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U.S. Ambassador: The United States Will Continue to Support Azerbaijan's WTO Efforts

On September 19, Economic Development Minister of Azerbaijan Heydar Babayev met with US Ambassador to Azerbaijan Anne Derse.

The meeting focused on the status of relations between the two countries, opportunities for further cooperation and Azerbaijan's WTO accession efforts. Minister Babayev said Azerbaijan has stepped up its efforts to bring its legislation in line with WTO requirements and continue to negotiate with WTO members.

Minister Babayev hailed the US government's support for Azerbaijan's membership to the WTO. He briefed Ambassador Derse about the hard efforts for accession made by the Azerbaijani government. The US ambassador added that her country has always backed Azerbaijan in WTO accession and rendered \$3 million technical assistance.

Minister Babayev noted that Azerbaijan and Turkey signed a bilateral protocol on goods and services and completed talks with Georgia, Moldova, Oman and the United Arab Emirates. He added that Azerbaijan is also holding bilateral talks with Japan, the European Union, Canada, South Korea and China.

In anticipation of the December meeting of Azerbaijan's Working Party with the WTO, Ambassador Derse said the United States is ready to render further assistance. She underscored that her country will continue to support Azerbaijan in the accession process. /APA/

President Ilham Aliyev Meets With Italian Parliamentary Delegation

On September 20, President Aliyev met with a delegation from the Italian Parliament headed by Umberto Ranieri, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Lower House.

Noting that bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Italy develop in all spheres successfully, President Aliyev focused in particular on the increasing trade between the two countries. President Aliyev said that the inter-parliamentary relations are of great importance for bilateral cooperation and noted that the visit of the Italian delegation to Azerbaijan will contribute to the deepening of this important partnership.

Chairman Ranieri of Italy mentioned that his country is a top trade partner of Azerbaijan. He said there are great opportunities to develop bilateral cooperation not only in energy but also in economic, cultural and other areas. Chairman Ranieri highly praised the Azerbaijani President's efforts to promote Azerbaijan's steady democratic development and impressive economic growth.

NATO Delegation Holds Meeting in Baku

On September 21, a delegation of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Committee's Civil Dimension Sub-Committee on Democratic Governance, headed by Tchetin Kazak held a meeting at the Euro-Atlantic Center in Baku.

First, the delegation was briefed on activities, goals and the challenges facing the Euro-Atlantic Center. Tchetin Kazak acknowledged Azerbaijan's efforts towards European integration. He stated that their visit aimed to study the present condition of the country and democratic reforms conducted, as well as to discuss Azerbaijan-NATO ties. He went on to say that the Civil Dimension Sub-Committee would compile a report on the current environment in Azerbaijan.

Meeting participants unanimously pointed out that the delay in the settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict impedes on Azerbaijan's integration into the Euro-Atlantic space. They stressed that NATO should do more to facilitate a prompt and fair settlement of the conflict.

President Aliyev Meets Economic and Labor Minister of Austria

On September 20, President Ilham Aliyev received an Austrian delegation led by Economic and Labor Minister Martin Bartenstein.

The President noted that economic relations between Azerbaijan and Austria cover a wide range of areas and several Austrian companies are successfully functioning in the country. President Aliyev expressed his confidence that this visit will contribute to the further expansion of relations between the two countries.

Mr. Bartenstein stated that he had productive meetings during his visit to Azerbaijan and underlined that the documents signed during the visit will expand good opportunities to encourage increased bilateral cooperation between Azerbaijan and Austria. /APA/

President Aliyev Receives Iran-Azerbaijan Friendship Group

On September 12, President Ilham Aliyev met with a delegation of the Iran-Azerbaijan Friendship Group led by its Chairman Ahad Gazai. Mr. Gazai said relations between the two countries develop in various spheres and noted that the Iran-Azerbaijan Friendship Group contributes to the expansion of inter-parliamentary cooperation. Mr. Gazai noted that the recent visit of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Azerbaijan was followed with great interest in Iran.

President Aliyev said that Azerbaijan-Iran bilateral relations are developing successfully. The President underlined the importance of Ahmadinejad's visit to Azerbaijan for the expansion of relations between the two countries. President Aliyev noted that the visit of the chairman of the Iran-Azerbaijan Friendship Group to Azerbaijan will contribute to the further expansion of inter-parliamentary cooperation. /APA/

President Aliyev Receives International Energy Agency Delegation

On September 11, President Ilham Aliyev met with a delegation of the International Energy Agency (IEA) led by its Deputy Executive Director William Ramsay.

The talks focused on the global energy projects implemented lately at the IEA with the active involvement of Azerbaijan, energy security in the Caspian basin region, the role of Azerbaijan in international energy cooperation and the outlook for the future.

The next day, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov also met with Mr. Ramsay. Foreign Minister Mammadyarov spoke of Azerbaijan's important role in transporting Central Asian hydrocarbons to the world markets through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Supsa, Baku-Novorossiysk oil pipelines.

Noting the energy memo signed between Azerbaijan and the European Commission, Minister Mammadyarov stressed the importance of the Turkey-Greece-Italy and Nabukko gas projects. Mr. Ramsay noted the special importance of energy security in foreign policy, saying the search for reliable energy sources is of political significance. He said the European Union is eager to see the expansion of alternative energy opportunities. /AzerTac/

World Bank to Finance 16 New Projects in Azerbaijan Within Three Years

On September 11, a delegation led by Peter Thomson, Director of the Sustainable Development Department of the Europe and Central Asia Region of the World Bank met with officials at the Economic Development Ministry of Azerbaijan.

According to the Ministry, the meeting centered on the current level of cooperation between Azerbaijan and the World Bank and WB projects in Azerbaijan.

Economic Development Minister Heydar Babayev said his country attaches great importance to the development of relations with international financial institutions, particularly the World Bank. He added that 16 World Bank-supported projects worth \$450 million have been implemented in the country and 18 projects worth \$537 million are under development.

He noted that, in accordance with the Country Partnership Strategy FY07-10 between Azerbaijan and the World Bank, the bank will also support 16 additional projects in various sectors over the next three years.

Director Thomson expressed his confidence that these ties will further develop. He added that the World Bank Infrastructure and Environment Sector, recently merged into the Sustainable Development Sector, will finance 80% of the projects in Azerbaijan within three years. He noted that the Highway II Project has been approved, and that the Agriculture Development and Credit Project (ADCP) and the Absheron Environmental Clean-Up Project have been approved. Mr. Babayev briefed the delegation about the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and other regional projects, expressing hope that the World Bank will give its support to these and other projects. /APA/