

TRANSCRIPT

U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan Richard Morningstar
Press Standup
Azerbaijan State Economic University
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Ambassador Morningstar: It is a pleasure to be here today at the Azerbaijan State Economic University. I've spent more than an hour and a half with the students and faculty and I thought that the students and the faculty asked just excellent questions and we had a very excellent discussion.

As far as the areas that we will continue to cooperate with with Azerbaijan, it goes far beyond the energy area. Energy is only one area. We will focus very hard on areas of economic diversification which we talked about today in our meeting. We will continue to work with Azerbaijan on democracy and human right issues, and we will work on a whole series of geopolitical issues including Nagorno-Karabakh, counter-terrorism, work relating to Azerbaijan's great cooperation in Afghanistan, and other geopolitical issues.

Media: [Through Interpreter]. Mr. Ambassador, there are rumors about the shutting down of two newspapers of Azerbaijan. First of them is the first independent newspaper in the country, *Azadliq*; and another one is *Yeni Musavat*. What can you say about this?

Ambassador Morningstar: I can't make any specific comments about either *Azadliq* or *Yeni Musavat*, but what I can say, is that freedom of the press is extremely important for Azerbaijan. It's important that there be independent press, independent newspapers, and also that the internet be used by all parts of Azerbaijani society. It's important that the media represent all aspects and all parts of Azerbaijani society – not only the government, but also civil society and all the various groups within Azerbaijan.

Media: [Through Interpreter]. The question is about the direct flights [between Azerbaijan and the United States]. What is the latest status of negotiations on that?

Ambassador Morningstar: We're making progress. It's hard to say exactly when direct flights will begin, but we're working very hard on all of the safety certifications and the various things that will be necessary to grant appropriate licenses. We're working hard on the finalization of an open skies agreement, all of which will make possible the flights which we hope will take place in the not too distant future.

I will say from a personal standpoint that I have flown out many times on Azerbaijan Airlines. I'm very confident flying with Azerbaijan Airlines. I think they do a very good job.

Media: [Through Interpreter]. A two-part question. What are your impressions of today's meeting?

And as a continuation, you mentioned that one of the areas of cooperation, the security area, is maritime security between the two countries. Former ambassadors were active in that and there were some joint trainings and exercises between the two countries. So I would like to know: are there any concrete joint trainings or drills between the two countries in this regard?

Ambassador Morningstar: First with respect to the latter question, we do have concrete activities that we take part in with Azerbaijan in that area.

And with respect to the meeting today and the students, I was very impressed. I thought the students asked great questions and I hope that they felt they were getting very straightforward answers from me.

Media: [Through Interpreter]. You mentioned about the possible presidential meeting regarding Nagorno-Karabakh that may happen next week. Is it possible that meeting will take place in Vilnius within the Eastern Partnership event?

Ambassador Morningstar: There have already been reports in the press about that meeting. My understanding is that it will not be in Vilnius. We certainly hope that a meeting will take place.

Media: [Through Interpreter]. Next week?

Ambassador Morningstar: I'm not going to talk about specific dates. That's up to the governments. Thank you.

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