



Promoting a Lasting Partnership Between Azerbaijan and America

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Top official: Azerbaijan wants its national will, policies to be respected



Baku, Azerbaijan, Jan. 8 (trend.az) - *Bloomberg did an interview with the Head of the Public and Political Issues Department of Azerbaijani Presidential Administration Ali Hasanov. Below is the text of the interview.*

- How can the tension that has recently emerged in relations of Azerbaijan and the US be explained? Who is to blame (if one may say so)?

- Azerbaijan's foreign policy is based on principles of equal cooperation, mutual trust, respect for norms of international law and non-interference in internal affairs. Azerbaijan cooperates with all the countries, including the US, exactly on the basis of these principles.

Looking back at history, it is safe to say that an important role was played in the development of US-Azerbaijani relations by the convergence of positions on various global geopolitical, geo-economic and military geo-strategic matters, Caspian energy resources' supplies and ensuring the energy security of the West in the third millennium.

It was Azerbaijan, which made the Caspian region accessible for the West and ensured the participation of major US and European oil companies in the production and export of hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian Sea.

In 1994, Azerbaijan joined the NATO program 'Partnership for Peace', and actively participated in the peacekeeping mission of this organization in such hot points as Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan.

President Heydar Aliyev was one of the first presidents in the world to immediately respond to the act of terror that took place in the US on Sept. 11 2001, unequivocally condemning this act, and thus demonstrated the his country's attitude.

Azerbaijan, as a modern Muslim country confidently following the path of democracy, has always closely cooperated with Western institutions, joined the Council of Europe, joined the Eastern Partnership program of the EU, and provided a comprehensive state support to the development of civil society institutions, independent media, and ensuring human rights and freedoms.

Given the above mentioned, it would be logical to assume that the US-Azerbaijani relations in the future will develop taking into account the interests of both countries and peoples on the basis of principles of mutual respect and genuine partnership.

But, unfortunately, in recent years, some US circles, in particular a number of NGOs, the media and some "experts" implement an unhealthy, contrary to the spirit of partnership campaign of "black PR" against Azerbaijan.

Despite the fact that it is difficult to understand and explain the logic, goals and objectives of this campaign, it is obvious that it has a negative impact on bilateral relations. In addition, some officials in the US State Department, sometimes make obscure statements that are misleading to Azerbaijani public and thus harm the constructive relations between the two countries.

- Do you agree that relations have never been so strained?

- I don't think that attempts of the former unsuccessful US officials, who now act as "experts", to teach anyone sense, including independent states, which are the subjects of international law, as well as calls, contrary to the law and the corresponding adequate response to them of the opposite side can aggravate relations of the deep partnership between the two countries.

Interstate relations between Azerbaijan and the United States coincide from the point of view of both the national interests and the international relations, and have the character of partnership.

Today, relations between the two countries continue to develop on the main issues of common interest, including the relations in the direction of partnership and cooperation on the global transnational level, mutual contacts are

intense. I think that mainly these factors will determine the trend of the future relations between the two countries. So it is a mistake to characterize the US-Azerbaijani interstate relations so pessimistic.

- What are the main expectations of the Azerbaijani government from the US? For what reasons does the main discontent arise?

- The US is the world's superpower, and has significant opportunities to influence global processes. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan, as a result of successful domestic and foreign policies, has over the past 23 years turned into a country with its position on regional and international arena. Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev wants all the countries respect the national will of his country and the policy, which complies with the norms of international law.

Azerbaijan expects this attitude from such countries as the US, China, Russia, the UK, France – the permanent members of the UN Security Council, which shape global world politics, as well as such neighboring countries and partner states as Iran, Turkey and others, as our country treats all the countries in the world, their national interests and independent will basing on this position.

Azerbaijan wants to be seen not as someone wants to, but the way the country really is. So, some circles have to understand that Azerbaijan, as an independent country, has always been guided in the foreign policy by its national interests, has never accepted and will not accept attempts of pressure and threats in the future.

Bilateral relations can develop not on the basis of desire to make domination claims, but on the basis of the principles of common interests, equal cooperation, and non-interference in the internal affairs of each other. The faster those who want to see Azerbaijan as a "satellite" or an outpost abandon this idea, the sooner they can become a close friend of our country.

- Do you really think that the US government wants a change of power in Azerbaijan, or wants to achieve this through its "fifth column"?

- Unfortunately, in modern times, some international forces, using standard programs developed in some "political laboratories", interfere under the guise of promoting democratic principles into the internal affairs of independent states, trying, so to speak, to take the official state policy and social processes in those countries under control, and direct and manage them.

This scenario, used some time earlier in the Eastern Europe, was at a later stage extended to post-Soviet area and the Middle East. Not everywhere the results were equally positive.

Such interference has led to social and political instability, civil strife, economic decline and social cataclysms in many countries. Some facts give reasons to think of the development of specific plans to implement a similar scenario in Azerbaijan as well.

However, I would not want to link these efforts directly with the US president or his administration. That's because President Barack Obama and senior US officials at various times attached great importance to the development of cooperation with Azerbaijan and expressed desire to work with the current President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and his administration. We believe in the sincerity of that desire...

- The US Peace Corps have left Azerbaijan this year. Radio Liberty office was sealed. The US-funded Mediaforum website had to stop its activity. Can this all be considered the result of an “anti-US policy,” as some people claim?

- Unfortunately, the media often attach great importance to artificially politicized, biased and prejudiced claims of “some people” and try to identify general trends on the basis of it. The report by the General Prosecutor's Office of Azerbaijan said that the financial activity of the Baku office of Radio Liberty was opaque.

Therefore, the prosecutor had “suspicions about the misappropriation and money-laundering on a large scale by means of radio.” The Prosecutor's Office conducted a corresponding investigation and carried out the interrogation of employees.

As for the activity of Mediaforum website, it is associated with neither the government, nor any government agency. There are hundreds of such news portals in Azerbaijan.

Regarding the activity of the Peace Corps, I would like to note that this structure has functioned in Azerbaijan since 2003, and we believe it has completed its mission. We believe that there is no serious need for the activity of the Peace Corps in our country thereafter.

The government of Azerbaijan also believes that one shouldn't keep the attention of such a superstate like the United States on such minor issues when there are numerous transnational challenges, international and regional conflicts and other issues the state may be engaged with on a global level.

- Will the Baku bureau of Radio Liberty be able to continue its activities?

- The representative offices of foreign media or their employees operate on the basis of their charters, Azerbaijani laws and accreditation rules. Relevant state bodies carry out control over the compliance with the requirements of the law in this area, and in cases of violations, take legal measures. This is their direct responsibility.

Radio Liberty had no local broadcasting in Azerbaijan and operated as an Internet radio. Under its charter, the radio has so far operated and continues to operate on the Internet, and probably, will further continue to operate. Just in order to be accredited in Azerbaijan and open a local office, it is required to comply with the rules and laws of the state. Naturally, the results of the investigation into the compliance of the Radio Liberty's activities with laws will play their role here.

- **According to information spread by the US Department of State, the Secretary of State John Kerry phoned President Ilham Aliyev on December 21. No details of this phone call have been presented to the press. Why did Kerry call President Aliyev? It is interesting that five days after this conversation, the Baku bureau of the Radio Liberty was closed.**

- In my opinion, during the telephone conversation, the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and the US Secretary of State John Kerry primarily discussed bilateral relations and topical issues of mutual interest. I would like to note that such contacts have always existed between the leaders of Azerbaijan and the United States, and the call of Mr. Kerry isn't an exception and it is in no way connected with the checks carried out by law enforcement authorities in the Baku office of the Radio Liberty.

- **The ties with Russia develop against the background of deteriorating relations with the US. Can one say that Azerbaijan has already made its strategic choice and is now on Russia's side?**

- As I have already noted, Azerbaijan builds its foreign policy not on the interests of some states, the centers of power, but implements it within the framework of its national interests, in accordance with its national will.

Azerbaijan will not become an enemy of one state in order to make friends with another one, or vice versa. Unlike the leaders of occupant Armenia, President Ilham Aliyev has always pursued and continues to pursue an independent policy.

Azerbaijan's relations with the US, Russia, Iran, most of the leading countries of Europe and other countries are built on the basis of its national interests and are implemented consistently. Azerbaijan is interested in the preservation of the traditional relations of cooperation and partnership with the countries of the whole world and the region, including the US and Russia. This policy isn't directed against other countries under any circumstances.

- **It is no a secret that exactly with Russia's military and political support, Armenia occupied Azerbaijani lands and continues this occupation. Will rapprochement with Russia help Azerbaijan to return its lands?**

- Azerbaijan has, for over 20 years, been declaring worldwide about the occupation of 20 percent of its territory by Armenia, about implementation of the policy of genocide and ethnic cleansing against Azerbaijanis by the Armenians throughout 200 years, about the destruction of our national and cultural monuments, and urges international community and superpowers to help solve the problem on the basis of international law and the well-known four UN resolutions.

However, the OSCE Minsk Group, which includes the US, France and Russia, each time shifts the constructive solution of the problem to the conflict parties, thereby prolonging the occupation.

Iraq, Libya and other countries are immediately bombarded on the basis of UN sanctions or the will of the mentioned big countries, sanctions are imposed on separatist regimes as it was in Ukraine, but no effective

international measure is taken against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh separatist regime. On the contrary, this regime is often patronized.

Doesn't the US government annually allocate \$10 million for the separatist regime in Nagorno-Karabakh? Isn't an opportunity created for the activities of the "representative offices" of the separatists in the US and Europe?

Why doesn't anyone prevent the heads of this regime to hold campaigns and collect money in the US, France? All this is a vivid example of double standards, discrimination and injustice in the world. The occupiers and separatists are supported by someone's weapons, funds and silence. Of course, this paralyzes the international law. In this sense, I think that the settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as part of the norms of international law is a direct responsibility and a task of the UN Security Council, the OSCE Minsk Group and its co-chairmen. This problem can and must be solved by joint efforts of the US, Russia and France. We are interested in developing relations with all co-chairing countries.

- How do you assess the prospects of relations between the US and Azerbaijan?

Only positively. Our countries have great potential for the development of cooperation. The attempts made by some circles in the US and Europe to spoil the relations between the two countries will be futile.

We think that neither the US official circles nor the public seriously consider the preconceived statements against Azerbaijan made by former representatives of the US State Department, former ambassadors and "experts" who act as their representatives, who lost the sense of reality.

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