

Baku Trip Summary: Assistant Secretary Nuland, February 16-17, 2015

From February 16 to 17, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland led a joint civilian-military delegation to Baku, Azerbaijan to meet with senior Azerbaijani government officials and civil society representatives to discuss a broad range of bilateral and regional issues. Speaking with media on February 17, Assistant Secretary Nuland said, “I had a very good, frank, candid meeting with President Aliyev and Foreign Minister Mammadyarov and the National Security advisor this morning. I then had a chance to sit with civil society. In both of those meetings, our message was strong and clear that the United States very much values our 20 year-plus partnership with Azerbaijan, that we want to see the strongest, most democratic, and independent Azerbaijan possible”. Assistant Secretary Nuland said the United States wants “to continue the strong work we’ve done together over the years in the three traditional areas of security, economics and energy, and in strengthening and promoting the strongest possible democracy in Azerbaijan”.

In her meetings with senior government officials Assistant Secretary Nuland said she discussed security cooperation and how the United States can do more to train and strengthen Azerbaijan’s peacekeeping forces. On energy cooperation, Assistant Secretary Nuland stated, “Now we’re moving on to strengthen and bring to life the Southern Corridor, which is important not just for Azerbaijan, but also for all the countries of Europe who are too dependent on a single source of energy”. Assistant Secretary Nuland noted President Aliyev’s focus on fighting corruption and said, “We agreed today that we would intensify that cooperation bilaterally in the interest of a strong, democratic, clean Azerbaijan, where all people can benefit as the country goes forward”. Assistant Secretary Nuland said she discussed issues related to Nagorno-Karabakh, but noted that the recent visit by the Minsk Group Co-Chairs covered most of those issues.

On democracy and human rights, Assistant Secretary Nuland said, “A vibrant, strong, conversation between the government and civil society is very important for the future of Azerbaijan. It’s something that the United States has supported and invested in for more than 20 years. She said they discussed the concerns that the United States has about the human rights situation in Azerbaijan and announced that she agreed with President Aliyev to create a U.S.-Azerbaijan dialogue on civil society and democracy. Assistant Secretary Nuland said, “This will be a U.S.-Azerbaijan bilateral structure that will work in parallel with the work that Azerbaijan is currently doing with the Council of Europe and Secretary General Jagland”.

Assistant Secretary Nuland concluded her remarks to the press by discussing people-to-people relations. She said, “We talked about people-to-people relations today, about the student exchanges that we have, Fulbright, IREX, the FLEX program, about the importance of young Azerbaijanis having the chance to study in the United States, and young Americans having the chance to come here, and work, and learn in your country. That’s a very, very important pillar of the work we do together”.