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MEDIA ADVISORY

US Ambassador Visits Nakhchivan, Calls for Respect for Cultural Sites April 21, 2011

Ambassador Matthew Bryza today concluded a two-day visit to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic that included meetings with officials, civil society representatives and a visit to Sadarak to see border-crossing improvements funded by the U.S. Department of Energy.

“Nakhchivan plays an important role in modern Azerbaijan,” said Ambassador Bryza, “and it was helpful to exchange views with Chairman Talibov, Nakhchivan State University Rector Habibbayli and civil society leaders and to gain a deeper understanding of the Autonomous Republic’s ancient history. We are collaborating with Nakhchivanis on a range of border security, democracy-strengthening, and education projects, including archaeology, and we seek to do more,” said the Ambassador.

On his first official trip outside Baku in his current position, Ambassador Bryza sought to travel to Djulfa to investigate the cemetery where Armenian Khachkars were reportedly destroyed in 2005, an act that has prompted protests by the European Parliament, international archaeological bodies, and civil society organizations, as well as Ambassador Bryza’s immediate and deeply concerned response at the time to senior Azerbaijani officials.

The ambassador’s request to visit Djulfa was denied. But authorities in Nakhchivan did discuss the Djulfa Khachkars in detail with Ambassador Bryza and pledged to work with him to facilitate a visit to the Djulfa cemetery in coming months.

“As I pledged to do in Washington before arriving as Ambassador, I traveled to Nakhchivan to investigate what happened in Djulfa. As I said at the time the cemetery destruction was reported, the desecration of cultural sites – especially a cemetery – is a tragedy, which we deplore, regardless of where it happens. The United States continues to call on all parties to respect such sites and collaborate on their preservation,” said Ambassador Bryza.

“The Caucasus is home to many cultural treasures – representing the various creeds, traditions and values of this beautiful region,” said Bryza. “I have worked actively to protect Armenian churches in Tbilisi, as well as Azerbaijani mosques in Shusha and Aghdam. Preservation of these cultural and religious monuments is of immense human importance, which transcends all political, cultural and religious differences,” he added.

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