

Matthew J. Bryza
Ambassador-Designate to Azerbaijan
Before the
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 22, 2010

Madam Chair and distinguished Members of the Committee,

Thank you, Madam Chair, and Senators, for the privilege of appearing before you today as President Obama's nominee as Ambassador to Azerbaijan. I am grateful for the confidence and trust that the President and Secretary Clinton have placed in me to serve, if confirmed, as Chief of Mission. Thank you, Senator Lugar, for the honor of being introduced by you and of working with you and your staff over these past several years.

While working on the South Caucasus over the past 13 years, I have always seen the promise of the region, and if confirmed, I pledge to work closely with this Committee and other Members of Congress to advance our nation's interests with respect to Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan is an important partner of the United States. Located at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia, and bordering Iran, Azerbaijan is a secular state with a Muslim-majority population, rich history, and religious and ethnic diversity. Azerbaijan's major hydrocarbon resources have driven its economic growth at one of the fastest rates in the world in recent years.

But, Azerbaijan has a long way to go to translate this growth into deeper reforms that unlock the full potential of its dynamic citizens and advance peace and prosperity throughout its region. The United States is committed to helping Azerbaijan overcome these challenges and to achieving our shared interests as partners. Secretary Gates delivered this message during his visit to Baku in June, and Secretary Clinton's recent visit to Azerbaijan is further evidence of this commitment. If confirmed, I will work to invigorate the U.S.-Azerbaijan partnership in pursuit of the U.S.'s three sets of strategic interests in Azerbaijan, notably security, energy, and democratic reform.

On security, Azerbaijan established itself as a key partner of the United States the day after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, when then-

President Heydar Aliyev immediately offered us unlimited overflights of Azerbaijan for our military aircraft. Today, Azerbaijan continues to provide valuable overflight, refueling, and landing rights for U.S. and coalition aircraft bound for Afghanistan. Azerbaijan is also an important partner in the Northern Distribution Network, allowing the United States to transit non-lethal goods through its territory en route to Afghanistan. Azerbaijan has also contributed troops to U.S. and coalition military operations in Afghanistan, as well as Kosovo and Iraq.

Even more, Azerbaijan has provided critical cooperation on counterterrorism, working closely with us on a range of important initiatives. Azerbaijan has also remained a steadfast supporter of Israel. The United States and Azerbaijan have worked together to help prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Caspian Sea Basin and beyond. The Nunn-Lugar program is the bedrock of these collaborative efforts. If confirmed, I will do everything possible to strengthen this vital initiative.

I also look forward, if confirmed, to helping advance a peaceful Nagorno Karabakh settlement. There can be no military solution to this long-standing conflict; rather, negotiation and dialogue hold the key to resolving this issue and bringing peace and stability to the Caucasus region. I am proud of the vibrant partnership my Russian and French counterparts and I developed as Co-Chairs of the OSCE's Minsk Group and the work we did together to try and bring Azerbaijan and Armenia closer to a negotiated solution based on the principles contained in the Helsinki Final Act, specifically those related to refraining from the threat or use of force, the territorial integrity of States, and the equal rights and self-determination of peoples. If confirmed, I will support my successor as U.S. Co-Chair, Ambassador Robert Bradtke, and his two Minsk Group colleagues in their efforts to pursue an agreed resolution between the two countries.

Azerbaijan's energy resources can help diversify global supplies of oil and gas and catalyze the economic growth and integration of the entire South Caucasus with global markets. Thanks to projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Caspian oil now reaches global markets in a commercially and environmentally sound way, free from potential cutoffs by monopolists or geographic choke points. In addition to oil, Azerbaijan is now becoming a crucial actor in our European allies' efforts to diversify their supplies of natural gas. If confirmed, I will continue to support

development of a Southern Corridor of natural gas infrastructure to link gas reserves in Azerbaijan – and perhaps Central Asia – with markets in Europe.

Sustaining and deepening the partnership described above will require a stable Azerbaijan. Stability will emerge from invigorated reforms that expand political participation and economic liberty, combat corruption, and ensure the rule of law is consistent with human rights observance. During my four years as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, I consistently pursued progress on democratic reform, human rights, and fundamental freedoms in Azerbaijan in a spirit of partnership. In her conversation with President Aliyev and in speaking to members of Azerbaijan's youth organizations during her recent trip, Secretary Clinton reiterated the importance of democratic progress for Azerbaijan's future. Programs like the Future Leaders Exchange, long championed by Senator Lugar, help to expand the horizons of opportunity for the next generation of Azerbaijan's leaders – the generation which will be ultimately responsible for bringing the benefits of democracy to full fruition in their country. If confirmed, I will continue to encourage the government of Azerbaijan to move forward on key issues such as media freedom, freedom of expression, political pluralism, rule of law, and civic participation. I will also continue to support youth exchanges which represent a significant and lasting investment in the future of Azerbaijan. Ultimately, if Azerbaijan succeeds in blending democratization, prosperity, and elements of its own culture, it could become an example for transitional countries around the world.

Madam Chair, the U.S. relationship with Azerbaijan spans many important issues. If confirmed, I pledge to do my very best to advance U.S. interests in that country. Thank you very much for considering my nomination, and I look forward to your questions.