

Ambassador Matthew Bryza
Press Conference
Baku, Azerbaijan
February 17, 2011

Ambassador Bryza: -- (In Azerbaijani) Welcome and thank you all for coming. I'm very happy to be here. (In English) I'm going to switch to English now, but as a sign of the very deep respect I have for the country and the people of Azerbaijan, I want to keep trying to speak better in the language of Azerbaijan.

Zeyno and Maya, who is upstairs, and I have absolutely loved these first few days here back in Azerbaijan, or for Maya for the first time in Azerbaijan. Thank you for helping me celebrate my extended birthday. We had a small family celebration yesterday here, and my main present was that I got to enjoy Azerbaijan dolmasi and dushbere, two of my favorite foods in the world.

So today I had the honor to present my credentials to President Aliyev, and this is the first official event I'm able to do. I wanted to make sure I did that with you, friends from the press and the media.

I have been very anxious for, well, over a year and a half to speak with all of you again. I see many of my friends here in the group, and I'm very pleased to have met many others that I haven't previously had a chance to get to know. I am excited about renewing and beginning our work together.

President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton both made very clear to me before I left how important the relationship, the friendship and the partnership between our two countries is. And the way President Obama appointed me to be able to come here to Azerbaijan I think underscores how important he views relations between the United States and Azerbaijan to be.

So we have a lot of work together as I with instructions from our President will make every effort possible to restore and deepen the partnership between our countries and to convey my country's deep respect for your country.

We have a broad and a deep set of strategic interests that bring our countries together. I've spoken before about our interests that we share in security, on energy, and on internal reform. No issue on security or in any segment is more important than finding or doing everything possible to help the Minsk Group Co-

Chairs find a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. So I will do everything I possibly can to support the efforts of Ambassador Bradtke and the OSCE Minsk Group to help both sides reach a settlement that is a compromise, that is fair, and that will last. I think nobody who's serious about being a diplomat wishes to do anything more strongly than to help countries come together and reach peace. We realize that a peaceful negotiated settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will be great for the entire region. It will strengthen the prosperity of the entire region and increase the strategic importance of this entire region.

We are also grateful for Azerbaijan's continuing cooperation in fighting terrorism, and especially in standing with our soldiers in Afghanistan. We have established and are deepening cooperation on moving non-lethal, so non-weapons into Afghanistan across and over Azerbaijan, and view that as a sign of deepening friendship and partnership.

I will say very little about energy other than this is an important year. Countries and companies have entered a serious stage of negotiations as they move forward in completing a southern corridor to connect Azerbaijan even more deeply to Europe, and to help Europe diversify its own supplies of natural gas. Our embassy and our government in Washington will continue its vigorous efforts to help the parties in any way that they wish as they finalize their agreements to develop projects that are commercially attractive and successful.

Finally, I'd like to make a few remarks about the continuation of democratic and market economic reforms in Azerbaijan. We welcome the recently announced anti-corruption initiative that you have said much about in your own writing and your own speaking. We stand ready to encourage the further progress of that effort and the deepening of that effort which will reflect our hope and our belief that Azerbaijan can and is emerging as an alternative and a very positive alternative to the choice that many people have spoken about and written about in the media that confronted Egypt. Much has been spoken about in world media about the way Egypt seemed to face a difficult decision between extremism and stagnation of reforms. We believe that as Azerbaijan moves forward with the sorts of efforts I discussed, as there's further progress on democratic reform, again Azerbaijan can stand as an example of success that provides a hopeful and positive way forward.

So we have a huge amount of work to do together. Our cooperation, between my government, our embassy, and you, the media of Azerbaijan, is a critical element

in what I just described. I look forward to your criticism of whatever I do that you think is wrong and I look forward to learning from you and from what you write and what you say about what people think in this country. And I hope sometimes we'll have positive things to say to each other, too. And I know we will.

Before I take some questions I wanted to raise a glass to all of you. Those of you who have glasses, please raise them with me. I toast you, the representatives of freedom of speech, of freedom of thought, of enlightenment here in Azerbaijan. I hope I will prove a worthy partner and I raise my glass to the honor of Azerbaijan. To Azerbaijan and to all of you.

Thank you for joining me.

[Applause].

Media: Mr. Bryza, welcome to Baku. What questions have you discussed with the President today? And was the possible terror threat among the issues? The U.S. embassy has stated more than a message twice. Thank you.

Ambassador Bryza: We discussed the full range of issues that I just mentioned in my extended remarks. Our discussion was a friendly one and a frank one. I felt we were able to exchange our views in a very open way and a very positive way that is appropriate for two countries that are friends and that face common challenges.

As far as the second point you raised, the terrorist threat, we don't issue those sorts of warnings lightly. The second message that we issued stressed that the situation is serious. At the same time I would like to stress that we are quite pleased with the cooperation and support we enjoy from the government of Azerbaijan. It sounds like Maya upstairs agrees with that. [Laughter]. It's nice to see you again, Victoria.

Media: The International Crisis Group made a statement that there is a possible threat of the resumption of the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. As a diplomat, as a person who was long-time involved on this issue, do you see any possibility of the resumption of the war between the two countries?

The second question is, after the WikiLeaks disclosure, is there going to be any changes in the procedures, activities of the U.S. embassy?

Ambassador Bryza: Thank you. First of all I need to make clear, again, that I come here as the Ambassador of the United States to Azerbaijan and not as the Minsk Group Co-Chair. So I don't want to leave the impression that in any way I'm involved in the actual negotiations.

But as I often have stated or had stated when I did get involved directly in the negotiations, I deeply believe there is no possible military solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We together as an international community all have to do everything possible to discourage the use of or the threat of force. The parties are negotiating a peaceful settlement on the basis of three key elements of the Helsinki Final Act. Of course one of those is the non-use of force and the non-threat of force.

In my opinion based on what I've learned here and from my own discussions with Ambassador Bradtke, the Minsk Group process is moving and the parties are looking forward to their meeting on March 5th in Sochi at the level of presidents. Thank you.

Media: Mr. Bryza, as far as we know you have presented your credentials to the President. On this occasion I would like to use this opportunity to congratulate you on behalf of ANS leadership. My question would be that we know that for a year and a half the ambassadorial post in the U.S. embassy was vacant. During that time there was consultations, regular military consultations between the two countries. But during that period of vacancy these consultations were not taking place. As now we have U.S. ambassador in Azerbaijan, what do you think these consultations will be carried on or not? We'd like to get your view on this.

Ambassador Bryza: You said military consultations?

Media: Military consultations.

Ambassador Bryza: Yes, I'm hoping very much that we will be able to hold those consultations in the near future. I plan to raise that exact issue in the next coming days with my colleagues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs because these particular consultations are political-military and led by the Foreign Ministries. And I anticipate that we will be able to hold those talks soon, though I don't know anything about an exact date. But it's important that those talks happen, and we have readiness at a senior level of our government to participate. Thank you.

Media: There was a question in Azerbaijani and English, I would like to ask my question in Russian. Several days ago at this event the U.S. Congress has worked on the foreign aid to the countries where the aid to Nagorno-Karabakh was written in a separate line. Given the fact that U.S. does not recognize Nagorno-Karabakh as a country and recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Don't you think that these two ideas are contradictory?

Ambassador Bryza: The United States Congress is the branch of our government that has enacted that legislation and made that statement that you just described. It's a separate branch of government and has a right to express itself any way it wishes, and is the part of our government that authorizes or permits the part of the government I work in to spend money.

My part of the U.S. government, the executive branch, has made clear that we both support Azerbaijan's territorial integrity as all members of the OSCE's Minsk Group do, and are working to achieve a negotiated settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh through which the final status of Karabakh will be determined through negotiations and an agreement that is based on three core Helsinki Final Act principles. The non-use of force and non-threat of force; the territorial integrity of states; and the self-determination of peoples.

Thank you very much.

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