



Baku Night View.

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Interview with H.E. Minister of Foreign Affairs Mammadyarov

100th Anniversary of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic

The Republic of Azerbaijan recently celebrated two milestone anniversaries: the 100th Anniversary of the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the 25th Anniversary of its membership to the United Nations.

We met His Excellency Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs to tell us more about his country.

SARAH BENCHERIF, UNITAR

This year marks the 100th anniversary of Azerbaijan's independence. What makes this centenary so important today?

On May 28, 1918, the first parliamentary democracy in the Muslim world – the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) – was founded with the adoption of the Declaration on Independence.

Despite facing grave internal and external challenges arising from the collapse of the Russian

empire, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic succeeded in setting effective state institutions, upholding the rights of its citizens and gaining the trust of the international community. Universal suffrage right, as well as the right of voting of women was guaranteed.

The Government was formed on the basis of accountability and separation of powers and the Azerbaijani Parliament was a democratically-elected,

multi-party and truly representative legislative body, the first of its kind in the entire Muslim East. In its two-year tenure, the Republic was governed by five executive cabinets, and the Parliament held 155 meetings and discussed more than 240 draft laws. Another vital pillar of the state-building process came with the establishment of the Chamber of Appeals, creating in effect a modern judicial system that would check the powers of the Parliament and the Cabinet of Ministers.

The newly formed Republic made education a primary concern, and the Baku State University was founded. Despite multiple economic and political difficulties that the Republic was facing, it aspired for long-term human capital investment by providing scholarships for hundreds of young students to study in leading European universities. The Azerbaijani language was declared the official language, the national tricolor flag and the anthem were adopted, modern theater and opera were established, Azerbaijani postage stamps were printed and a national Azerbaijani currency – Manat – was issued.

As stated in the Declaration of Independence, the establishment of friendly relations



His Excellency Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

with all nations, especially the neighboring nations, was determined as one of the foreign policy priorities of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.

The first major breakthrough in diplomatic relations came when the parliamentary delegation of Azerbaijan, headed by Speaker of the Parliament Mr. Alimardan Topchubashov, went to Paris with the main goal to gain international recognition for the ADR at the Paris Peace Conference. Members of the delegation to the Conference impressed foreign dignitaries with their respect to ideas of liberty, rights and justice. The unanimous de-facto recognition of the independence of Azerbaijan was attained, and the Azerbaijani mission received an invitation to the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference.

The Azerbaijani people treasuring the heritage of the ADR celebrate the centennial

anniversary of their independence this year with the heightened sense of pride and particular spirit of festivity.

Today the Republic of Azerbaijan as the independent, sovereign and democratic country brings into the reality the aspirations and ideals of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic with its good and effective management, socio-economic and human capital development as well as its growing role and prestige in international relations. If the founders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic were alive, they would have been proud of today's Republic of Azerbaijan.

Since regaining its independence, Azerbaijan has become a member of the international community. In that sense, how do you value the relations between the United Nations and Azerbaijan?

Shortly after restoring its independence, Azerbaijan was

admitted to the United Nations on March 2, 1992. Membership to the UN allowed Azerbaijan to re-integrate into the world community as an independent State. Since then, Azerbaijan has consistently demonstrated its strong commitment to the principles and purposes of the UN Charter and international law, and has staunchly supported the Organization and actively contributed to its activities.

We highly appreciate the support of the UN, and all its institutions, particularly the UNHCR assistance during the active military phase of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict in 1992-1993 to the refugees and IDP's of Azerbaijan. We look forward to the continued presence in and support to Azerbaijan by the UN system, particularly the UNDP in assisting to keep momentum of success from the realization of the Millennium Development Goals to that of the Sustainable Development Goals.

On October 6, 2016, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, issued an Executive Order on the Establishment of the National Coordination Council on Sustainable Development, instructing it to identify national priorities and their indicators until 2030, in line with the global development goals and targets, adapt the relevant State programs and strategies to the SDGs and prepare annual national SDG progress reports.

During this short period, Azerbaijan has been elected to two principal organs of the United

Nations, namely, the Security Council (2012-2013) and the Economic and Social Council (2003-2005, and since 2017 for the following three years term), as well as to the Commission on Human Rights (2005-2006), the Human Rights Council (2006 – 2009) and the Organization's other elected bodies and agencies. Azerbaijan's election to the UN institutions is also a vivid example of confidence rendered by the Member States to my country.

Azerbaijan is the main author of a series of resolutions adopted within the United Nations on humanitarian, human rights, economic, and cultural issues.

My country is fully committed to maintaining international peace, security and stability and is making sustained efforts towards that end.

As the Secretary-General pointed out in his address to the Security Council in early 2017, "challenges to national sovereignty and territorial integrity are reminders that we must collectively work to preserve and strengthen a rules-based international order so as to maintain peace and security, in accordance with the Charter".

Once being a net consumer of security and international aid, now Azerbaijan acts as a donor country by making contributions to the UN's various programs. In this context, Azerbaijan pays particular attention to addressing the needs of the developing and least developed countries, as well

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as those recovering from natural disasters. Over the years, we have provided humanitarian and other assistance to a number of countries in different regions.

Azerbaijan also attaches primary importance to the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue at the national and international levels.

Finally, I can also add that Azerbaijan contributes to world affairs via its active membership in the United Nations and tries to make the world a better place for all in the future.

Historically Azerbaijan played an important role on the ancient Silk Road. What is the role of Azerbaijan in building connectivity along the East-West and North-South axes?

You are absolutely right that Azerbaijan was one of the important locations along the ancient Silk Road. Based on this historical heritage the development of regional and trans-regional multi-modal transport corridors along the East-West and North-South axes is among the priorities of Azerbaijan.

We have constructed a backbone strategic Baku – Tbilisi – Kars railway with a freight-forwarding capacity of 6-7 million tons at the first stage and its subsequent increase to 17 million tons a year. In expert community is sometimes called the Iron Silk Road. This railway, commissioned last October and passing through Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, is a key segment of the emerging trans-continental corridor, called New Silk Road, which will link trans-Europe and trans-Asian railway networks and will significantly contribute to a reliable and integrated freight railway connection between Europe and Asia. It will also definitely increase transport

and transit capacity of those countries involved and will promote economic growth, stability and welfare in the region. It is expected that Baku – Tbilisi – Kars railway will carry one million passengers at the first stage and 3 million passengers in few years that contributes to movement of people across different regions, their well-being, and paving the way for growth in inter-cultural ties. The Baku – Tbilisi – Kars railway will create opportunities not only for Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, but also for the countries in Asia and Europe. It is an important connection in the Lapis Lazuli trade and transit corridor, aimed at unlocking trade potential of Afghanistan and its link to Europe.

Considering the volume of trade between only China and EU being over €500 billion, it is obvious that there should be a diversity of reliable trade routes – not in conflict or competition with each other, but in complementarity to each other.

Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Ukraine have crafted the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route as a cornerstone of its East-West trade corridor strategy, whose prime objective is to link Europe with East Asia. This is a corporate-institutional undertaking of railway companies, sea ports, and maritime companies of the involved countries. Our initial estimation is to transit some 3-4 million tons of goods during next years and then, subsequently to achieve the volume of 8-10 million tons per year.

Azerbaijan is also actively engaged in further development of the North-South transport corridor that will enable transit of cargo from the Gulf countries via Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia to Europe. We joined this project in 2005, and since then have taken significant steps and

decisions to facilitate trade flows between the northern Europe, Germany, Russia on one side and the South-West Asia and, South Asia on the other.

There is also another trade corridor – that is, South-West international transport route, whose purpose is to bridge India, Iran, Gulf countries with Turkey and Europe. The railway authorities of Poland, Ukraine, Georgia, Iran, and Azerbaijan are jointly developing this route.

Another priority area for the Government of Azerbaijan in promoting connectivity is good governance in transport and trade facilitation, inter alia, through streamlining import, export and transit border procedures, efficient trade formalities allowing more transparent customs processes in transit and trade. Particular attention is given to introduction of information technologies in trade facilitation measures.

Removing bottlenecks and creating a diversity of regional and inter-regional connectivity projects is one of the priorities of my country in its bilateral relations and in all international and regional economic forums.

Belonging to different political and economic domains should not create bottlenecks. However, nations trade with each other, invest into each other's economies, and support each other based on mutual respect and trust. The objective of a new Silk Road is a shared benefit for all those who are interested and willing to cooperate. Azerbaijan has tried so far, and we are willing to do more in order to contribute to these shared benefits.

Azerbaijan is also very well known for its staunch support for intercultural dialogue and multiculturalism.

For centuries, representatives of different religions have been living in Azerbaijan in peace and dignity. Today our historical monuments reflect that cultural diversity. Our strength is in cultural diversity.

We, in Azerbaijan, attach primary importance to promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue at all levels. Multiculturalism and tolerance made a longstanding tradition in my country that strengthens and consolidates our society. We deem that cultural diversity and multiculturalism are strength and wealth that give an ample opportunity to contribute to promotion of dialogue, encourage ethnic and religious pluralism, and thus effectively prevent potential rise of violent extremism. It is not a coincidence that in Azerbaijan the year 2016 was proclaimed as “The Year of Multiculturalism” by a decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Government of Azerbaijan continues to pursue a consistent policy towards protection of rights of all ethnic and religious minorities. More than one thousand mosques, eleven churches, six synagogues and other religious temples are functioning in Azerbaijan without any obstacles.

In 2016, Baku hosted the 7th Global Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations entitled “Living together in inclusive societies”. This important event was attended by more than 4,000 delegates from 147 countries, including the heads of states and governments, ministers, government officials, representatives of international organizations and mass media. The Forum's themes reflected the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which incorporates the promotion of inclusive societies as pivotal component for sustainable development.

World Religious Leaders' Forum, Intercultural Dialogue Forum and other international events are regularly held in Baku, thus contributing to the cause of multiculturalism. There should not be alternative to multiculturalism. The alternative is discrimination, xenophobia, Islamophobia.

Ten years ago we initiated the beginning of the Baku Process. That was our initiative supported by the United Nations to invite government officials from the member-states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Council of Europe. Azerbaijan is one of the few countries, which is a member of both organizations. We invited their members to Baku to get together to address the issues of intercultural dialogue, to reduce tensions based on ethnic and religious grounds, to establish a platform for dialogue and mutual understanding, to address seriously the issues of xenophobia in the world.

The Baku Process this year will celebrate its 10th anniversary. It is a unique international platform, which unites countries of the Muslim world and Europe, and which is open to all countries, and the goal is to create a better understanding between different countries, representatives of different religions and ethnic groups.

Azerbaijan will continue to play its important role in promotion of these values.

The Southern Gas Corridor was commissioned in May this year and Azerbaijan's gas started to be delivered to the Turkish market through the TANAP pipeline. What are the next following steps?

Today Azerbaijan is a key enabler of the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), which is one of the largest infrastructure and energy projects in Europe. More than 40 billion USD will be invested in all four segments of the project with the aim of bringing alternative gas volumes from reliable and alternative source to European markets. The SGC is a unique project of energy security with the right balance of interests among producers, transit countries and consumers. The SGC is also a project of energy diversification and diversification of routes and sources. The gas from the huge Shah Deniz field in the Caspian sector of Azerbaijan will be transported through three consecutive pipelines – the South Caucasus Pipeline, TANAP – Trans-Anatolian Pipeline, and TAP – Trans-Adriatic Pipeline. The South Caucasus and TANAP pipelines are now operational. With the completion of the TAP project the Azerbaijani gas from the Shah Deniz II field in the Caspian Sea will start to be delivered

to Greece, then cross Albania and the Adriatic Sea and will reach Italy and other buyers in Europe. The TANAP/TAP project provides vast opportunities for employment, new investments and prosperity in the countries where it will be passing.

We highly appreciate productive and fruitful cooperation and partnership of all parties involved in the TANAP/TAP project. We are also glad that the European Commission considers the TAP project as a strategic one for the energy security of the European Union.

The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict remains unresolved. What are your expectations for the resolution of the conflict?

The continued occupation of Azerbaijan's lands by Armenia and maintaining the status-quo of occupation constitutes the major threat to regional peace and security. In 1993, the United Nations Security Council adopted four Resolutions that reaffirm the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the inadmissibility of the use of force for the acquisition of territory, and demand the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of occupying forces from all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. This year marks the 25th anniversary of adoption of these Resolutions. UN Security Council Resolutions do

not have time limits and form the fundamental political-legal basis for the resolution of the conflict.

In April this year an inevitable political crisis and government change have taken place in Armenia. Azerbaijan made it clear that if reasonable political forces come to power in Armenia, then it would be possible to make progress in the resolution of the conflict. We also realize that having faced the existing social-economic and political challenges, the new Armenian government needs some more time to become closely engaged with the resolution of conflict.

However, we do hope that new political leadership of Armenia will make a realistic assessment of the situation on the ground, and will come to understanding that the soonest resolution of the conflict will open up opportunities for lasting peace and regional cooperation. It will be people of Armenia who primarily will be able to benefit from the prospects of regional cooperation. Armenia should demonstrate its commitment to peace and security by de-occupying the seized lands of Azerbaijan, and such a move can guarantee durable peace and security, which can be reached in the region. ■

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