

Ambassador Matthew Bryza
Interview with Ictimai (Public) TV
Baku, Azerbaijan
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Interviewer: Mr. Bryza, first of all thank you for that first exclusive interview. And please accept my, first of all, congratulations on starting your ambassadorial tenure here in Baku.

Is being an Ambassador difficult?

Ambassador Bryza: Well, it's hard to say because I've only had this huge honor for about 11 or 12 days, and actually for less than 24 hours, since I only truly became Ambassador yesterday when President Aliyev accepted my credentials.

I can say it is by far the most exciting and most fun assignment I've ever had, and I've had some great ones -- in the White House serving on the President's staff; overseeing our foreign policy for a broad stretch of Europe and Eurasia, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Caspian Sea. But I've never had so much fun as I have so far in this job. But the responsibilities are heavy and require me to always be sober, all the time clear-minded and always ready for anything. So that's difficult. But overall it's very pleasant.

Interviewer: Your appointment procedure was complicated and you were faced with many difficulties before you arrived in Azerbaijan. Also some of the Members of the Senate and the influential Armenian-American lobby opposed your nomination. President Obama used his power and appointed you as the U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan.

How would you characterize your nomination process?

Ambassador Bryza: My nomination process reflected democracy in America. Some people had objections to my candidacy. I had a chance to explain my views, my qualifications before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. The opposition in some quarters continued, and according to the United States Constitution, President Obama took a decision that was completely in line with our democratic processes.

So I guess I'd characterize what I experienced in the nomination process as American democracy. And I'm so grateful, of course, to be here with you; honored by your request to do an interview; and deeply honored that President Obama put forward in the first place U.S.-Azerbaijani relations above everything else in appointing me in the way he did.

Interviewer: Mr. Bryza, before coming to Azerbaijan you served in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and democracy would be your main priority in Azerbaijan. Please explain.

Ambassador Bryza: First of all, I'm not the Minsk Group Co-Chair anymore, so my top priority or one of the top priorities is to support Ambassador Bradtke and the work of the Minsk Group to secure a peaceful negotiated settlement which I continue to be convinced is absolutely possible.

For a diplomat, and for any person, nothing is more important than peace. The whole reason I became a diplomat was to do whatever I could to help bring then the Soviet Union and the United States together to generate and sustain peace. So nothing is more important to me today than making sure I can do whatever I can to help the mediators and help the parties come together and reach a lasting peace that's seen as fair and secure that will be good for the entire region and will clear the way for broader cooperation that incorporates all three Caucasus states and connects them to Europe and beyond.

As far as democracy is concerned, absolutely democracy remains one of the, well encouraging democratic reform in Azerbaijan remains one of my top direct priorities and one of the top priorities of the United States government.

There have been steps taken. There is in fact the anti-corruption campaign that's underway right now. As I said yesterday, we have seen some positive results. We've heard some positive results from our friends and colleagues and contacts here in Azerbaijan. But of course we have a long way to go. That's what I hear also from my Azerbaijani friends, colleagues and contacts.

Ultimately we know that there is stability in a country when there is democracy. Democracy ensures a connection between the people who are governed and the government. And democracy ensures that that connection is supported by the population and therefore is seen as being fully legitimate.

We understand that it's impossible to jump from one situation to a fully democratic situation overnight, but what we want to do is work together to ensure that the process is moving forward. That's the great challenge. I feel positive about the opportunities that hopefully are opening before us.

Interviewer: Staying on the topic of Nagorno-Karabakh, you are former Minsk Group Co-Chair. I'm interested in your opinion. Who holds the key to resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and what will you be doing in your time as Ambassador to solve this conflict just and peacefully?

Ambassador Bryza: the key to resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as you said, justly and peacefully, is in the hands of the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia. We, the countries that are members of the Minsk Group, can encourage them and can help improve their communication and help them think through the possibilities to bridge differences between them. But we can't take the decisions ourselves, and we can't force the parties to take decisions.

What I can do is again, work as closely as possible to support Ambassador Bradtke and his colleagues, the Minsk Group Co-Chairs' efforts. I promise to do that.

Interviewer: There has been sharp criticism and perceived double standard in U.S. policy towards Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It appears to Azerbaijanis that the U.S. is not trying enough to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It closes its eyes to these problems while at the same time providing Armenia and separatist regime of Nagorno-Karabakh with financial assistance. How would you respond to this?

Ambassador Bryza: My response would be that those criticisms are not based on the facts. Though I understand why people feel very strongly about Nagorno-Karabakh, of course, as we do. The United States is quite active in trying to help the two parties find a peaceful negotiated solution. It may be people look at different styles of the mediators. I perhaps was more active in reaching out to the media so people maybe had a feeling that there was more activity. It could be that my successor and his colleagues have decided to be less active with the media. That's just a question of style. That's not a question of substance. I know they are working creatively with intense energy. And making progress.

When it comes to our relations in general with Azerbaijan, I accept a full range of criticism because any country's foreign policy can be seen by another country as

having made mistakes. So I'm here to work together with our friends and colleagues in Azerbaijan to understand better those criticisms; to explain the real situation as we see it; and fundamentally to solve whatever problems had ever arisen in our relations.

When it comes to U.S. government assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh, that assistance first of all is determined by the United States Congress. The Congress is an independent branch of the U.S. government. That's the way our constitution is set up. And the Congress has the right to make any decision it wishes. Often the Congress consults with us in the Executive Branch, but ultimately makes its own decisions.

Our policy is clear in the Executive Branch of the government, that means the part of the government led by the President rather than the Congress, and that is like all the Minsk Group countries, all of them, we support Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and we believe the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh will be determined by negotiations and those negotiations we hope will lead to a peaceful settlement based on the three key Helsinki Final Act Principles of non-use of force and non-threat of force; territorial integrity of states; and self-determination and equal rights of peoples. I think our record as an honest broker and an active mediator is a good one. I'd be ready to defend that against anyone's criticism.

Interviewer: Changing topics, what are the prospects for the U.S.-Azerbaijan bilateral relations? How would you also characterize U.S.-Azerbaijan cooperation in energy and security approach?

Ambassador Bryza: I would characterize our cooperation of energy and security as very strong for, well, since 1994 and then really beginning actively in 1998 the United States and Azerbaijan have had a strong strategic partnership on energy security which benefits everyone. It benefits Azerbaijan from helping Azerbaijan reach European and global markets for its energy and by helping Azerbaijan secure a strategic connection to our allies in Europe.

That energy cooperation helps our allies as well, by ensuring a diversified supply of oil and now of natural gas. That benefits the United States because when our allies are comfortable, when their economies are prospering and when our friends like Azerbaijan are comfortable as well, we are comfortable.

Security is another strong success story. First of all in counter-terrorism Azerbaijan has been a strong partner. As I said yesterday, we've had a series of

terror threats here and elsewhere, and Azerbaijani authorities have been great partners in helping us deal with the situation.

More broadly on counter-terrorism over the last several years Azerbaijan has also proven to be a reliable and a crucial partner.

When it comes to Afghanistan and Iraq, Azerbaijan has been with us all the way, beginning on September 12, 2001 when Azerbaijan offered unlimited over-flights for us to respond to the attacks against us. The cooperation has only deepened in the subsequent years.

So security cooperation is a good story.

Security cooperation is not meant in a way to make Russia uncomfortable. We're not trying to push Russia out of the region. On the contrary, we're trying to create a stable and reliable partnership here with Azerbaijan and with its countries to the west -- with Armenia, with Georgia, with Turkey -- to create a calm area of liberalization and to ensure peace which is in everyone's interest in the region.

But of course our most important security issue of all is Nagorno-Karabakh, and again, I think we have a pretty good record on working with Azerbaijan on that. We have to do much more, though.

Interviewer: You are the 7th Ambassador to Azerbaijan. According to the prediction, seven is a lucky number. So we wish you much success. And will you remain in our memory as the person who finally succeeds in abolishing Section 907.

Ambassador Bryza: [Laughter]. First of all, I am already lucky because I am here with you and I had my birthday two days ago, and it was the happiest birthday in my memory, to be here in Azerbaijan in this capacity. I've never experienced that level of joy in my professional life.

As far as Section 907 goes, that's a decision of the United States Congress which is based in Washington, D.C. I am here, far away, and my job is to work together with you, with your friends, with the general citizenry of Azerbaijan and the government to make sure our relationship is as strong and constructive as possible so we can achieve some of the most important objectives that the United States has anywhere in terms of foreign policy.

As we succeed in what I just described, I hope that our Congress will also recognize how important and how successful our cooperation is.

Interviewer: I'm wondering what kinds of programs for media people the U.S. Embassy is going to implement in Azerbaijan. And please tell us briefly about your cultural and educational programs.

Ambassador Bryza: First of all, I don't have any brand new programs to announce or any new directions. We have a long history of exchange programs that aim to bring to the United States students of all ages to help us both understand our cultures better, and to provide young Azerbaijanis opportunities to develop their language skills as well as their broad analytical skills in the context of the U.S. education system. We benefit as well as, I mean our people in the United States benefit I hope as well as the students do benefit.

In terms of media programs, we have journalists are part of our exchanges. The outreach from our embassy will remain strong, and I hope even stronger now that we have an ambassador. I hope to be not only doing interviews with you and your colleagues in the media often, but simply understanding better how Azerbaijan works, thanks to your insights and your knowledge of your own culture.

So that strong outreach will be part of our program. And I would also like us in our full range of outreach programs to Azerbaijan, stress the role of women. Women are half of our population. Without them we don't exist. You can't have democracy if one-half the population doesn't enjoy the same respect and rights as everybody else. And I think that's felt and understood in Azerbaijan. I think we have some common views about how much we love all of our women. And I also think there is a strategic element to this. Some parts of the region outside of Azerbaijan, extremists try to weaken the rise of women as part of a broader political agenda that misuses religious faith and misuses some of the values that are the foundation of society.

So working together, strengthening the role in society of women in the context of Azerbaijan's own culture and own traditions, being very respectful of Azerbaijan's traditions, I think is something that will help secure and strengthen peace and stability here, as well as lay the foundation for further democratic evolution.

Interviewer: Mr. Bryza, thank you for the first exclusive interview as our new Ambassador. Thank you very much, and we wish you every success in your life

Ambassador Bryza: Thank you very much. I wish you every success as well.

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