



Promoting a Lasting Partnership Between Azerbaijan and America

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BRYZA: Don't write off Azerbaijan just yet

Matthew Bryza is a former U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan and is now director of the International Center for Defense and Security in Estonia and a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Patricia Eurasia Center.

Washington, D.C. – November 29, 2013 – In an op-ed published this month in CNN World, former U.S. ambassador to Azerbaijan, Matthew Bryza, posed the following questions: “When a Western ally holds a presidential election that falls short of international standards, should we write it off? Or should we take a sober look at steps we can help the country take to meet our expectations?”

The article stated, President Ilham Aliyev faced no real competition for a third term and election observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe were particularly sharp in their criticism of the electoral process. Making matters worse, the Central Election Commission appeared to announce results before voting began when a smartphone app developer allegedly tested its election software with false results.

Bryza stated: “President Aliyev is genuinely popular. Two years ago, when I served as U.S. ambassador to Azerbaijan, independent polls reported Aliyev's approval rating at between 83 percent and 86 percent. These numbers, perhaps unimaginable for a Western political leader, reflect the support he enjoys for delivering what Azerbaijani citizens crave most: stability.”

“Azerbaijan nearly collapsed in the early 1990s: the country was gripped by poverty and had just suffered a humiliating military defeat by Armenia in Azerbaijan's region of Nagorno-Karabakh.” Bryza added, “Heydar Aliyev's coming to power is viewed in Azerbaijan as a moment of national salvation, even by many oppositionists. Azerbaijanis recognize that the elder Aliyev's bold decision to connect Azerbaijan's oil and gas fields to the West was critical to securing the country's independence and economic growth,” said Bryza.

“Aliyev has built on that success. GNP has tripled since 2006, while poverty has dropped from 49 percent to just over 6 percent; reformist economic policies have helped catalyze the growth of Azerbaijan's non-energy sectors.”

Bryza concluded his article by underlining Azerbaijan's role in ensuring European energy security.

To read the op-ed in its entirety, visit <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/> website at <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2013/11/14/dont-write-off-azerbaijan-just-yet/>

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