

**Ambassador Matthew Bryza**  
**Interview with Voice of America Azerbaijani Service**  
**May 18, 2011**

**VOA:** Can you point to successful steps in the U.S.-Azerbaijani relations priority areas as democracy security and energy security?

**Ambassador Bryza:** If you look back at the history of Azerbaijan's evolution since, well, since independence and since 1993, a lot of positive things have happened in terms of internal reform as well as in our cooperation on security and on energy. The record is complicated and mixed on internal reform.

We have seen some strong performance on economic reform, especially in Azerbaijan's success in avoiding the so-called Dutch Disease. That's due to wise management of oil revenues thanks to the Oil Fund, as well as the Central Bank.

On political reform there have been steps forward and backward or backward and forward. There have been detentions in some cases of journalists, bloggers, and there have been releases as well. We want to do all we can to help Azerbaijan come to a place where the rule of law is what determines the fate of people as well as we wish to see a strong civil society that can advance the reforms that the government itself has talked about in the area of anti-corruption and beyond that. To achieve these goals there needs to be constant continuous effort and meaningful reform every day.

By the way, we so warmly congratulate Azerbaijan on its Eurovision victory and hope that that will help strengthen the entire country's confidence and its positive spirit and will lead to accelerated reforms in all these areas.

On energy our cooperation and our successes are well known. You can see it if you look out the window here and even observe how much construction has happened thanks to the revenues that have come to the country thanks to Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan [pipeline]. I'm hoping that Azerbaijan is again going to change the strategic map of Europe in a very positive way by completion of the southern corridor for natural gas, for diversification of Europe's natural gas supplies.

On security, our cooperation is very strong, as reflected in Azerbaijan's contributions of troops to our coalition operations in Afghanistan and Iraq as well

as Kosovo, as well as in our strong cooperation and transportation to Afghanistan for which we're grateful and which help strengthen our strategic partnership.

**VOA:** The State Department reports contain information about violation of human rights, freedom of media, freedom of assembly and corruption in Azerbaijan. Have you discussed this issue with Azerbaijani government? And what kind of assistance the U.S. may propose to Azerbaijan to improve the situation in this area?

**Ambassador Bryza:** Of course I've discussed all of these issues with officials of the Azerbaijani government ranging from the very top to middle level to Parliament. And, in fact, I've probably spent more time focusing on democracy and human rights issues in the spirit of partnership with my counterparts in the Government of Azerbaijan than any other issue. This has included cases of detained protesters and journalists. It has also concerned cases that turned out better than some expected, for example, the way the police put to use the training that the OSCE provided them. The discussion has always been one in a spirit of partnership, proceeding from our understanding that to be stable Azerbaijan must maneuver between two extremes of political authoritarianism and Islamic extremism. We think Azerbaijan is on that path and we want to help keep it on that path. These reforms bring stability in the long term even if in the short term they may seem risky to some people.

We welcome the government's announcement of an anti-corruption campaign, and we welcome the government officials' assurances that this remains a serious campaign and will broaden and will deepen and we'll do whatever we can to support that.

**VOA:** How would you characterize the latest developments in Azerbaijan and the pressure upon journalists during these rallies?

**Ambassador Bryza:** There were some positive steps in terms of the treatment of journalists after the first rallies in March when the Press Council sat down with journalists and agreed on methods to help protect the journalists. But, of course, our goal is an Azerbaijan in which journalists don't have to worry about seeking protection.

The protests were not large in scale, and we have always supported the right of freedom of assembly of all Azerbaijanis, so a continuing topic of discussion in all

my conversations with Azerbaijan's leaders is the importance of allowing for that right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

**VOA:** How would you characterize U.S.-Azerbaijani security cooperation during the latest period, since Azerbaijan twice postponed joint military training? What are the reasons for this?

**Ambassador Bryza:** I think that U.S.-Azerbaijan security cooperation is good and in fact has been improving, especially over the last few months. I would let the Azerbaijani government explain for itself why it requested to postpone our most recent exercise. I would add only that the government of Azerbaijan has subsequently told us that it would like now to schedule those exercises.

But regardless of what happens with that one exercise that was receiving media coverage, I'd like to say that we are doing and will do many important and interesting cooperative programs with the Azerbaijan military. I hope we'll be able to broaden that cooperation into a new area which is working with Azerbaijan as it protects its own critical energy infrastructure in the Caspian Sea.

Finally, I'm very grateful, both as an Ambassador and as a father and as a husband that the government of Azerbaijan has provided us tremendous cooperation in keeping us safe. Thank you for that.

**VOA:** Are there any future perspectives regarding the Qabala radar stations? And what is the current status of those negotiations?

**Ambassador Bryza:** I'm not involved in any of those negotiations, were they to exist. We're still in a process, in Washington, as well as with all of the capitals of all of our friends and allies in figuring out how we will work together on our missile defense system. To me, speaking as a non-expert, it's not clear to me what sort of technologies that could be available, or what sort of capabilities could be available here or in any other country that's one of our allies, would be appropriate or useful for such a missile defense system. I simply don't know.

But it's no surprise that our missile defense system aims to protect us and our allies against potential threat from Iran. And I think, on security issues, Azerbaijan and the United States are quite well aligned.

**VOA:** How would you characterize the situation regarding the transportation of supplies over Azerbaijan for the U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan? Are there any problems? Are there any plans to increase the volume of supplies?

**Ambassador Bryza:** I would characterize that cooperation on transportation to Afghanistan as excellent. Azerbaijan has geography that poses significant challenges, but also enormous opportunities. In my estimation, Azerbaijan is doing a good job in using its geographic position to develop the infrastructure of transportation that will elevate Azerbaijan's strategic importance to us and to our allies and to the entire world. That's led to an important and a very positive set of relationships between us and Azerbaijan on transportation both in the air and on the surface on the way to Afghanistan. Whether that expands depends on Azerbaijan.

While we have a variety of options to secure and continue our transit to Afghanistan, we very much enjoy working with Azerbaijan as a friend and as a partner.

**VOA:** Azerbaijan has several hundred kilometers of border with Iran and part of this border is out of Azerbaijan's control. What is the role of Azerbaijan in implementing of the United Nations sanctions to Iran? Are there any cases of Iran's money-laundering through Azerbaijan structures? How would you characterize the U.S.-Azerbaijan consultations?

**Ambassador Bryza:** U.S.-Azerbaijan consultations and cooperation with regard to Iran are strong and, as I noted a moment ago, our two countries are well aligned on the full set of issues regarding Iran.

Azerbaijan has been a strong performer in the effort to fight financing of terrorist organizations and to fight money laundering. And we give significant credit to of course the entire government of Azerbaijan, President Ilham Aliyev and of course to the head of the Financial Monitoring Service, Mr. Qasimov.

Azerbaijan has moved more quickly than almost any country I believe in the world to fulfill all the requirements of the Financial Action Task Force or FATF, which means a lot to people in Washington.

That's an example of two things. One, of our cooperation in the area you asked about with regard to Iran and illicit financial transactions; but it's also another sign

of economic reforms that have proceeded farther, I think, than many people appreciate, though of course there's a long way to go on reform.

**VOA:** The Presidential Administration Foreign Relations Advisor has said that international organizations, including the United States, do not hold a just position toward resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. What do you think on it? What are the reasons that the conflict has not been solved yet?

**Ambassador Bryza:** Mr. Mammadov is a good friend of the United States and of me personally. He's also a very strong patriot, which he should be. I agree with Mr. Mammadov on most things. On this one my opinion is slightly different because I know from my own experience how hard the United States and our Minsk Group co-chair partners work in pursuit of a fair or a just settlement and a peaceful settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Of course it's only natural that a senior official from one of the countries that's a party to the conflict would want us, the international partners, to do more. And I often hear criticism that nothing has been accomplished under the Minsk Group so far. But in reality a tremendous amount has been achieved. There is a fair proposal on the table for a peaceful and a just settlement that requires a bit more of elaboration. Of course, such an agreement can never come to life unless both parties accept it. So it must be balanced.

The nature of an agreement like this is nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. So for a long time it appears that nothing has been agreed because it takes a long time for everything to be agreed. But the Presidents [of Azerbaijan and Armenia] have gone a long way toward finalizing the basic principles and have just a bit more work to go.

**VOA:** During the last several years the volume of exports of Azerbaijan crude oil to the Ceyhan port decreased from 25 percent to 10 percent. At present Azerbaijan oil is mainly exported to the southeast regions of Asia. Does it mean that American interests decrease in Azerbaijan?

**Ambassador Bryza:** I don't think that statistic is right. I know that the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline is still functioning quite effectively. But in any case our interest in helping to bring to life Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan had very little to do with our expectation that we would consume oil from Azerbaijan. The oil we consume comes from other sources, and much of it comes from our own country, in fact.

We supported the development of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan for strategic reasons, because our friends considered the project a strategic priority. We also supported it because it makes commercial sense. So it remains a tremendous success and therefore, of course, our strategic focus on Azerbaijan energy security is no less. In fact it's increasing because of the issue of the southern corridor of natural gas for Europe.

**VOA:** What are the main interests of the U.S. in the Nabucco project? We know the field that is not no economic justification of the project.

**Ambassador Bryza:** First of all, the United States is interested in the southern corridor which could be a network of several pipelines, one of which may be the Nabucco pipeline. It's not up to the United States to decide whether the southern corridor will include Nabucco or the Turkey-Greece-Italy pipeline or the TransAdriatic pipeline or a series of smaller pipelines that step by step interconnect European countries. Those decisions will be taken by investors who will make their decisions based on the projects developed by companies and by governments, but not our government.

What we see is a corridor consisting of some or maybe all of those projects that helps our European allies realize their goal which is to have more diversified supplies of natural gas than is currently the case where they rely so much on one supplier, Gazprom.

By the way, that southern corridor could also include liquefied natural gas through the so-called AGRI project. So Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania which was discussed, well, it's discussed often but President Băcescu of Romania was here recently, and I'm sure that was a major point of discussion. There have been declarations issued by the countries, in fact. It could also one day even include the so-called White Stream pipeline which would travel under the Black Sea from Georgia to Romania.

**VOA:** Thank you very much for the interview, Mr. Ambassador. Would you like to make a final comments or remarks?

**Ambassador Bryza:** I would. I'd once again like to congratulate everyone, everyone in Azerbaijan on this beautiful victory at the Eurovision contest. Ell/Nikki's performance was beautiful. I found the performance and then the

outpouring of absolute joy by the performers and by all of the people in the streets here in Baku emotionally moving.

This was maybe the clearest example yet of Europe and everyday Europeans voting for Azerbaijan and saying Azerbaijan is with us as a partner, and that our cultures are connected to each other.

So the victory by Ell/Nikki was only the preliminary victory. The bigger victory for the entire country is coming during the course of this entire next year. Forty-three countries and 100 million Europeans will have their eyes focused on Azerbaijan all year. Azerbaijan finally has what it wants, very positive interest and focus from Europe.

So we in our government and here in our embassy want to do everything we possibly can as outsiders to help Azerbaijan and use this year in a very productive way. I hope I'll be sitting here with you one year from now, looking back and saying what a great job Azerbaijan did in using the Eurovision contest as a way to strengthen the prospects of peace, of prosperity and of freedom in this entire region.

**VOA:** Thank you very much that you promise to have an interview in a year's time.

**Ambassador Bryza:** Long before that.

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