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School of International Affairs

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AZERBAIJAN AND MOLDOVA

An Interview with H.E. Mr. Ion Robu Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Moldova to Azerbaijan

September 10, 2008
Baku, Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan in the World: In your view, what is the most important feature of relations between Moldova and Azerbaijan? How do you rate the level of these relations at present? And which aspects of bilateral relations have been the most successful and which require additional attention?

Ambassador Robu: Relations between Moldova and Azerbaijan Republic today are marked by friendship and mutual cooperation. We are connected by strong ties of

friendship, mutual support, cooperation, and partnership. Political and economic cooperation, as well as cultural and educational exchange are bringing us ever closer together as peoples and states.

There are more than 50 inter-governmental and inter-agency agreements linking our two countries. A new impulse for the development of relations was given by the official visit of Moldova's President Vladimir Voronin to Baku, during which he and Azerbaijani leaders discussed expanding political dialogue, bilateral and regional cooperation, energy cooperation, investment projects, and a variety of other issues of mutual concern.

Cooperation between our two parliaments is also rapidly developing. Moldova's parliamentary chairman, Mariann Lupu visited Baku in May of this year to take part in the celebration of the 90th anniversary of the Milli Majlis of Azerbaijan.

We are watching ever growing ties between scholars and scientists in our two countries and among various sectors of our populations, in particular young people. George Duka, President of Moldova's Academy of Sciences has recently paid a visit to Azerbaijan.

This year, for the first time in a long time, a festival of Moldovan culture took place in Azerbaijan, a celebration that enjoyed great success, as did an analogous measure for Azerbaijani culture in Moldova a year ago.

But despite these successes, it is obvious that we have not yet realized the full potential for cooperation between our two countries, especially in the economic sphere. Business people in our countries do not appear to know very well the possibilities of each other's markets, and it is our responsibility to provide them with the information they need.

AIW: What role do you see Azerbaijan playing in the future development of your country?

Amb. Robu: In recent years, Moldova, just like Azerbaijan, has become attractive for businessmen and investors. Our country is ready to create the necessary conditions for all Azerbaijani companies interested in operating in Moldova. We are especially interested in doing that in the energy sector where Azerbaijani specialists have particular expertise, some of which they have already generously shared with their Moldovan colleagues.

At present, we are very interested in the technical assistance which Azerbaijan can provide Moldova in prospecting for oil and gas. In March 2008, Azerbaijani experts from SOCAR came to Moldova for the second time. They examined what we had done to that point and provided valuable recommendations on how we should proceed further. SOCAR President Rovnag Abdullayev is also expected to pay a visit to Moldova soon.

We also believe that Moldova can play a role in the creation of new oil and gas transport corridors from the Caspian basin to Europe through the exploitation of the Dzhurdzhulesh oil terminal located in the southern part of our country as an extension of the Baku-Supsa system. If the project gets materialized, Caspian oil and gas could be transported to Europe through the Danube River.

AIW: What do you see as the next steps in the development of relations between Azerbaijan and Moldova?

Amb. Robu: Our countries are building a new home in which we and future generations will live. The more attention we devote to this task and the more seriously we work at it, the better it will be for our children and grandchildren. Personally I am deeply convinced that our countries – Moldova and Azerbaijan, by combining our efforts will build a future based on the triumph of all-human values. In these conditions, our bilateral ties take on a special significance. We are very glad that in recent times, there has been a continuing dialogue between our two countries and our two peoples at the highest levels and at other levels as well.

The interest of each of the sides for mutually profitable partnership has grown dramatically and is taking on ever new aspects. The most prospective direction of the development of the economies of our countries lies with mutual investment projects. The presidents of our countries have directed their governments to develop and achieve such concrete forms of cooperation. I have already pointed out that we have not yet realized our full potential in this area, and I am confident that working together we can broaden trade between our two countries, just as we are working to expand cultural ties, tourism, and educational exchanges.

AIW: What impact do you think the recent events in Georgia will have on the security of this region and the resolution of the so-called “frozen” conflicts in other countries of the region, including Azerbaijan and Moldova?

Amb. Robu: In speaking of the Transdnistria conflict, I would like to say that the answer to this question is contained in the declaration of the Government of the Republic of Moldova in connection with the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

That document stresses that “the inter-ethnic conflict in Georgia, which has existed for many years, unfortunately at this time has not found an adequate resolution in correspondence with the standards of international law and human values and thus has been transformed into a bloody drama with victims among the civilian population. The Government of the Republic of Moldova categorically rejects any use of force for the resolution of conflict situations, including those which are connected with the maintenance of the territorial integrity of countries, and it does not consider that international recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia will become a stabilizing factor in this situation.”

At the same time, the document stresses “the absence of any connections and parallels between the situation which exists in Georgia and that which exists in the Transdnistria region” of Moldova. The latter has its own distinctive features, and there are no objective reasons for conflict. Consequently, we hope that all partners will do everything possible to ensure a constructive approach to the resolution of the problem.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict also has its own specific features. The common feature of these conflicts is aggressive separatism supported by external forces which block our states from achieving any resolution. We must work together ever more closely in order to achieve greater positive results and by peaceful means reestablish the territorial integrity of our countries.

AIW: Azerbaijan and Moldova cooperate not only bilaterally but also in the multilateral framework of GUAM. What importance does this organization have for your country? And how would you like to see it develop, especially in the wake of the recent events in Georgia?

Amb. Robu: Our countries cooperate in the framework of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM, where we actively discuss questions of how we can work together. In 2007, GUAM marked its 10th anniversary, and on that occasion and under the presidency of Azerbaijan, the organization took a number of steps to raise its authority in the world. Earlier this year, the members of GUAM took additional steps in this direction at a Baku conference on GUAM's development strategy.

GUAM has already successfully realized such projects as a free trade zone, cooperation in transportation routes and trade, and the creation of the national virtual center SECI-GUAM. The chief task of this center with its center in Bucharest is to support the exchange of information between national entities of the GUAM countries in such areas as the struggle against transnational crime and others.

In my view, one of the basic directions of GUAM's activity in the future should be the development and implementation of energy projects including the creation of an effective corridor between east and west and the achievement of the GUAM countries' aspirations to integrate with European institutions. As to the impact of Georgian events on GUAM, that must become the subject of discussions among the GUAM member states.

UKRAINE SEES A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR GUAM

Ukraine's newly-arrived ambassador in Baku, H.E. Mr. Boris Klimchuk, shared these comments with "Azerbaijan in the World" about how his government sees GUAM developing.

One should begin by noting that October 2007 marked the tenth anniversary of the meeting of the presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in Strasbourg that formalized the already close cooperation among our countries and thus created what today is known as GUAM. Now, as a result of their joint efforts, GUAM has acquired real weight in the international system and has developed partnerships around the world, including with the countries of Eastern Europe, the Baltic States, the United States, Japan and more.

In the course of the decade, our organization has demonstrated its effectiveness and continues to do so. The 2007 Baku summit at which the GUAM presidency passed to Azerbaijan not only highlighted what has been achieved but gave new impetus to the organization's development.

For all the member countries and for GUAM as an organization, the past year under Azerbaijan's presidency has been particularly protective in terms of social and economic development, the development of communication and transportation links, the expansion of cultural and scientific ties, the strengthening of our cooperation in other international organizations, and the joint struggle against international

terrorism, organized crime, and the drug trade. As a result of these efforts, the GUAM member states are closer than ever before to achieving their goal of bringing their countries into line with European values and standards.

A clear illustration of what has been achieved – and an indication of the possibilities for further growth in cooperation among our countries – is the expansion of trade between Azerbaijan and other member states. In 2005, Azerbaijan’s trade with the three other GUAM countries amounted to 516 million US dollars; in 2007, it had almost doubled to 912 million US dollars; and this year it is on track to top more than one billion US dollars.

That kind of growth and the integration that goes with it will only be increased by some of the other initiatives GUAM has taken over the past year including but not limited to the development of the Euro-Asiatic oil transit corridor, the development of intermodal transport systems, and the development of the GUAM space as the most important transit zone between Europe and Asia.

At the present time, GUAM is devoting particular attention to promoting stability first and foremost within and among the member states, an effort that our partners in the European Union and the United States in particular have welcomed. We cannot speak about the strengthening of security without addressing the frozen conflicts in Transdnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Indeed, their resolution is one of our most pressing tasks, and although there are no such conflicts on Ukrainian territory, Kyiv stands ready to provide whatever assistance it can both directly and through international organizations.

In this connection, I would like to call attention to the united front of GUAM countries in the course of the 14 March 2008 debate and vote in the UN General Assembly on the resolution concerning occupied territories in Azerbaijan. That kind of cooperation was also manifested at the third ODER-GUAM summit in Batumi on June 30-July 1 of this year. At that meeting, GUAM countries committed themselves to work together even more closely than in the past at the United Nations and at the OSCE, in the first instance to secure the passage of resolutions on the frozen conflicts.

Such progress gives us every reason to be confident that GUAM will have an even brighter future than its already successful first decade.

**GUAM AFTER GEORGIA
More Important than Ever or Soon to Die?**

Paul Goble
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This is a defining moment in the history of GUAM, one more important than the initial agreement that launched this regional grouping a decade ago, more difficult than the accession and departure of Uzbekistan from its ranks, and more uncertain than any time before, with the possibility that Russian actions in Georgia

will make GUAM a more significant body than it has ever been before and the threat that those same actions will result in the death of GUAM as a player in the geopolitics of Eurasia.

On the one hand, Moscow's invasion of Georgia and Georgia's decision to leave the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) opens the door to the possibility that GUAM as one of the most important organizational alternatives will become more important, either by attracting new members or perhaps even more importantly by serving as a model for the emergence of other regional groupings within Eurasia.

There are at least five ways in which these positive outcomes might occur.

First, the United States and the European Union may increase their political investment in GUAM, seeing it as a useful tool for countering Russian influence, a development that will be more likely if GUAM can develop more bilateral ties with countries like Poland and Japan beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union.

Second, with Georgia's exit from the CIS and with Kazakhstan's declaration that Tbilisi's move will not have any consequences for bilateral ties, more countries, starting with Ukraine may leave the CIS, and some of them may look to GUAM as a possible new home.

Third, even if these countries do not make that choice, they are certain to consider GUAM's principles and history as a model for what they might do elsewhere. Indeed, it is conceivable that there could be a series of multiple, overlapping mini-GUAMs that would contribute to the further decomposition of the post-Soviet space.

Fourth, the four countries now in GUAM may decide not to articulate any NATO Article Five type accord but agree to speak out in common whenever they are threatened. Ukraine's backing of Georgia is a model of what this might look like, but for GUAM to succeed, its members will have to speak with a more united voice in defense of one another.

And fifth, the multilateral experience of the GUAM states may lead to the creation of a variety of new institutions, including peacekeeping units, that will make it a more attractive partner for other countries in the region and for the Western powers who will be interested in investing political capital in a group of countries that understands both the nature of the Russian threat and what it takes to counter it.

And on the other hand, Moscow's invasion of Georgia and Georgia's apparent inability to attract the kind of support in the West that that would not only force Moscow to retreat to the status quo ante but also prompt the Kremlin to disavow the use of force against its neighbors means that GUAM may rapidly become a dead letter, an interesting but remarkably short-lived artifact of the period between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the return of Russian imperial ambitions.

There are at least five ways in which these negative outcomes would be likely.

First and most important, the Russian invasion of Georgia changes the rules of the game. For the first time since 1991, every post-Soviet state other than Russia has to deal with the reality that the use of force is not off the table, that Moscow is

willing to end its military across international boundaries. That inevitably will promote in some countries a greater willingness to defer to Moscow – Russia’s goal in all this – and the kind of hyperbolic nationalism based on an appeal to do whatever it takes to promote national survival. Neither of those developments will dispose countries in GUAM to expand cooperation; indeed, such attitudes, especially if they divide the member states as seems likely, will help kill it.

Second, it is an unfortunate reality that all four of the GUAM states have on their territories what the Russians have called frozen conflicts. Moscow will certainly play up this to divide the alliance, promising as it did in mid-August that it would support Chisinau against Tiraspol if Moldova remained committed to the CIS. And because of Russian power, Moscow’s decision to support now one and now another of these countries will place severe strains on the alliance by sparking suspicions that one or another member is getting a better deal by selling out the other three.

Third, in the wake of the Russian invasion of Georgia, a GUAM country, many both within the countries of the grouping and others outside it are going to ask what this alliance means? And why should we have any faith in it? Like a religion, when no one believes in an alliance any more, it is dead, regardless of the meetings that its operatives may hold. Fewer people believe in GUAM today than did a month ago; if that decline continues, it is difficult to see how the grouping could survive.

Fourth, the achievement of one of the primary functions of GUAM at least from the point of view of the West – the organization and support of the export of Caspian hydrocarbons – is almost certainly in trouble. Either the oil and gas will now flow through Russia giving Moscow leverage, through Iran giving the West problems, or flow through Baku-Ceyhan but with that route increasingly under Russian influence or even control. In such circumstances, the foundation of GUAM will crumble, and many in the West first and then in GUAM itself will ask why there is any reason to continue.

And fifth, this group, which was created by one set and even one generation of leaders, may not fit with the plans of new leaders and a new generation. They will see GUAM not as a mistake but as something of the past, and they will seek to create something new, possibly broader, possibly not, but in any case something where GUAM would no longer be at the center of the calculations of these countries.

What then is the likely future of GUAM? No one can say for sure, but three things are fairly obvious. First, the future of GUAM will depend not only on its members alone; it will reflect both Russian actions and the West’s response, two things that are difficult to predict. Second, the future of the organization will depend importantly on the ability of its current members to attract new ones, especially those beyond the old Soviet borders. If that happens, the group will certainly survive; if it doesn’t, there is a much greater chance that it won’t. And third, GUAM’s future is to a greater extent in the hands of the new generation of leaders who have come to power in these countries. If they are prepared to devote more attention to GUAM and to give it new tasks and meaning, it will survive. But if they assume that they need not worry about this future, then GUAM won’t have one.

DOES GUAM HAVE A FUTURE? A Personal View

Tedo Japaridze
Alternate Director General
International Center for Black Sea Studies

Ambassador Japaridze has served as Georgia's ambassador to the United States, that country's national security advisor and foreign minister, and Secretary General of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). He currently is an Alternate Director General at the International Center for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) in Athens. The following text represents a revised and updated version of an article he published in "Central Asia and the Caucasus." Like that article, it reflects the personal views of the author and does not necessarily reflect the position of the government of Georgia or the ICBSS.

As many commentators and analysts have pointed out, GUAM was the brainchild of those countries – Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova – which joined the Commonwealth of Independent States but which were interested in pursuing a more Western orientation than the other eight members. Its birth mother, if you will, was the Conventional Forces in Europe talks, where the four first made a joint declaration about their orientation.

At the same time, we should recognize that NATO and especially the United States played a role as foster mothers or babysitters as the organization took its first steps. But there is one important comment that should be made here: GUAM did not emerge as an internal dissenter within the CIS as some in Moscow continue to suggest. The member states had a broader agenda than that.

Evidence of that is not hard to find: despite Uzbekistan's decision to leave GUAM and the often unclear messages about Moldova's future role, GUAM with all its occasional confusion and clumsiness nonetheless remains a more dynamic, possibly because more chaotic structure than some other more rigid but completely unproductive organizations in the post-Soviet space.

When GUAM was set up, many of us expected that it would become an important actor not only on that space but beyond, but our expectations at least so far have not been realized at least in full. And it is important now to ask why that was the case, examining carefully where GUAM succeeded and where it has failed and what impact it has had on integration processes across the region. Those are some of the questions I want to consider here in this informal essay.

Because we have been disappointed by what GUAM did not achieve, we sometimes forget to acknowledge what it has achieved. Indeed, considering the landscape, we need to acknowledge that despite everything, the organization has succeeded in becoming a genuine and functioning international organization, with a well-articulated structure and a clearly defined strategic agenda. Those are no small things.

Moreover and perhaps even more important, GUAM has delivered a message to the world that its members want and expect to be treated as sovereign and

independent countries, each with its own national interests and goals, rather than as part of something that no longer existed or through the prism of another country's claims. In short, GUAM has helped to change the mental maps that governments around the world have about the post-Soviet region.

But that is clearly not enough, and now it is time for GUAM to move from changing people's perceptions to changing the reality within which its member states operate. And that quite obviously is no easy task because it may require that GUAM become a very different organization than it has been up to now. If that is to happen, then GUAM and its member states must overcome some outdated ways of thinking, some dating from the Cold War and others from the difficulties of the 1990s, and focus on the ways in which they can promote security in a world where the quality of hotels and banks matter far more than the quality of even the best tanks.

How then to awaken GUAM from its current somnolent, if not moribund condition? By promoting strong economies in order to support the kind of military and other security capabilities that will protect the national security of its members and their neighbors, rather than by racing after the latter in the name of the former. This does not mean any downgrading of the importance of military power but rather thinking strategically about the nature of power relations in the 21st century. And that will require that GUAM and its members adopt a strategic way of thinking, something they have not all done up to now.

If that happens – and it won't be easy given the multiple and competing challenges of life in post-Soviet Eurasia – then GUAM could become a complementary partner with the European Union (which, by the way, BSEC due to its political diversity and vibrancy has failed to acknowledge up to this moment) and a pole of attraction for countries in other regional organizations. So far, however, the EU considers GUAM only occasionally and considers it with a certain neutral curiosity in the best of times – although there are a few politicians in Old Europe who think of GUAM as a kind of institutional enfant terrible or spoiler of what is becoming a new status quo.

To overcome that skepticism, GUAM needs to begin offering the EU and other possible partners certain modest but sustainable and doable cooperation projects as confidence building measures if nothing else. In this, GUAM may want to consider the difficult but ultimately effective contacts between the BSEC and the EU over such cluster issues as transportation, ecological protection, and the fight against organized crime and corruption. If BSEC can do this, so too can GUAM, although there appears little interest in taking such steps now. And if GUAM does more in this direction, then such an engagement strategy will allow GUAM to become part of the EU's decision-making cycle, something important in that increasingly bureaucratic organization.

The pursuit of such cooperation with the EU and other international groupings will help GUAM in another way: it will allow that organization and its member states to take advantage of something that has become axiomatic in today's world. It is not sufficient to be against something or someone in order to attract cooperative support; it is critically important to define one's goals and direct one's efforts to being for something.

While it is clearly the case that relations between Moscow and the West are deteriorating, it is also the case that GUAM needs to present itself not as contributing to that deterioration but rather as a grouping that can help promote cooperation, even where it appears to be failing. That will not hurt GUAM in either place, and it may give the organization and its members the chance to attract positive attention and play a greater role in international affairs.

In developing such an approach, GUAM and its members need to remember that the Former Soviet Space was once a road to somewhere else but now is a vital crossroads in its own right, a place where things happening elsewhere have an impact on tens of millions of people and where things that happen there affect many others. That is a lesson some in the EU need to learn. For many there, GUAM are part of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and thus a segment of the EU's very own "near abroad."

But if GUAM is to become more vital, it needs to look beyond the EU alone, expanding its contacts with powers further afield, especially in Asia, and to increase its visibility through the adoption of a new road map for the organization. That means more than just declarations, although the process of adopting them and their specific content can be significant. It means actions directed at building relationships rather than simply declaring the value of doing so.

One thing that appears to be holding GUAM back is certain pessimism about the organization, a reluctance to talk about many sensitive issues, and a willingness to explore issues that may either seem beyond resolution or outside the competence of the organization. One example of this concerns GUAM's reluctance to talk about the interrelationships of development and security, things that many viewed as separate in the past but that are now thoroughly intertwined. To make progress in all these directions, we who want GUAM to succeed need to identify internal resources so as to redefine and recharge the organization by expanding its agenda and its actions. In short, we must take steps to reinvent GUAM, to make it a very different organization than it has been up to now, rather than simply try to implement its existing agenda more effectively.

Too often in recent months and years, GUAM has been left to academic and bureaucratic experts rather than successful politicians and businessmen. That needs to change, and I would like to propose that GUAM invite EU-based investment bankers to come for three to six months to each of the GUAM states to provide instruction to our bankers and send GUAM bankers and other business people West to learn more and bring back new ideas to invigorate their countries and GUAM itself.

Each of the member countries – Ukraine which is the largest and most economically developed, Azerbaijan with its vast energy resources, Georgia with its difficult experiences, and Moldova which is closest to Europe – can make a contribution. First and foremost, they will individually and collectively overcome certain old Soviet habits of inter-elite ties, bureaucratic cultures, and other characteristics which limit out sovereignties and ability to act independently. And then they can look more confidently to the future.

GUAM is clearly in the midst of a crunch time, of a period in which its own members will decide whether it has a future or whether it will come to be viewed as a short-term and failed institution. I am more than confident that the organization and its members have the capacity to come through with flying colors, but I am also

very much aware that all of them will have to have the courage to move in new directions if they are to avoid failure and succeed.

A CHRONOLOGY OF AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

I. Key Government Statements on Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

After his meeting with visiting U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, President Ilham Aliyev says that "relations between Azerbaijan and the United States will play a very important role in the realization of energy projects" (www.day.az/news/politics/129453.html).

Azerbaijan Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov says that Baku assesses favorably Turkey's proposal for establishing a Platform of Stability and Cooperation in the Caucasus (www.day.az/news/politics/129483.html).

Azerbaijan Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov says that all issues about the legal status of the Caspian and its seabed "must be decided by dialogue among the Caspian littoral states" (www.day.az/news/politics/129496.html).

II. Key Statements by Others about Azerbaijan

After his meeting with President Ilham Aliyev, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney says that he is pleased and encouraged by the level of cooperation between Azerbaijan and the United States on all major questions (www.day.az/news/politics/129353.html). Russian Security Council director Nikolai Patrushev criticizes Cheney for what he said was his effort to put pressure on Baku (www.day.az/news/politics/129398.html).

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov tells visiting Azerbaijan Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov on September 7 that "Russia recognizes the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/129788.html>).

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried says in a widely quoted "Financial Times" interview that "the main question standing before the United States is support of Georgia. The second question in importance is not to allow Russia to create a new zone of influence" (www.day.az/news/politics/129150.html).

III. A Chronology of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

15 September

Iran's oil minister Gholam Hussein Nozari tells the Austrian newspaper "Wiener Zeitung" that Nabucco can go forward if and only if Iran is included among the countries involved.

14 September

President Ilham Aliyev speaks by telephone with Russian Federation President Dmitry Medvedev to congratulate the Russian leader on his birthday and to discuss their Moscow meeting scheduled for September 16.

Turkish President Abdulla Gul officially invites Armenian President Serge Sargsyan to visit Ankara.

Members of the Political Committee of the Assembly of the West European Union arrive in Baku for meetings.

13 September

President Ilham Aliyev receives visiting Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki to discuss bilateral relations and regional security.

The Azerbaijani embassy in Moscow says that it will follow closely the case of Enver Mansurov, an Azerbaijani resident in the Russian Federation who has been accused of pedophilia but who denies the charges.

Ukrainian Ambassador in Baku Boris Klimchuk says that his country's relationship with Azerbaijan is developing rapidly and that the two countries are developing an ever closer foreign policy line (www.zerkalo.az/rubric.php?id=35992&dd=13&mo=9&yr=2008).

The Azerbaijani Academy of Sciences hosts a scholarly conference on the 90th anniversary of the Azerbaijani Republic.

12 September

U.S. Ambassador Anne Derse reaffirms Washington's commitment to Azerbaijan's territorial integrity as the basis for any resolution of the Karabakh dispute and to the OSCE Minsk Group as the best forum for negotiations toward that end and says that this is an especially auspicious time for the resolution of the conflict (www.day.az/news/politics/130302.html).

11 September

President Ilham Aliyev receives visiting Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov and signs a series of bilateral agreements to strengthen relations between their two countries.

Azerbaijan is recognized as the leader in making economic reforms over the last year by the World Bank.

10 September

President Ilham Aliyev receives visiting Turkish President Abdulla Gul.

Azerbaijan's minister for industry and energy Natig Aliyev says that Azerbaijan remains committed to the Nabucco project.

President Ilham Aliyev accepts the letters credential from the new ambassadors to Baku from Cuba, Greece and Egypt.

9 September

President Ilham Aliyev receives Boyden Gray, the U.S special representative for energy issues, who assures him that cooperation between the United States and Azerbaijan will continue after the upcoming elections in both countries.

President Ilham Aliyev receives the OSCE election observers mission.

President Ilham Aliyev receives Hilmi Guler, Turkey's minister of energy and natural resources.

President Ilham Aliyev receives Christos Pholias, Greece's minister for development.

Azerbaijan's parliamentary commission for international relations delays consideration of a memorandum on strategic partnership with the Russian Federation (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/129947.html>).

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation holds in Baku its 31st session on questions of economic, trade, technology and ecology.

Representatives from 31 countries attend the opening of a two-day conference in Baku on "The Potential for Oil and Gas of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan."

8 September

Polls show that a majority of Azerbaijanis have a negative view of Turkish President Abdulla Gul's visit to Armenia and believe that his appearance there will have a negative impact on any resolution of the Karabakh dispute (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/129892.html>).

Baku hosts the third session of the Organization of Economic Cooperation on Agriculture.

Azerbaijan formally opens a consulate general in the Kazakhstan city of Aktau (www.day.az/view_day.php?date=2008-9-8).

7 September

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov receives visiting Azerbaijan Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov.

6 September

President Ilham Aliyev receives the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Claudio Gujerotti, who transmits to him the greetings of Pope Benedict XVI.

Hungarian parliamentarian Katalin Seili says in Baku that Budapest will soon open an embassy in Baku. Meanwhile, Austrian officials indicate that they plan to do the same thing.

5 September

Representatives of the Caspian littoral states conclude a two-day meeting in Baku without achieving an agreement on the delimitation of the sea bed.

The Federation of Azerbaijani Organizations of Turkey say that Turkish president's visit to Armenia "does not correspond to the highest interests of Turkey" (www.day.az/news/politics/129652.html).

Matthew Bryze, US deputy assistant secretary of state, says that the United States "will do everything possible for moving in the direction of a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" (www.day.az/news/politics/129583.html).

4 September

President Ilham Aliyev receives visiting US Vice President Dick Cheney and then receives a telephone call from Russian Federation President Dmitry Medvedev (www.day.az/news/politics/129452.html).

U.S. Ambassador Anne Derse says that the Cheney visit marks a new stage of relations between the United States and Azerbaijan (www.day.az/news/politics/129515.html).

President Ilham Aliyev receives visiting Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mehdi Safari (www.day.az/news/politics/129487.html).

Azerbaijani parliamentarians participate in a Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe session devoted to the problems of the South Caucasus.

Azerbaijan again leads the CIS in GDP growth.

3 September

Orudzh Zalov, Azerbaijan's deputy interior ministry, says that "all mosques function normally" in his country and that no one is persecuted on a religious basis (www.islam.az/modules/news/article.php?storyid=3347).

Nikolai Bekarsyak, the European Union's manager for the South Caucasus, arrives in Baku for a three-day working visit.

Elmira Suleymanova, Azerbaijani ombudsman, takes part in a Dublin conference of the ombudsmen of Europe.

2 September

Russian foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov says that Moscow has nothing against the construction of the Nabucco gas pipeline.

A delegation of the International Atomic Energy Agency arrives in Baku for talks about the peaceful use of atomic power in Azerbaijan.

1 September

Goran Lenmarker, the special rapporteur of the parliamentary assembly of the OSCE on Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia visits Baku.

Azerbaijan and NATO sign an agreement calling for additional joint exercises as part of Baku's participation in the Partnership for Peace program.

Azerbaijani transportation officials visit Austria to discuss cooperation in their field.

Boris Firles, the head of the observer mission of the OSCE Bureau of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, arrives in Baku to supervise that group's observers in advance of the October 15 Azerbaijani presidential election.

Note to Readers

The editors of "Azerbaijan in the World" hope that you find it useful and encourage you to submit your comments and articles via email (adabiweekly@ada.edu.az). The materials it contains reflect the personal views of their authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.