

Azerbaijan-EU: Promising Partnership hampered by a regional conflict

H.E. Ambassador Emin Eyyubov

Head of the Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the EU



Deepening of the Azerbaijan-EU partnership remains on top of Azerbaijan's foreign policy agenda. Azerbaijan views the EU as a good model of successful development in economic, social and humanitarian fields. As a sovereign State with a pragmatic foreign policy, the Republic of Azerbaijan welcomes all initiatives by the EU, which are supposed to provide a positive contribution to further developing bilateral ties, strengthening the political and security dialogue, extending assistance to reforms aimed at modernization of Azerbaijan in all spheres.

President of Azerbaijan H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev attended the Eastern Partnership Summit held in Prague in May 2009,

where the Joint Declaration was adopted as the outcome of this event. From the first day of the implementation of the Eastern Partnership the Republic of Azerbaijan has been engaged into constructive dialogue and cooperation with the EU to promote common goals and mutual interests. As another very encouraging indicator for the future of this one-year-old initiative, on 10 May 2010 the EU General Affairs Council adopted the directive for the negotiation of Association Agreement with Azerbaijan to replace the existing Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. We hope for the soonest start of the drafting talks and express our preparedness to negotiate in a spirit of good understanding.

However, while being committed to the successful realisation of the Eastern Partnership, we can't ignore political obstacles existing in its geographic area, in particular the unresolved conflicts, which in case of the South Caucasus hamper the process of establishment of a full-scale regional cooperation. In this respect, the continued occupation of Azerbaijan's territories by Armenia prevents us from fully exploiting the whole potential of the Eastern Partnership multilateral track, particularly in those areas, which imply cooperation with this country. Any interaction between participating States must be based on a firm political foundation, which includes mutual recognition and respect towards each other's territorial integrity and borders.

In its recent Resolution on "The need for an EU Strategy for the South Caucasus" adopted on 20 May 2010 the European Parliament gives a very pertinent assessment to the situation in our region. It singles out rightly the unresolved conflicts as an impediment to the economic and social development in the countries of the region and considers the peaceful resolution of the conflicts as essential for the full realisation of the Eastern Partnership in the South Caucasus. Referring to the respect by the EU for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity in its relations with the South Caucasus states the Parliament reminds furthermore that one of the aims of the Eastern Partnership is indeed to bring tangible support for the consolidation of statehood and territorial integrity of partner countries and judges unacceptable any conditioning of the respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries of the region.

Moreover, calling for the intensification of efforts to settle Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the coming months and the abandon of preferences to perpetuate the *status quo* created by force and with no international legitimacy the European Parliament demands the withdrawal of Armenian forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan. The European parliamentarians also express their serious concerns on the fact that

hundreds of thousands of refugees and IDPs who fled their homes during or in connection with the Nagorno-Karabakh war remain displaced and their rights, including the right to return, are denied and they call for an unambiguous and unconditional recognition of these rights and underline the need for their prompt realisation.

We believe that this timely and clear statement by the European Parliament on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should be perceived by Armenia as a strong signal to stop its policy aimed at prolongation of the settlement process and finally to take a constructive position in the negotiations, on the

basis of the principles mentioned in the Resolution. Unfortunately, until now playing for time and backtracking from previously agreed understandings, Armenia has been pursuing its annexationist policy, consolidating the occupation of Azerbaijan's territories, and trying to impose on Azerbaijan a *fait accompli*-based solution without any international legitimacy.

Being a very comprehensive document the Resolution of the European Parliament on South Caucasus strategy signposts the paths to be followed by the EU to carry out all necessary measures for the elimination of threats to the peace and stability in the region

and to provide firm support to its European future, including through the dynamic implementation of the Eastern Partnership. In this regard, we hope that furthering its engagement in the South Caucasus the EU, as a global actor and active defender of the international law and justice, will also press more vigorously on the soonest settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in conformity with the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan to allow the promising potential of our long-lasting partnership be fully realised for the benefit of every one and the entire region.



Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

In 1992-1994, in addition to the Nagorno-Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan the Armenian armed forces occupied seven administrative districts surrounding this region and perpetrated an ethnic cleansing against the peaceful Azerbaijani population living in these lands. In sum, the ongoing armed conflict in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan has resulted in the occupation of almost one-fifth of the territory of Azerbaijan and made approximately one out of every eight persons in the country an IDP or refugee, 20 000 people were killed, 50 000 people were wounded or became invalids, about 5 000 citizens of Azerbaijan are still missing.

Ignoring the relevant four UN Security Council Resolutions, Armenia continues the military occupation of the Azerbaijani territories and denies the right of one million Azerbaijani IDPs and refugees to return to their homes. The negotiations process conducted under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group has not yielded any tangible result until today.