

Ambassador Bagirov: If one of the sides demands mediation, we are ready to do what we can.

AZERBAIJAN and TURKEY

FORM THE SPINE OF THE TURKISH WORLD

This month Azerbaijan's Ambassador to Turkey Faig Bagirov is the guest ambassador to the pages of The Diplomatic Observer. We have discussed the foreign policy of Azerbaijan, the continuing legal battle over the Hocali Genocide and relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan with Ambassador Bagirov.

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According to Ambassador Bagirov, the greatest obstacle to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabagh issue is Armenia's stance for the status quo.

Sharing his views on the continuing aircraft crisis between Turkey and Russia, Ambassador Bagirov said that they were not concerned the crisis would spread to Caucasasia.

The world has began 2016 with many hot global developments. The most recent important development occurred on January 16th, when the International Atomic Energy Agency announced that Iran had complied with the obligations of the agreement it had signed with the P+1 group. The sanctions on Iran have been lifted and the world is set for a new period. How does Azerbaijan evaluate this development? Is it a

positive development for Azerbaijan for sanctions to be lifted?

Azerbaijan does not generally support sanctions being imposed on countries. Iran is Azerbaijan's southern neighbour and is an important state good relations with which are important for Azerbaijan. An important point regarding this development is that our President Ilham Aliyev has phones his Iranian counterpart to express his congratulations and during the phone conversation they have agreed to make more intensive efforts to further strengthen ties between Azerbaijan and Iran in the coming period.

Even under the sanctions relations between Azerbaijan and Iran were positive.

At the end of 2015 there were important developments between Turkey and Russia which began with

the aircraft crisis and continues today with Russian sanctions. How does Baku view the increased tension between Turkey and Russia? Is Baku concerned that the crisis between the two might spread to Caucasasia?

Azerbaijan has a clear stance on this matter. Right after the aircraft crisis, Turkey's Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu was visiting Azerbaijan, when the crisis with Russia flared up. Our President Ilham Aliyev expressed to Prime Minister Davutoğlu that Azerbaijan is on the side of Turkey regarding this issue.

Azerbaijan is has friendly and fraternal relations with Turkey. We also have good and strategic relations with our northern neighbour Russia. Of course we do see negative developments between these two countries in a positive light. We believe that the problem will be solved in the future and relations



between Turkey and Russia will be put back on track.

Good relations between the two are also important for the whole region of Caucasia. In this light, Azerbaijan views positive bilateral ties between Turkey and Russia favourably. However, we are by no means concerned that the crisis between the two countries will spread to Caucasia. Of course, bilateral ties not being at the previous level has some effect on the region of Caucasia, but we believe that the relations will get back on track.

Has there been a demand for mediation from Turkey or Russia?

There have been no such demands. However, as I have said, we have fraternal relations with Turkey and strategic relations with Russia. If Azerbaijan is asked to play such a role, we will do the best we can.

“There can be no ceasefire as long as our territory remains occupied”

There were also significant development between Azerbaijan and Armenia following the Turkey-Russia crisis. There was already

fighting along the Nagorno line, but the Armenian side has made strong allegations regarding this issue. Armenia has claimed that Azerbaijan has used heavy weapons and an Armenian Defence Ministry spokesman has said that the ceasefire between the two countries is over. Most recently, on January 21st, the press office of the Armenia Defence Ministry claimed that Azerbaijan had fired 300 times on their positions. In line with these developments, can one say that a state of war exists between Azerbaijan and Armenia?

I would first like to remind your readers that there have been times when the situation has been more volatile since the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabagh problem in 1998 and the establishment of the ceasefire in 1994. 20 per cent of Azerbaijan’s territory is under foreign occupation. The ceasefire established in 1994 has never really applied and there can be no ceasefire as long as our territory remains occupied.

The main reason why the ceasefire does not hold lies with the Armed Forces of Armenia. If they were to withdraw from our territory the ceasefire would apply. Armenia wants the status quo to continue.

If the Armenian military were to leave our territory, stability would improve greatly in the region of Caucasia, as well as in surrounding countries.

Azerbaijan and Armenia are two countries at war. While Azerbaijan makes intensive efforts for a peaceful solution, this has never been met with a positive reaction from Armenia.

Azerbaijan expects the international community to place the necessary pressure on Armenia. It expects the four relevant decisions taken by the UN Security Council to be implemented. These decisions foresee the Armed Forces of Armenia unconditionally withdrawing from Azerbaijani territory.

We know that Moscow has increased arms support to Yerevan. Is this a message? Are they sending a message over Turkey’s brother state?

It must first be said that Armenia is the only country in southern Caucasia to house a Russia military base. As you now, Russia has a military base in Gyumri. Russia has been carrying out military transfers to increase its presence there.

It is clear against whom Russia is carrying out this move.

On December 15th 2015, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev had a meeting with his Armenian counterpart Serge Serkisyan in Bern, Switzerland and no positive developments over Nagorno-Karabagh had been observed. How will this issue be resolved?

That meeting took place on the initiative of the Co-presidents of the Minsk Group. ESCO Minsk Group Co-Presidents, including the USA and France, have declared the status quo in Nagorno-Karabagh to be illegitimate. Armenia has been ignoring such statements and insisting on the continuation of the status quo.

The negotiations have yielded no results. The main reasons for this, as I have said before, is that there is no pressure on Armenia at the international level.

Azerbaijan is making a lot of effort for the issue to be resolved diplomatically.

"It betrays great lack of conscience to ignore a genocide which took place 24 years ago"

February has been a month of great suffering for the Azerbaijani people in the past. On February 26th 1992, the Armenian army massacred Azerbaijani civilians in Hocali. 613 Azerbaijanis including women and children were killed. What would you like to say about the Hocali Genocide of 24 years ago?

The date February 26th 1992 has been written in blood in the modern history of Azerbaijan. 613 of our citizens were brutally murdered. The massacre took place in plain sight of the world. Those who perpetrated the murders have been identified. Yet they go about their business freely.

World public opinion has remained indifferent to the crime. It has ignored a massacre for which visual evidence exists. It betrays a great lack of conscience to ignore a genocide which took place 24 years ago.

In the eyes of the world, what took place in Hocali had no political signifi-



cance. But through the direct initiative of our great leader Haydar Aliyev, a commission was established to prove that what took place in Hocali was genocide and the names of perpetrators were identified one by one. We have let the world know of these names.

What are the latest developments in the international legal battle over the issue?

Azerbaijan is working swiftly to have what happened in Hocali defined as genocide in the framework of international law. When the time comes the reports will be filed with the European Court of Human Rights. Our research continues.

At this point in time many countries in the world have come to see the facts as they are. For example, many legislative assemblies around the world have accepted the events of February 26th 1992 to constitute genocide. These are, for example, the parliaments on Mexico, Colombia, Pakistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Parliamentary Union of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. There have also been several decisions in various state of the USA for recognising the Hocali Genocide.

Azerbaijan is doing its utmost to tell the world about what took place. As countries become better informed about the issue, they will impart more information to their citizens.

"Unfortunately, we forget too easily"

So why does the Turkish world fear the Us President using the word 'genocide' come every April? The example of a genocide such as that took place in Hocali is there for all to see. What is the major problem in the Turkish world not being able to communicate its views? Is it deficient in lobbying?

We have a bad habit that is unique to us. We forget too easily. One cannot forget such things. What happened 24 years ago is clear for all to see. While a true genocide has taken place in Hocali, they would rather talk about a so-called genocide which allegedly took place a hundred years ago.

This has partly to do with us. There are deficiencies in our diaspora and lobbying activities. Azerbaijan and Turkey form the spine of the Turkish world. We should stand in greater unison.

“Sectors other than oil need to develop”

To speak about energy and the economy, how will the fall in oil prices affect Azerbaijan? The manat has depreciated by 47.63 per cent. What is the current state of the Azerbaijani economy?

Data show that the world economy is in serious crisis. We know that oil producing countries are the most affected from the fall in oil prices. Being an oil producing country, Azerbaijan is also going through difficult economic times due to recent developments. That is not to say that rumours that the Azerbaijani economy is in crisis are true. The Azerbaijani government has taken positive steps in order to avoid fallout from the current crisis. It is working on many economic reforms.

Looking at its economic performance over the last decade, it is clear that Azerbaijan will overcome the crisis. We believe that after the crisis is over, the necessary steps will be taken to develop sectors other than oil and the production of goods for export.

It has been claimed that the Baku Formula 1 Grand Prix scheduled for June will be cancelled due to economic reasons. Is such a cancellation really the case?

There have been no problems on this issue. Preparations are well under way. Baku will host the F1 Grand Prix in June.

Due to its geopolitical position, Azerbaijan is an energy transit country between Central Asia and Europe. For example, Azerbaijani oil reaches Turkey over Georgia, through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. How do the advantages of location affect the diplomatic stance and foreign policy decisions of Azerbaijan? For example, while President Ilham Aliyev opposes Russian policy towards Georgia and Ukraine, Azerbaijan maintains a strategic connection with Russia.

In foreign policy, Azerbaijan advocates maintaining good relations with neigh-

bouring countries. Azerbaijan has oil and natural gas wealth. After gaining its independence, Azerbaijan has taken important steps in ensuring its own energy supply security as well as diversifying the sources of energy and oil, especially for Turkey and Georgia.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline is the artery of this policy and is a very good example. That project was completed in 2007, despite objections from various countries and it is a win for Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan. In addition, natural gas supply to Turkey from the Shahdeniz-1 field is planned over the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline. That project is also progressing well.

Does this bring you closer to the West?

Azerbaijan is a unique place. It is a point at which eastern and western civilisations converge. Azerbaijan is an important country in getting to understand what emerges from the mixture of these two civilisations. For example, we are a member of the Council of Europe. At the same time Azerbaijan is an eastern country.

Thanks to this quality of the country, the summit meetings of the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations will be held in Azerbaijan.

“TANAP will ensure Europe’s supply security”

The TANAP project, which is intended to transport Azerbaijani natural gas from the Shahdeniz-2 and other fields in the Caspian to Europe over Turkey is a very significant project. When will the TANAP be completed?

The TANAP has a major role in ensuring Europe’s supply security. With this project, Azerbaijan will provide energy supply security to Europe. The EU values this project very highly. According to an agreement signed between Azerbaijan and the EU, relations will pick up pace in 2018.

We believe that the TANAP will be

completed in 2018 and an annual total of 16 billion cubic metres of natural gas will be supplied to Europe over Turkey. Turkey will receive 6 billion cubic metres of the gas and the remaining 10 billion cubic metres of Azerbaijani natural gas will enter Greece from Turkey and then to Italy through a pipeline.

This project will have been realised as the result of a synthesis of Azerbaijan’s successful politics and energy economy policies.

The phrase “two nations, one state” is a slogan which defines relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan.

How do you assess current relations between the two countries? What are their action plans and aims for 2016?

The phrase was coined by the great leader Haydar Aliyev. As years pass, we see how true it is. Ataturk also had valuable lessons to impart on the matter, especially after Azerbaijan became a part of the Soviet Union. Ataturk said “Azerbaijan’s sorrow is our own sorrow, Azerbaijan’s joy is our own joy.”

There is also the well coined saying that “relation between Azerbaijan and Turkey are unique in the world.” The affection between the two countries can be witnessed in the most remote village in Azerbaijan.

As with any other year, 2016 is expected to prove rich in terms of the development of relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey. Economic data indicate that the two countries have performed well together over recent years.

The governments of two countries also have mutual objectives. One of them is to increase the volume of trade between Azerbaijan and Turkey to USD 15 billion by 2023.

Especially at this time of worldwide economic crisis, we want to make use of Turkey’s experiences in sectors other than oil such as textile, tourism and manufacturing industry. In this context, I would like to underline the importance of the Strategic Cooperation Council established by Turkey and Azerbaijan. ■