
AMBASSADOR MATTHEW BRYZA

INTERVIEW WITH TREND NEWS AGENCY

Baku, Azerbaijan

March 18, 2011

Trend News Agency: Mr. Ambassador, first of all I would like to ask about your priorities of your work in Baku. Because you are a diplomat who knows the region very well, and so as a diplomat with really great knowledge of the region, what would you put at the top of the agenda?

Ambassador Bryza: Thank you for the very kind characterization. We conceive of ourselves as having three sets of shared strategic interests here with our friends from Azerbaijan. Those are in security, in energy and in internal reform. In security – as I’ve said many times – no issue is more important than helping the parties find a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

But in energy, this is an important year. It’s a year when we hope to see the companies and the countries that are developing the Southern Corridor for natural gas exports to Europe finalize their agreements to allow the investors here in Azerbaijan to commit a large amount of money, up to \$20 billion, for the next phase of natural gas development. Those projects – when they come together – will do a great deal to strengthen Azerbaijan’s strategic connections to Europe, and will help Europe be even more secure by having a diversified supply of natural gas.

Finally, on internal reform, we conceive of our top goals as helping Azerbaijan to liberalize its society, to lay the foundation for further democratic reform, and thereby allow the country to maintain long-term stability because it is, in fact, ultimately through democracy and democratic evolution that long-term stability is born.

Trend News Agency: Your candidature had a long debate in the Senate. What is your opinion about the reason for such a long debate in the Senate?

Ambassador Bryza: The long debate has to do with our democratic system. The system worked as it’s supposed to work. There were some people in our country who were concerned about aspects of my candidacy. I had the opportunity to answer those concerns, and, in the final analysis, some people still maintained objections, but our President exercised his constitutional right and authority to

appoint me. I'm very grateful he did, and I would underscore that by so doing he demonstrated how important Azerbaijan-U.S. relations are. I'm just so happy I happen to be the ambassador who was appointed, and I derive great energy from pursuing those three sets of interests we talked about a moment ago.

So, in short, my comment on my confirmation process is that our democratic system had to play itself out, and I'm very pleased to be here.

Trend News Agency: What about our bilateral relations? How do you see the level of relations now and the prospects for the future?

Ambassador Bryza: I hope I'm accurate when I say that I feel they're improving. We've always been quite aligned with Azerbaijan about the major strategic questions. I think both of our countries share a desire for a peaceful negotiated settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and I'm fully aware that no issue is more important for Azerbaijan than that.

I think for years, over a decade, a decade and a half, we have been aligned very closely on energy issues: first, on creating the corridor to export oil from the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli field through Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, and now on the new generation of investments to again help Europe diversify its supplies of gas. I think we're very well aligned on that.

I'd just like to add that it's crucial now that the companies involved in developing the Southern Corridor and the countries have open dialogue. There's an urgent need to resolve the transit and gas sales issues and finalizing that agreement on gas transit sales that was preliminarily concluded between Turkey and Azerbaijan last June. We hope to see the two parties coming together very soon to resolve those issues.

Then, finally on that third set of strategic interests, on internal reform, I'd like to think that the launching of this anti-corruption campaign will grow and deepen and lead to further liberalization of Azerbaijani society so that, as I said before, Azerbaijan becomes increasingly stable and our friendship deepens.

Trend News Agency: What about the views on the regional policy? How close do you think the U.S. and Azerbaijanis are on regional policy, including the resolution of the conflict?

Ambassador Bryza: By the region, I assume you mean the Southern Caucasus – quite closely aligned, I think. As you mentioned just now, and as I mentioned

before, we share an interest in the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. President Aliyev referred to this, along with President Sarkisian recently on March 5 in Sochi, where the presidents issued an important statement saying again that they're committed to a peaceful settlement, saying that all incidents along the line of contact need to be investigated thoroughly by the OSCE, and they agreed to an exchange of prisoners that happened just yesterday.

So, as the co-chair of the Minsk Group, we believe that we have an international duty to do everything possible to help Azerbaijan realize this peaceful settlement to which President Aliyev recommitted himself in Sochi just now.

Trend News Agency: You were in the OSCE, one of the co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group. Were you somehow involved in the process of resolution now or --

Ambassador Bryza: No, I'm not a mediator. Ambassador (Robert) Bradtke succeeded me, and he's a superb diplomat. I've known him for many years. I consider him a friend, a colleague, and one of our finest diplomats. My job is to do all I can to support him and the entire Minsk Group as the parties themselves work toward a solution.

So, to the extent to which Ambassador Bradtke needs my assistance, I will do everything possible, use every ounce of energy I have, but he's the mediator.

Trend News Agency: What efforts do you think that the U.S. can do now? Any efforts, do you see the U.S. can push forward the process?

Ambassador Bryza: I think we're doing a lot already. Before I left Washington to come here, I had a chance to discuss the Minsk Group process in the context of our overall bilateral relationship with President Obama, with Secretary Clinton. Again, from the clear perspective that I'm not the mediator but I'm going to a place that's very important, obviously, for resolving this conflict. So I could feel and hear with my own ears how committed they are to doing whatever is necessary to help the parties reach agreement.

I think the co-chairs are doing a very good job. You might say okay, I'm subjective as a former co-chair. I always liked the co-chairs. But I just look at the process, and they're doing a very good job. And I see that President Medvedev has been constructive, and he's helped move the process along. And, as the co-chairs said, there was progress in Sochi. So we will do all we can to sustain that progress.

Trend News Agency: About the economic cooperation. You mentioned energy. Energy is the traditional sector of economic cooperation. Do you think that the U.S. will pay attention to any other sectors like ecology, agriculture, medical sectors?

Ambassador Bryza: Absolutely. Energy gets most of the attention, but there's much more that we're doing in economic cooperation with Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan has expressed an aspiration to join the World Trade Organization, so we hope that it will invigorate its negotiating efforts to succeed in that way. We have been working together to finalize a very important sale of a commercial satellite with Orbital Sciences, a company based in Austin, Texas – a communication satellite that will allow Azerbaijan to be the only country in the Commonwealth of Independent States other than Russia to have a communication satellite. We're very pleased that the progress continues on the finalization of sale of some Boeing aircraft to AZAL, which is quite a big deal that underscores the strategic connection of our two countries in the economic sphere.

Also you talked about the health care sector. I think there's more that we can do as partners, meaning the United States and Azerbaijan, in the areas of health care reform, education, and education reform, and gender issues, or women's rights. The more we can do together to strengthen the health care and education systems and the rights of women throughout Azerbaijani society, the healthier Azerbaijani society will be, the stronger its secular system will be, and the more vigorous will be our friendship and our partnership.

Trend News Agency: Talking about any particular projects, can you mention any project in the national sphere like health care, education or promotion of women's rights?

Ambassador Bryza: Actually you asked me about agriculture. A lot of these ideas are preliminary and we're still working them through, of course, with my colleagues here at the embassy and in Washington and, most importantly, with colleagues here in Azerbaijan. I think, in general, there is a lot we can do on agri-business. Since 40 percent of Azerbaijan's population is living in rural areas, agricultural business is a crucial way to help Azerbaijan diversify its economic growth away from the energy sector and to help improve the lives of Azerbaijan's rural population. I think those sorts of projects that help stimulate business and economic growth in rural regions are a crucial way to help lay the foundation for further democratic reform. As we know from the history of Europe and the United States, when individual property

holders or business owners feel a need to protect and grow their own holdings, that's where the spirit of democracy really starts to flourish.

So while we work on political reform, it's also important to work on business development in rural areas.

One other thing I'd like to mention is Azerbaijan's and Baku, the beautiful tradition of Taghiyev, the great industrialist at the turn of the last century, who started the first girls school in a Muslim country anywhere in this region. That's a hint to me that maybe that's an area where we can work together with Azerbaijan, both with its government, its companies, and with civil society as well.

Trend News Agency: You mentioned the AZAL, the opening of the direct lines, yes, as Azerbaijan buys this new Boeing aircraft. So how is the situation going in this sphere, and what legal aspects have already been solved? What is there to be worked on?

Ambassador Bryza: The process of a country's airline gaining access to U.S. airspace is a technical one, and it's moving forward here. I've had the good fortune to discuss it with a variety of Azerbaijani authorities, including Mr. (Jahangir) Askerov of AZAL, and we had provided some technical assistance in the past to help Azerbaijan work through all of these technical issues, and I sense that now the process is moving pretty well.

This probably isn't the proper forum to get into all the complex and specific legal issues. I would just like to say I'm comfortable that the process is moving forward.

Trend News Agency: I see. And you mentioned also ecology. What about green energy, like alternative energy. Any plans in this year?

Ambassador Bryza: Thank you for bringing that up. I think Azerbaijan has great potential for renewable energy. As I know from where I live up in Badamdar, Baku is the windy city, just like my hometown of Chicago is known as the windy city in the United States. Yes, wind energy seems to be quite promising. I've heard some informal proposals from a variety of entrepreneurs which sound, in theory, promising. Of course, every business venture succeeds or fails based on the business plan and the fundamental economics of the environment, of the market, and of the business climate. So I hope that the entrepreneurs will be able to work

with local authorities here to make sure the business climate is as attractive as possible for wind projects.

And solar ought to be, in principle, workable as well, with all the sunshine we have in this beautiful city. I'm so happy that Novruz is here. And, by the way, I wish all of your readers a very happy Novruz. I feel spring here, and may the sunshine of Azerbaijan become even more prosperous.

Trend News Agency: Is there a base to work on, or it's just plans?

Ambassador Bryza: I think at this point it's plans. It's good ideas from serious business people, but they need to sit down with their partners here in Baku and figure out what makes the most sense.

My role as an ambassador is not to make the deal happen. I'm not the negotiator. I can simply try to help people here and in the United States find each other, help partners find each other, and then help anybody who seeks assistance think through the possibilities.

Trend News Agency: Thank you very much.

Ambassador Bryza: Thank you very much.

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