



Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy

School of International Affairs

AZERBAIJAN IN THE WORLD ADA Biweekly Newsletter

Vol. 2, No. 7

April 1, 2009

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AZERBAIJAN IS IMPORTANT NOT JUST BECAUSE OF ITS OIL AND GAS

A Conversation with H.E. Mr. Radek Matula
Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Azerbaijan

March 30, 2009
Baku, Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan and the World: What do you see as the most important spheres of cooperation between your country and Azerbaijan?

Ambassador Matula: The Czech Republic, since it considers Azerbaijan its strategic partner, is ready for the rapid and intensified development of political and economic relations with Baku and also for the development of ties in all other areas, including the scientific-technical sphere, culture, education, tourism, and so on. We do not

want to put one of these sectors above the others. All have their importance in the system of bilateral relations, and they are mutually reinforcing.

AIW: Where do you see the greatest progress in bilateral relations? And where would you like to see more progress?

Amb. Matula: Relations between our countries have a long tradition. There were never controversial or seriously problematic issues between us. But we feel that there are great possibilities for further progress, and we have been thinking about how to develop our relations more fully. By our joint efforts, we have been able to do something in this direction already. I am not afraid to say that the last 18 months have represented an important turning point for relations between the Czech Republic and Azerbaijan.

We were able to achieve the historic first official visits of the foreign ministers of the two countries and also the historic first visit of the Czech prime minister to Azerbaijan. In 2007, Azerbaijan opened its embassy in Prague, and Czech is preparing to do the same thing in Baku. We can observe a broadening of contacts between our individual ministries as well as among other government and private bodies. The interest of Czech and Azerbaijani companies and firms to cooperate is growing. It is especially pleasing to see the deepening of relations between our countries in the humanitarian area, between universities and students and between cultural figures. I am confident that relations between the Czech Republic and Azerbaijan have a good future. It is important that in Azerbaijan no one forget about the Czech Republic.

AIW: Could you say a few words about the Nabucco project and the Czech Republic's view on its future?

Amb. Matula: The Czech Republic considers Nabucco as a project which must become a constituent part of the broader efforts of the members of the European Union to diversify the sources and transport routes of energy supplies to Europe. We consider the region of the Caspian Sea a very important one in the context of the European energy security. As far as Azerbaijan is concerned, its importance consists not only in its large reserves of oil and natural gas but also in its very important geostrategic location.

Taking all that into account, the Czech Republic decided to organize during its European Union presidency a Southern Corridor Summit, which will take place on May 8th in Prague. Among the participants will be representatives of the European Union and both producer and transit countries, including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Georgia and Turkey. The Czech Republic considers the basic goal of the summit to be the creation of political conditions and the provision of political support for economically viable projects of particular firms. In addition, and for us this is very important, we want by means of cooperation in the energy area to achieve the development of relations with Azerbaijan in all other areas. We do not want people in Azerbaijan to have the feeling that we look at it only through the prism of oil and gas.

AIW: What is your view on the *Eastern Partnership* initiative brought forward recently by Poland and Sweden within the EU and what future do you see for it?

Amb. Matula: First of all, I should say that Eastern Europe is one of the priorities of Czech foreign policy and the Czech presidency in the European Union. Many certainly do not know that the Czech Republic has been behind this initiative from the very beginning. In the first half of 2008, the Czech Republic presented its initiative, "The European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Neighborhood – A Time to Act." Poland and Sweden then developed our proposals under the title, "The Eastern Partnership."

The Czech Republic supports the further strengthening of relations between the European Union and its eastern partners in all areas, bilaterally and multilaterally, and this is the basis of this ambitious initiative. The bilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership will be developed in the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy, which anticipates a differentiated approach to each of the partners. Association agreements are foreseen, which might include deep and comprehensive free trade area.

The multilateral dimension should provide the framework for cooperation on common, joint challenges, like for example, democracy and stability, economic rapprochement with the European Union, energy security, and contacts between people. At its session on March 20th, the European Council adopted the concept of the Eastern Partnership, which is an important precondition for this initiative, after the negotiations with eastern partners, to officially enter into force. This should take place in Prague on May 7 at the summit of the Eastern Partnership at the level of chiefs of state or heads of government of the European 27 and the six partnership states.

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

Amb. Matula: The Czech Republic carefully observes the development of the situation around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and calls on the countries involved to seek a peaceful resolution, which will be based on the principle of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. In voting on the UN resolution, we, following the jointly agreed position of the European Union, did not vote for the resolution, but we also did not speak out against it. And I believe that in the situation that developed around the resolution the fact that the Czech Republic abstained should be considered a position supportive of Azerbaijan. And I want to repeat that we have several times stressed also after the voting on the resolution in New York that we support the peaceful resolution of the conflict on the basis of the principles adopted in the framework of the OSCE Minsk group, including sovereignty, territorial integrity, and respect for the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan.

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

Amb. Matula: As I have mentioned, we have great opportunities in all areas of cooperation. There is a lot of work to be done. It is important that there is a mutual interest in doing it. We find in Azerbaijan attentive partners, and we want to be the same for them. Our task is to attract Czech entrepreneurs to Azerbaijan and to find partners for them for joint, mutually profitable work. And conversely. For this we need to provide them with accurate, undistorted information about Azerbaijan and the size of Azerbaijan markets, services and so on. We need to improve out treaty

and legal arrangements in order to establish for entrepreneurs and not only for them reliable conditions for work. In the fall of this year, we plan to open a Czech embassy in Baku. This also is one of the important steps directed at the development of relations between the Czech Republic and Azerbaijan. Our presence here should make possible the establishment of new contacts in all areas and the deepening of those contacts which already exist.

AIW: Finally, what advice would you as an experienced diplomat offer to young Azerbaijanis beginning their careers in diplomacy?

Amb. Matula: First of all, a diplomat must love his own country and be ready to do for it everything in the best possible way. One must never forget that he is a representative of his country not only during working hours. Second, diplomacy requires someone who is ready to work whenever his country needs him, including evenings and weekends. Devote to one's work, unselfishness, and decisiveness are all important qualities. Third and no less important in the case of work abroad, one must strive to understand the country to which he or she is assigned, its history and the mentality of its people. If an individual is not prepared to do that, it would be better for him to seek another area of work.

On the basis of my personal experience with Azerbaijani diplomats, I can say that they have all these qualities. And I have no doubt that such diplomats are being trained by the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy. I wish all the teachers and students of ADA success in their efforts on behalf of their beautiful country and happiness and well-being in their personal lives.

**NOT A DEFINING MOMENT:
AZERBAIJAN'S REFERENDUM
AND
INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS**

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In advance of Azerbaijan's referendum on constitutional amendments that would allow Ilham Aliyev to serve more than two consecutive terms as president, some commentators both in Baku and abroad treated this event as a defining moment in the history of Azerbaijan, as an event that had the potential to shift Azerbaijan from the category of those post-Soviet states that are moving toward greater openness and democracy to that of countries in that region which have been moving in exactly the opposite direction.

But now that the referendum has taken place, with Azerbaijani voters overwhelmingly approving the amendments and with almost all observers indicating that the vote itself was conducted according to international standards, it has become obvious that this referendum by itself did not mean that Azerbaijan has fundamentally changed the course its government has pursued and its people approved over the past 15 years or that the country has moved, to paraphrase

Kipling, from the easternmost of the western part of the former Soviet space to the westernmost part of Central Asia.

That becomes obvious if one considers both the history of term limits and the implications of their application or non-application in Azerbaijan in the future. The first thing to recognize is that most countries do not have term limits and that the post-Soviet states largely do, not because they decided that was a prerequisite for democratic development but because they modeled some but far from all their constitutional provisions on those of the United States which does limit its chief executive to two terms in office.

Such arrangements were promoted by the United States and accepted with little debate by post-Soviet states like Azerbaijan. As a result, few of those countries paid much attention to the history of this question in the United States or the implications of term limits both in the US and in their countries. And consequently, only now that the leaders of some post-Soviet states are running up against this limitation are leaders, governments and peoples being forced to confront this situation.

The first thing to point out is that the United States did not have constitutionally-set term limits for most of its history. George Washington, the first president of the US and truly the father of his country, set the tradition. He retired after his second term, but neither Washington nor the other founders thought it would be a good idea to limit the number of times that someone could be elected.

On the one hand, they believed that it would be unfortunate to convert an incumbent president into a lame duck after his second election. If everyone knew that he could not be re-elected, his power would inevitably decline. And on the other, they recognized as we know from discussions at the Constitutional Convention that there might be extraordinary times in which a president could and should serve for more terms.

For the first 150 years of American history, presidents followed Washington's lead, a reflection of their judgment that there were no good reasons to break with that tradition. But in the 1940s, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, having guided the US through the Great Depression and faced with the threat of war, ran first for a third term and then a fourth, actions that he and others considered an extraordinary response to extraordinary times by an extraordinary political leader.

But after FDR's death near the start of his fourth term, Republicans in Congress decided to push through a Constitutional amendment that would limit all future presidents to only two terms. Their success in amending the US Constitution thus "legalized" what had been a fundamentally "political" tradition. And it is worth noting that in the case of every popular president of the US since that time, there have been suggestions that this amendment should be repealed to allow that individual to continue to serve.

To date, however, the United States has not taken that step, and because of its pre-eminence in the world especially at the time of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, many post-Soviet states, lacking an independent historical tradition and seeking approval from Washington, included term limits in their constitutions, with little thought of the implications of that arrangement in the extraordinary times that many of them continue to face.

Different post-Soviet countries more recently have struggled with the implications of such limits. Perhaps the most comical was what happened in the Russian Federation, when Vladimir Putin faced with a ban on his re-election to a third term arranged to become prime minister and to install someone he expected to be able to control as his successor in the Russian presidency. While many respected Putin's decision to obey the constitution, few thought then or now that the way he did so necessarily and immediately contributed to the development of a more open and democratic Russia, although that remains a possibility.

Azerbaijan chose a different approach: It sought to follow the constitution by changing it rather than subverting it by making the kind of arrangements that Putin imposed on his country in the name of "defending" the country's basic law. And consequently, Azerbaijan has taken another step away from the American-supplied cookie cutter approach to democratic development that it and many other post-Soviet states accepted in the 1990s.

As every observer – domestic and foreign – acknowledged, the Azerbaijani people voted overwhelmingly to lift the constitutional ban on more than two presidential terms, the result of both Baku's efforts to promote precisely that result and the understanding of almost all Azerbaijanis that they and their country live in an extraordinarily dangerous neighborhood at an extraordinarily difficult time.

Again, according to almost all analysts and commentators, Ilham Aliyev will not only run but win the presidency once or perhaps even several more times, a reflection of the regime he has built and the recognition of his particular skills by the population. But the amendments to the Azerbaijani Constitution that the Azerbaijani people approved do not mean that he has become "president for life." Indeed, one can argue that by eliminating a provision that resulted from unique conjunction of events in the US after 1945 and then in Azerbaijan after 1991, this referendum sets the stage for what the tradition of two terms George Washington established to be realized at some point in the future.

There are at least three reasons for drawing that conclusion. First, President Aliyev and his government sufficiently respect the Constitution that they were convinced they had to amend it rather than ignore it or subvert it as leaders in some neighboring countries have done. As a result, more and more Azerbaijanis are likely to conclude that the Constitution and all of its various guarantees are something to be taken seriously as well.

Second, by escaping a Constitutional arrangement that would have left him a lame duck and hence less able to navigate the difficult times ahead, including but not limited to the economic shocks of declining petroleum prices and Armenia's continuing occupation of more than a fifth of Azerbaijani territory, President Aliyev is in a stronger position to defend the interests of his country. Such enormous challenges are why FDR ran for a third and fourth term, as some who have criticized the Azerbaijani referendum prefer to forget.

And third, this referendum has yet another consequence that few people are yet thinking about. It has the effect of focusing the attention of Azerbaijanis on the future. George Washington's decision to retire after a second term was his way of opening the way to the rise of a new generation of leaders. Many believed that having term limits could force that process. But even when after such constitutional

limitations are lifted, the challenge of developing new generations of leadership does not go away. Instead, it may become even more compelling.

THE SOUTHERN AZERBAIJAN QUESTION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR IRANIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

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Since the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijanis living in Iran have developed a stronger ethno-national identity, and that development has affected Tehran's domestic and foreign policies. Most immediately, it has had an impact on Tehran's policies in the South Caucasus, shifting Iran from a position of quiet neutrality in Soviet times to more active support of Armenia against Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict lest an irredentist movement arise within Iran (Shaffer 2004).

Throughout much of modern history, the territories of Northern and Southern Azerbaijan were part of the Iranian empire, but in the early 19th century, as a result of two wars between Iran and Russia, historical Azerbaijan was divided between north and south by the treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Turkmenchay (1828) (Shaffer 2002). Since that time, the two Azerbaijanis have developed along very different paths. In the north, Russia promoted the development of the oil and gas fields and the growth of Baku as an urban center, whereas Iran did little to transform the traditionalist, rural, and agricultural society of the south.

Western ideas like liberalism, nationalism or secularism came to Baku early on, and Southern Azerbaijanis who came north to work were affected by those ideas as well, with the two sides developing a sense of common identity and solidarity. The northerners wanted to share their wealth and their ideas, and the southerners responded with solidarity when violence broke out between Azerbaijanis and Armenians a century ago (Laçiner and Demirtepe 2004, p. 444).

A consequence of this was the emergence of the idea of a single Azerbaijan, especially among northerners who were heavily influenced by the Young Turks and exported this idea to the south. Intellectuals like Huseyinzade or Agaoglu, for example, promoted the idea of an Azerbaijani State unifying northern and southern territories. And by the start of the 20th century, newspapers in Tabriz began publishing articles promoting the idea of "One Azerbaijan" (Atabaki 2005, p. 33).

These ideas attracted greater attention following the collapse of the tsarist empire and the emergence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918. And during the short period of that state's existence (1918-1920) (Altstadt 1992, p. 65), Northern and Southern Azerbaijanis expanded their contacts and promoted this idea. Needless to say, neither Russia nor Iran approved of this, and the dream of a single Greater Azerbaijan ended with the intervention of the Red Army in the North and the application by the shah of a harsh policy of assimilation in the South (Ismayilov 2008).

In the 20th century, Southern Azerbaijan was one of the most unstable regions of Iran. Three revolts in particular were especially important: The first, led by Azerbaijani activist Sheykh Mahammad Khiyabani, sought the decentralization of Iran rather than its break-up. But despite that, Tehran feared that he would ultimately follow the example of the North and crushed his revolt, killing 50 people, including Khiyabani.

The second, known as Pischevari's revolt, after the name of its leader, demanded national self-determination, independence and the introduction of Soviet-style communism. It did not gain much support because most Azerbaijanis did not trust Moscow; they preferred greater autonomy within Iran rather than a nominally independent state controlled by Moscow. And in December 1946, the Iranian army entered Northern Iran and quickly restored Tehran's control following the withdrawal of Soviet forces which had been there during World War II.

And the third period of instability occurred at the time of the Islamic revolution. At the time of its outbreak, Iranian Azerbaijanis occupied important economic positions in both Tabriz and Tehran, but the shah refused to recognize their separate identity. Consequently, many Azerbaijanis in the south opposed him, but they soon discovered that Ayatollah Khomeini opposed them as well, and so they found themselves excluded even though Ayatollah Shariatmadari, the Azerbaijani religious leader, supported some of their demands.

The establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1991 triggered an Azerbaijani national revival in Northern Iran. Until then, most of the southern population identified themselves as Turkic but after that, they preferred to be called Azerbaijanis or Azeris. In the Majlis, deputies of Azerbaijani origin sought to defend their language and cultural rights, and for the same reason some intellectuals began to write in the Azerbaijani language instead of Persian. A few newspapers in Azerbaijani appeared, especially in Tabriz, and alongside this cultural revival, several transport routes between Iran and Azerbaijan were inaugurated to connect these two populations.

This intensification of national identity generated fears in Tehran because one of every four Iranian citizens is an ethnic Azerbaijani, something that could under certain conditions threaten the territorial integrity of the state. And because of that possibility, Tehran changed course in the Caucasus, shifting from a balanced approach on Nagorno-Karabakh to an open tilt toward Armenia (Priego 2005, p. 9) and to closer ties with the Russian Federation. One indication of this tilt is that Armenia was able to open an embassy in Tehran already in 1992 whereas Azerbaijan had to wait until 2004 to open a consulate in Tabriz.

Because of its fears about irredentism, Tehran frequently accuses Baku and Washington of provoking revolts in its northern provinces. In one infamous case, an Iranian cartoon portrayed Azerbaijanis as cockroaches, something that provoked demonstrations in Tabriz and other Azerbaijani areas. After that, the Iranian government decided to close the journal, although its officials continued to blame Washington and Baku for the rallies. And they noted that a *New Yorker* article by Seymour Hersh (2006) had suggested that American forces in the region had some contact with discontented Azerbaijanis within Iran. In addition to lashing out at the Americans, Tehran has sought to influence Baku through their common Shiite faith.

And Baku in response has blamed Tehran for financing Islamist movements like the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, Jeysullah and branches of Hezbollah.

As the existence of the Southern Azerbaijan issue shows, Iran remains a multi-ethnic state, something that on occasion has forced it to pursue a more inclusive policy toward its minorities but often has simply led to more Iranian persecution of these non-Persian groups. Given Azerbaijan's prosperity, the existence of an Azerbaijani minority within Iran is considered by most Iranian officials as especially threatening, all the more so because Southern Azerbaijan is one of the richest provinces in Iran. But the current crackdown reflecting Tehran's fears appears likely to provoke more Azerbaijani nationalism in the south rather than lead to the integration of this community.

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A CHRONOLOGY OF AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

I. Key Government Statements on Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

President Ilham Aliyev says that the popular support shown in the referendum "will allow for the continuation of the realization of democratic reforms in Azerbaijan" and that Baku will use all opportunities in order to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh question in the framework of justice and the practice of international law." He adds that "we will try to resolve this question by peaceful means," but he stresses that "Nagorno-Karabakh will never receive independence. For the resolution of this question, Azerbaijan will apply not only diplomatic but also economic means" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150949.html>).

The Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs releases a statement on the results of the election conducted on March 18. The statement says that "the referendum and its results reflected the will of the Azerbaijani people, yet again demonstrating the attachment of Azerbaijan to fundamental freedoms and democratic values, represents another important indicator of stability in the country and its development." It notes that more than 47,000 local observers and 177 international monitors had concluded that the referendum was conducted freely and openly (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150984.html>).

II. Key Statements by Others about Azerbaijan

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev says that Azerbaijan is "a close ally of Russia." His remarks come during a meeting with Vladimir Dorokhin, Moscow's newly appointed ambassador to Baku (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150704.html>).

Nikolay Bordyuzha, the executive secretary of the Organization of the Agreement on Collective Security, says that he "would very much like Azerbaijan to participate in the activities" of that organization more fully. At present, he notes, Azerbaijan is taking part in "certain measures" such as those involving interdiction of illegal drug flows (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150978.html>).

Leonid Slutsky, the first deputy chairman of the Russian Duma's International Affairs Committee, says that the results of the referendum will give the republic the chance to continue its successful course of reforms. He stresses that "each country has its own path to democracy, and the Western European and American models are hardly applicable in the Caucasus region" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150899.html>).

At the Azerbaijan-Armenian Forum in Vienna concerning the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, a meeting convened by the British NGO *International Alert*, Bernard Fassier, the French co-chair of the Minsk Group, notes that "even Armenia is not moving to recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh." Other speakers, including the co-chairs of the Minsk Group, express optimism about the future of the peace process (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151175.html>).

III. A Chronology of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

31 March

In commemoration of the Day of the Genocide of Azerbaijanis in 1918, Azerbaijanis in the republic and Azerbaijani embassies, consulates, and cultural centers abroad organized a variety of meetings to call attention to that human

tragedy (<http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/69499/-azerbaijan-marks-day-of-azerbaijani-genocide.html>; <http://day.az/news/politics/151667.html>; <http://anspress.com/nid108551.html>; <http://www.day.az/news/politics/151736.html>).

Irakly Alasaniya, one of the leaders of the Georgian opposition, says that "relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan will remain strategic," adding that "we will never forget how Azerbaijan supported us in difficult times." He urges that the two countries work together to develop GUAM (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151722.html>).

30 March

Novruz Mammadov, the head of a department in the Presidential Administration, says that "the US president should send a special message to Armenia calling on it to end its occupation" of Azerbaijani territory (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151636.html>). He adds that Baku's opposition to the operation of foreign military bases on its territory remains unchanged (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151617.html>).

Vitaly Churkin, the permanent representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, says that Moscow "supports the process of negotiations" on Nagorno-Karabakh "taking place under the aegis of the OSCE." (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151606.html>).

29 March

Sergey Prikhod'ko, an aide to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, says that the Russian president will discuss the possible joint use of the Gabala radar station in Azerbaijan with US President Barak Obama in London (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151440.html>).

The Council on Gender Equality of the Belgian Senate begins a visit to Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151450.html>).

28 March

Lt. Gen. Safar Abiyev, Azerbaijan's defense minister, visits Qatar to sign an agreement on military cooperation with that country (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151426.html>).

27 March

Matthew Bryza, the US deputy assistant secretary of state who serves as a co-chair of the Minsk Group, says that "it is possible to expect serious moves forward in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151302.html>).

The commanders of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan express their satisfaction with the performance of the Azerbaijani soldiers serving there (<http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=99313>).

26 March

Lt. Gen. Safar Abiyev, Azerbaijan's defense minister, signs a military-technical cooperation accord with his visiting Uzbekistan counterpart Kabul Berdiyev. Berdiyev for his part says that Tashkent continues to support the position of Azerbaijan on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151286.html>; <http://anspress.com/nid108350.html>).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov receives Matthew Bryza, the US deputy assistant secretary of state who serves as co-chair of the Minsk Group (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151282.html>).

25 March

Khalaf Khalafov, deputy foreign minister of Azerbaijan, says that by arming Armenia, Russia is not only "acquiring the reputation of a country which provides help to an aggressor state," but is also destabilizing the situation in the South Caucasus (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151174.html>)

24 March

President Ilham Aliyev sends a letter of sympathy to US President Barak Obama after the plane crash in Butte, Montana (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151138.html>).

Araz Azimov, deputy foreign minister of Azerbaijan, says that "the goal of Azerbaijan is the re-establishment of territorial integrity and peace between the [Azerbaijani and Armenian] communities in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151096.html>).

The Azerbaijan-Armenian Forum concerning the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict starts its work in Vienna (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/151175.html>)

20 March

Azerbaijani officials reject the draft conclusions of the Venice Commission on changes in the Constitution of the Azerbaijan Republic. The draft, which concludes that the measures approved by the constitutional referendum represent "a step backward on the road to the strengthening of democracy in Azerbaijan," is "unbalanced" and "incomplete," the officials say (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150969.html>).

19 March

The observers group of 20 representatives of European parliaments say that they have concluded that "the referendum reflects the will of the Azerbaijani people," adding that it is essential that Azerbaijan continue "the process of the building of democratic institutions" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150835.html>).

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recognizes the referendum as "legitimate," "was transparent, well organised and held in a peaceful atmosphere," according to Paul Wille, the chief of the PACE delegation which

monitored the vote. The delegation "concludes that the result of the referendum shows the willingness of the people of Azerbaijan to have greater stability and elements for further democratisation, a better balance of power will nevertheless require further reforms in the future" (<http://www.coe.az/Latest-News/147.html>).

The observer mission of the CIS says that the referendum in Azerbaijan was free and open and corresponds to the norms of the existing legislation in the country and to generally accepted approaches to the conduct of such voting. The mission continues that "the referendum was an important factor of the further democratization of social life of Azerbaijan, strengthened the basis of sovereignty, and is a reflection of the stable, step by step social-economic development of the state" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150823.html>).

Svetlana Orlova, the deputy speaker of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation, says that over the last years, "there have been serious positive changes" and that "the referendum in Azerbaijan took place openly." She adds that "this is an absolutely objective assessment. The referendum is an important choice, and the people made its choice in favor of the existing authorities" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150826.html>).

Elin Suleymanov, the Consul General of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles, speaks to the Jewish Community of America about the high level of tolerance in Azerbaijan and about the "active role of the Jewish community in the social-political life of Azerbaijan" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150843.html>).

18 March

In a referendum, the Azerbaijani people overwhelmingly approve amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan that eliminate the restriction on anyone serving as president for more than two consecutive terms (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150800.html>).

President Ilham Aliyev receives Svetlana Orlova, the deputy speaker of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150779.html>).

Hulusi Kılıç, Turkey's ambassador to Azerbaijan, says that "Turkey will not take any steps which will bring harm to the interests of Azerbaijan" in the course of its contacts with Armenia or otherwise (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150761.html>).

Vladimir Dorokhin, Russia's incoming ambassador to Azerbaijan, arrives in Baku. Dorokhin, who was born in 1948, is a graduate of MGIMO and speaks Hungarian, English and German (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150775.html>).

17 March

Hulusi Kılıç, Turkey's ambassador to Azerbaijan, says that the opening of the border between Turkey and Armenia is "not a subject for discussion" at present and that bilateral talks between Ankara and Yerevan are only at an early stage (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150709.html>).

16 March

President Ilham Aliyev receives the former chairman of the French Senate, Christian Poncelet, who notes that he is "very glad to be a witness of the colossal processes of development in Azerbaijan"
(<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150541.html>).

President Ilham Aliyev receives the members of the special committee of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly who are in Azerbaijan to observe the referendum (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150567.html>).

Achmet Unal Çevikez, the deputy foreign minister of Turkey who earlier served as Ankara's ambassador in Baku, says in an interview on the Voice of America that "the US and Turkey have many common goals, including in the Caucasus." His comments are in advance of President Barak Obama's visit to Ankara
(<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150466.html>).

Azerbaijani military personnel begin their participation in a series of NATO exercises in Turkey, the Czech Republic, and the US
(<http://www.day.az/news/politics/150453.html>).

Note to Readers

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