the public. In addition to this information effort, we also provide logistical support to NATO officials visiting Azerbaijan, although the embassies of other NATO countries here in Baku also help out in that regard.

AIW: Could you mention other fields where cooperation between our two countries is taking place?

Amb. Ureche: We are cooperating in a wide variety of areas, including culture, science and education; ties that help us understand one another better. Here in

Baku, we have a Romania-Azerbaijan Cultural Relations Association named after our poet Mihai Eminescu, a consultative council that brings cultural figures from the two countries together and helps every interested Azerbaijani understand Romania better. And there is a similar Azerbaijan-Romania Friendship Association in Bucharest which works to raise awareness among people in Romania of Azerbaijani culture and science, and has as one of achievements the translation of the Quran into Romanian.

Further, we are working with the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy and other Azerbaijani higher schools. Several Azerbaijani students are currently studying in Romanian Universities. More can be done in this regard, however, and I look forward to work with Azerbaijanis in the future.

NATO'S POSSIBLE EXPANSION TO THE EAST: SOME UNEXPECTED IMPLICATIONS FOR AZERBAIJAN

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Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008 and Moscow's destabilization campaign in Ukraine since that time have prompted many in NATO capitals to ask ever more insistently whether either country let alone both should be invited to join the Western alliance anytime soon. And while such questions appear to have put on hold the chance that either will be taken in soon, they have also opened the broader debate about the expansion of the alliance in ways that are certain to have some profound implications for Azerbaijan.

On the one hand, any pause in the expansion of the alliance, especially after the efforts Washington made toward that end earlier, will affect not only those countries who have actively sought membership but may now have to wait or perhaps not get it at all and also for their neighbors who will have to recalibrate their security calculations in either case.

And on the other hand, this pause is leading at least some participants in these discussions to recognize that Ukraine and Georgia are not a natural pair but rather two countries whose radically different geopolitical and security situations suggest that they should be treated separately, however much the two have sought to boost themselves through references to their common "color" revolutions. Some argue that Ukraine should get in sooner than Georgia; a few argue the reverse.

These discussions, of course, not only focus on the candidate countries but also on their neighbors, with many in the alliance convinced that if NATO does not extend membership immediately, it will need to take other steps for both the current candidates and their neighbors. And these conversations in turn are even leading a few to consider that there is a better pairing of countries than Ukraine and Georgia and that is Georgia and Azerbaijan. While there is no indication NATO is ready to offer membership to this pair anytime soon or a certainty that Baku would accept if it

were, such discussions likely will have an impact on other sets of relations and thus help to define the environment within which Azerbaijan will now be operating.

There are five possible permutations to NATO's expansion eastward – Ukraine and Georgia are invited to join together and soon, neither is invited in, Ukraine gets in but Georgia does not, Georgia gets in but Ukraine does not, and Georgia and Azerbaijan eventually get in together, probably but not necessarily after Ukraine. Each of these has implications, some obvious and others not so obvious, for Baku and its foreign policy.

Option One: Ukraine and Georgia Become NATO Members. If the Atlantic alliance moves to take in both Ukraine and Georgia, three things are almost certain: First, Russia will move quickly to try to prevent any other former Soviet republics from getting in, using all the means at its disposal. Second, the inclusion of both and the actions of Moscow will lead other countries in the region to seek membership. And third, the alliance itself will expand its programs for the countries neighboring both Ukraine and Georgia, among them being in the latter case Azerbaijan.

A year ago, Kyiv and Tbilisi appeared on the brink of becoming members. Now, that is far less likely given Russian actions and the onset of the economic crisis which is causing many member states to rethink what they are willing and able to do. But if NATO did include the two at once, Azerbaijan almost certainly would find itself both under increased Russian pressure both overt and covert not to seek membership, offered additional support by NATO and its member states to promote its security in the changed neighborhood, and likely under increasing domestic pressure to seek membership lest it fall again under Russian domination.

That combination of circumstances again, almost certainly, would lead to some radical discontinuities in Azerbaijan's relations with other countries, both inside the alliance and outside, changes that would put to the test President Ilham Aliyev's hitherto successful prosecution of a balanced foreign policy.

Option Two: Neither Ukraine Nor Georgia Become NATO Members. If as now seems more likely NATO decides not to offer membership to either Ukraine or Georgia anytime soon, the consequences could prove equally dramatic and unsettling across the region. On the one hand, both Kyiv and Tbilisi would certainly feel that they had been misled; their neighbors would assume that the alliance's expansion was at an end, at least for a long time to come, and Moscow would seek to exploit this situation by presenting itself as the obvious alternative to the West, an effort that might bear fruit.

On the other hand, many in the alliance would feel that they would have to do more short of membership to support Ukraine and Georgia and more for the neighbors of the two, albeit in ways that would not encourage the others to think that they could look forward to membership in the near term. That might reassure some but it would simultaneously reduce the pressure in all these countries to reform their military and political systems while perhaps provoking Moscow, many of whose officials would see such arrangements as a kind of covert expansion whatever Brussels and Washington might say.

In this situation, Azerbaijan would likely have to "reset" its policies, tilting more toward Moscow relative to the West diplomatically and considering how best to proceed with its internal military modernization program, one that has been moving

the Azerbaijani military away from Soviet-style systems toward interoperable NATO ones. Again, such a situation could lead to serious discontinuities, with Baku forced to react quickly to changes in the actions of all outside actors.

Option Three: Ukraine Gets In but Georgia Does Not. Moscow's use of force in Georgia has led some analysts and policy makers within NATO governments to consider that perhaps the alliance should take in Ukraine but not Georgia. While the political situation in Kyiv is far from stable and clear, it is certainly more stable and clear than the one in Tbilisi. And by splitting the difference, both those committed to expansion and those opposed could claim a certain victory, confident in the one case that the alliance's proclaimed open door has not been slammed shut and in the other that NATO has not risked "a bridge too far."

In some ways, this option would pose the most serious challenge to Azerbaijan and its foreign policy. It would suggest whatever anyone said that the West has accepted a Russian *droit de regard* in the Caucasus, something that would give Russia a freer hand there. It would also indicate that no south Caucasus state is likely to get into Western institutions anytime soon and thus must make the best deal it can with Moscow. And it would mean that other, non-security arrangements including the transit to the West of Caspian Basin oil and gas would have to be revisited and possibly sacrificed.

Option Four: Georgia Gets In but Ukraine Does Not. When Russia invaded Georgia, some in the West suggested that NATO should immediately offer membership to Georgia in order to stay Moscow's hand. That was never a real possibility, given differences within the alliance, and this option is even less likely now. Georgia has not stabilized, Russia has not backed down, and both Europe and the United States are seeking to deal with Moscow on a status quo ante basis that would be impossible were NATO to extend membership to Georgia alone. Indeed, Moscow would see this as a provocation of the purest kind.

But for analytic completeness, it is worth considering for the following reason: Suggestions that the alliance should proceed in this way have already had two consequences. On the one hand, they have pointed to a reality all too often forgotten: defense alliances are for defense. Those who are at risk are thus those who need them most. And on the other, by separating Georgia and Ukraine, those who made this argument – and their numbers were never large – have opened the door to the possibility that NATO needs to reconsider its current thinking about just what it is and explore other options and other possible members.

As the alliance does so, it almost certainly will devote more attention to Azerbaijan, a country which resembles Georgia in terms of its location, the geopolitical threats it faces as a result, and its role in the east-west flow of oil and gas and the west-east flow of geopolitical influence. That means that many in the alliance will want to do more for Azerbaijan even if NATO never extends membership to Tbilisi let alone Baku, and that in turn suggests that such discussions are certain to prompt Moscow to seek to forestall such a development.

Option Five: Georgia and Azerbaijan Become Members. If the Georgia alone option seems remote, the notion that Georgia and Azerbaijan, however much in common they may have, might join NATO together with or without Ukraine seems impossibly so. Azerbaijan has not sought membership, although it is an active participant in many NATO and EU programs, and it is far from clear whether Baku would accept

inclusion were it to be offered. But the pause in expansion makes this option less unthinkable at some point in the future than it was only six months or a year ago.

Some experts and officials in the region are now talking about it, and such conversations, even if they seem unlikely to go anywhere anytime soon, have their own dynamic, one that will force some decisions on those now reluctant to make them and prompt others, opposed to those decisions to act in anticipation of them. Both these calculations will affect Baku and its foreign policy, complicating the life of its leaders and diplomats who will face new challenges on all sides. And that development in turn means that Azerbaijan must begin to think about the implications expected and even more unexpected of NATO expansion whether in fact the alliance grows eastward or not.

AN ARMENIAN ACKNOWLEDGES EXISTENCE OF ARMENIAN TERRORISM

A Review of
Markar Melkonyan
My Brother's Road: an American's fateful journey to Armenia
(London and New York: Taurus, 2005/2007).

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There have been so many books documenting Armenian terrorism that most people are now familiar with what they are going to say without even looking into them. But this memoir in which Markar Melkonyan discusses the career of his brother, Monte, is significant not only because it opens a window to the hidden world of the inner workings of Armenian terrorism and helps to explain the mindset behind those who are part of that effort but perhaps even more because it represents a rare if not in fact unique Armenian acknowledgement of Armenian terrorism, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

Motivated by Myths

Born in California in November 1957, Melkonyan grew up in a family which like many in the Armenian diaspora promoted feelings of hatred toward and the need for revenge against the Turks. "For me," he is quoted in this book, "everything was simple and logical that it was even mathematical: diasporan Armenians live outside Armenia because the genocide took place, and they were obliged to leave the country. Today, they can't go back because [of] the Turkish government... ... Therefore, our nation should carry out an armed struggle over there, in order to achieve any tangible rights. And every Armenian patriot, including me of course, should go and participate in that struggle" (Melkonyan 2005/2007, pp. 39-40).

Melkonyan studied ancient Asian history and archaeology at the University of California, hoping to finish his schooling as quickly as possible and to enter into the world of terrorism against Turkey. He was convinced given the instability in that

country in the 1970s that the time had come for Armenians to act in order to claim what they saw as "their" territory in Turkey. Toward that end, he revived the Armenian Students Association in order to form the nucleus of a terrorist band, something his fellow members document when they note that he passed out "*xeroxed bomb literature at the first ASA meeting*" (Melkonyan 2005/2007, p. 37). And the group acted on that, placing in 1977 a bomb outside the residence of a historian Prof. Shaw who described the events of 1915 as a myth concocted by "*Entente propaganda mills and Armenian nationalists.*"

Getting on the Orient Express

In April 1978, Melkonyan arrived in Beirut, but most Armenians there assumed he was a CIA or KGB agent and did not give him a warm welcome. In his autobiography, he acknowledged that "*it was a little difficult to gain the confidence of some Armenians*" in Lebanon. They certainly had reasons for suspecting him: Here was a 20-year-old Armenian American who had left his own country with the intention of opening an Armenian terrorist training camp in Ainjar, an Armenian village in the Bekaa valley.

But if the Armenians were suspicious and some Kurds were unwelcoming (Melkonyan 2005/2007, p. 61), one group of the latter, the Komala, an organization dedicated to achieving autonomy for the Kurds inside Iran, and especially its leader Ezzedin Hosseini, were interested in working with such an Armenian. And he began to think about how to provoke an Armenian uprising in Iran modeled on the Kurdish one Hosseini sought to promote. But Melkonyan was unable to make any progress in that regard and so had to return to Lebanon.

There, he came to the notice of ASALA, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia. That group, which had close ties with Palestinian groups like Abtal al-Auda and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, would not have been able to conduct the terrorist actions it did except for the support it received from the Soviet KGB, which viewed ASALA as a means to the achievement of a variety of Moscow's geopolitical goals.

The Culmination of a Terrorist Campaign

In his book, Markar Melkonyan describes the wave of terrorist actions that ASALA unleashed in the early 1980s, including those intended to force governments like the Swiss and Italian to release their perpetrators. "*In mid-January 1981,*" he writes, "*Italian officials asked a Fatah official named Hael Abdulhamid to help negotiate a 'ceasefire' with the Secret Army. The Italians send word that they were prepared to support Armenian demands for Turkish recognition of the genocide, in exchange for a Secret Army pledge to desist from bombings in Italy*" (Melkonyan 2005/2007, p. 92).

In 1985, the book under review notes, Monte Melkonyan was captured by the French police, but the French courts were not able to convict him of trying to sink a Turkish ship, although in fact he was, but only of entering France illegally, having a counterfeit American passport and an illegal handgun. Monte for his part considered his six year sentence "more insulting than anything else."

Armenia at last and terror against Azerbaijan

With the support of Levon Ter-Petrosyan and Khachig Stamboultzian, leaders of the pro-independence movement in Armenia, Moscow sent an invitation to Timothy Sean McCormick at the Soviet embassy in Bulgaria. "McCormick" was none other than the nom de guerre of Monte Melkonyan. After a warm welcome at the Yerevan airport by the Armenian KGB, Melkonyan was provided with cover – as a researcher at the Yerevan Institute of Ethnology – and reinstructed to organize terrorist groups against Azerbaijan.

Within a short period of time, the book here relates, Monte was involved with ASALA groups ready and willing to kill Azerbaijanis. "*If you give them half chance,*" Monte told his brother proudly, "*they'll 'do' an Azeri-village - they'll kill everyone in sight, men, women and children*" (Melkonyan 2005/2007, p. 189). In the Azerbaijani village of Garadagli, the group killed more than 50 Azerbaijani captives, some of them after being doused with gasoline and set aflame. Shortly thereafter, the Khojali massacre took place, and Monte played a role there.

He conducted Armenia's reconnaissance of the city of Khojali and organized intelligence operations in that region before the assault. And he said he had helped set up free fire zones for the Aramo and Arabo death squads along the only routes that Azerbaijanis living there could use to escape. Later, he was involved in killing 25 more Azerbaijanis at the Zulfugarli tunnel during the occupation of Kalbajar. In the book under review, these actions are portrayed as a form of heroism, but there is only one correct term that can be applied: they were crimes against humanity.

No End in Sight

Monte was subsequently killed during the Armenian occupation of Agdam, his brother reports with obvious grief despite the horrors Monte had been involved with (Melkonyan 2005/2007, p. 264). But Monte's activities and the Armenian terrorism with which he was involved continue. One of his close associates, Kechal Sergey, for example, - notorious for his cruelty in killing Azerbaijani civilians – after the ceasefire was promoted to a senior position in Armenia's Ministry for National Security [Melkonyan 2005/2007, p.p. 215 and 303], evidence that many in Armenia are continuing the policies of ASALA and the Armenian terrorist community into the new century.

Reference

Melkonyan, Markar (2005/2007) *My Brother's Road: An American's Fateful Journey to Armenia*, London and New York: Taurus.

A CHRONOLOGY OF AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

I. Key Government Statements on Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

Azerbaijan's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York sends to the UN Security Council and General Assembly two new documents on the situation in the occupied territories detailing what Armenian forces have done there since the March

2008 UN General Assembly resolution was adopted (<http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=98233> and <http://www.day.az/news/politics/149393.html>).

Fuad Akhundov, the head of the social-political department of the Administration of the President of Azerbaijan, says that "the developed and mutually profitable relations between Azerbaijan and Russia are important for Europe" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149034.html>).

Mazahir Panakhov, the head of Azerbaijan's Central Election Commission, says that "Azerbaijan is striving to become a full and worthy member of the democratic world" and that in its conduct of elections and referenda, Baku seeks to meet "the standards applied in the leading countries of the world" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149009.html>).

II. Key Statements by Others about Azerbaijan

Matthew Bryza, US deputy assistant secretary of state and co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, says that he believes there has been "progress" in relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia as a result of meetings between the presidents of those two countries (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150373.html>).

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov says that there is no basis for Azerbaijan to be concerned about the establishment of rapid reaction forces by the Organization of the Treaty on Collective Security (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149755.html>). He adds that "the main responsibility for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh problem lies on the Azerbaijanis and Armenians" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149752.html>). In other comments, he adds that there are great opportunities for expanding humanitarian, cultural and other forms of cooperation between Moscow and Baku (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149759.html>).

Outgoing Russian Ambassador Vasily Istratov says that "the basic contribution to the improvement of Azerbaijani-Russian relations belongs to the leaders of the two states" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150224.html>).

Anne Derse, the US ambassador to Azerbaijan, says that the new administration in the United States is interested in broadening and deepening the level of cooperation with Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148831.html>).

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan says that "in its relations with Armenia, Ankara will not take any steps which contradict the interests of Azerbaijan. That is what has been the case up to now and thus it will be in the future" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149294.html>).

In its annual review of Moscow's relations with the rest of the world, the Russian Foreign Ministry says that ties with Baku enjoyed "stable development" during 2008 and expresses the hope that they will develop further in a wide variety of areas in 2009 (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149466.html>).

III. A Chronology of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

15 March

Zakir Gashimov, Azerbaijan's ambassador to Turkey, says that media reports about the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border were intended to create "a sensation" rather than to describe a reality (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150414.html> and <http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=98871>; <http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=98796>).

14 March

Joao Soares, the president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, says that there is no military solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute and that diplomacy is the only way forward (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150346.html>).

Ogtay Asadov, the chairman of the Milli Majlis, receives a delegation of Kyrgyzstan parliamentarians (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150392.html>).

13 March

President Ilham Aliyev receives a delegation of Kyrgyzstan parliamentarians and praises Bishkek for its commemoration of the late writer Chingiz Aitmatov (<http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=98834>).

President Ilham Aliyev receives outgoing Russian Ambassador Vasily Istratov on the completion of the latter's assignment in Baku (<http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=98848>). Istratov both at that meeting and in interviews with the media stresses that "the basic contribution to the improvement of Azerbaijani-Russian relations belongs to the leaders of the two states" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150224.html>; <http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=98808>).

Fuad Akhundov, the head of the social-political department of the Administration of the President, says that Baku has always given "enormous importance to the position of Moscow on the Nagorno-Karabakh problem" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150248.html>).

12 March

President Ilham Aliyev receives Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and expresses his appreciation of the strengthening of bilateral relations between their two countries (<http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=98775>). Earlier, Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov and Lavrov discuss a variety of bilateral issues (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150097.html>).

Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov says that President Ilham Aliyev and his Armenian counterpart Serzh Sargsyan may meet in Prague during the European Union summit (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150085.html>).

Matthew Bryza, US deputy assistant secretary of state, says that Washington at the present time "does not look positively" on the possibility of Iranian participation in the Nabucco project (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150146.html>).

11 March

President Ilham Aliyev participates in the summit of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and says that this body will work for the good of all member states. During the session, he meets with his counterparts from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Tajikistan, Iraq, Syria and Qatar (<http://www.day.az/news/economy/150003.html>).

10 March

President Ilham Aliyev signs seven inter-governmental agreements on economic, cultural, and scientific affairs with Iran during his visit to Tehran and meetings with the Iranian president (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149751.html>).

Samad Seyidov, the head of the Milli Majlis Committee on International Affairs, flies to Paris to take part in sessions of several executive bodies of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149758.html>).

9 March

President Ilham Aliyev receives Army General Atilla Ishik, the commander of the Turkish Republic gendarmerie (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149711.html>).

6 March

President Ilham Aliyev receives outgoing Chinese Ambassador Zhang Haizhou on the completion of his assignment in Baku (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149508.html>).

Defense Minister Safar Abiyev receives Mubarak bin Fahd Hasim al-Tani, Qatar's ambassador to Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149430.html>).

Abbasali Gasanov, Azerbaijan's ambassador to Iran, says in advance of President Ilham Aliyev's visit to Tehran that cooperation between the two countries is expanding and will increase after President Aliyev's visit (www.day.az/news/politics/149420.html).

Azerbaijani deputies participate in a meeting of their counterparts from other member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and devote particular attention to contacts with Iranian parliamentarians in advance of President Ilham Aliyev's upcoming visit to Tehran (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149401.html>).

The Milli Majlis creates an Azerbaijan-Ireland parliamentary group and expands the membership of the existing Azerbaijan-Israel one (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149518.html>).

5 March

President Ilham Aliyev receives an invitation from French President Nicolas Sarkozy to visit Paris. The date of the visit has not yet been set (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149287.html>).

President Ilham Aliyev receives the UN resident coordinator for Azerbaijan Bruno Pouezet (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149327.html>).

The co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group condemn the violation of the ceasefire between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces during the course of the February 26 visit of the OSCE's monitoring group (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149340.html>).

Debnat Show, India's ambassador to Baku, says during a visit to Ganja that his country supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and wants to develop greater economic ties with Azerbaijan and its regions (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149312.html>).

4 March

Vasily Kalinov, Bulgaria's incoming ambassador to Azerbaijan, arrives in Baku to take up his duties. He replaces Ivan Palchev who spent five years in Azerbaijan and who wrote a book in Bulgarian on "Azerbaijan – the Caucasus Tiger" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149319.html>).

Anne Derse, US ambassador to Azerbaijan, says that the issue of American participation in the operation of the Gabala radar station will be discussed with Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149211.html>). In other comments, she says that the question of "the so-called 'genocide of Armenians' in 1915" is an issue for historians and ought not to be the subject of actions by legislatures (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149215.html>).

Yulon Gagoshidze, the Georgian minister for diaspora questions, arrives in Baku for a four-day visit (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148887.html>).

Members of the Norwegian parliament tell Rafael Ibragimov, Azerbaijan's ambassador to Sweden, Norway and Finland, that Oslo supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149200.html>).

3 March

President Ilham Aliyev receives the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, Matthew Bryza of the United States, Bernard Fassier of France, and Yury Merzlyakov of the Russian Federation (<http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=98219>).

President Ilham Aliyev receives Alfredo Mantica, the deputy foreign minister of Italy (<http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=98220>). Prior to that meeting, Mantica meets with foreign ministry officials (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148882.html>).

Fuad Akhundov, the head of the social-political department of the Administration of the President of Azerbaijan, says that "the developed and mutually profitable relations between Azerbaijan and Russia are important for Europe" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149034.html>).

Mazahir Panakhov, the head of Azerbaijan's Central Election Commission, says that "Azerbaijan is striving to become a full and worthy member of the democratic world" and that in its conduct of elections and referenda, Baku seeks to meet "the

standards applied in the leading countries of the world" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/149009.html>).

Abbasali Gasanov, Azerbaijan's ambassador in Tehran, meets with Iranian foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki to discuss arrangements for the seventh bilateral inter-governmental commission meeting now scheduled for February 2009 in Baku (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148946.html>).

2 March

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov takes part in the International Donors Conference in Egypt to discuss assistance to Gaza (<http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=98063>).

Azerbaijanis take part in staff courses in various NATO countries as part of the alliance's Partnership for Peace program (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148870.html>).

Levan Varshalomidze, the head of the government of the Adjara Autonomous Republic of Georgia, visits Baku to meet President Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister Artur Rasizade (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148788.html> and <http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=98056>).

1 March

The Azerbaijan-American Council, the Azerbaijan Society of America and the Federation of Turkish American Organizations organize a series of meetings devoted to the anniversary of the Khojali massacre (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/148758.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 necessarily represent the views of the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.