



Azerbaijan News Update



Robert Wexler

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I thought you might be interested in the latest developments regarding the Republic of Azerbaijan.

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The US Continues Support for Azerbaijan

- Azerbaijani PM Mammadov met with the US House of Representatives, where both countries expressed satisfaction with the current level of bilateral relations and exchanged views on national and regional matters.
- The two countries work together to promote European energy security, expand trade and investment, combat terrorism and transnational threats. They also work together in politics, the economy, energy and security.
- The U.S. government actively supported the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline as the primary route of transportation for Caspian Oil.
- The US is committed to strengthening democracy and promoting economic diversification in Azerbaijan.
- Head of a delegation of the US House of Representatives, Robert Goodlatte, hailed relations between Azerbaijan and the US, stating, "The United States values its cooperation with Azerbaijan."
- US President Trump sent his best wishes to Azerbaijani President Aliyev for the celebration of Eid al-Fitr, wishing Azerbaijan health and prosperity.

- US President Donald Trump sent Azerbaijan's President Aliyev a celebratory note in regard to the 100th anniversary of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, and stated "Azerbaijan and the United States share a close partnership, working together to solve difficult regional challenges. I appreciate your cooperation on security and counterterrorism, as well as our longstanding commercial ties."

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Azerbaijan Continues to Strengthen Bi-lateral Relations

- Azerbaijan has signed or adopted declarations on strategic partnerships with one third of EU member states, including areas, like: politics, the economy, security, culture, trade and energy security. British MP Sajjad Karim said there is great potential for the EU and Azerbaijan to expand cooperation in transportation, investment, and interparliamentary relations.
- The EU is Azerbaijan's largest trade partner, accounting for 50% of its foreign trade (€11 billion in bilateral trade), the EU has declared they will spare no effort in regard to expanding cooperation with Azerbaijan.
- The EU is the biggest investor in Azerbaijan, investing over \$20 billion in the last 11 years.
- The EU-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee hailed Azerbaijan's efforts to improve social conditions of refugees, and its efforts to fix its housing problems.
- Azerbaijan is extremely important to the EU and the US, because its Southern Gas Corridor is set to bring vital energy resources from the Caspian Region, through the Ganja Gap and into Europe, allowing Europe to be independent of Russian oil. Its geographic location is also important for the transportation of goods and people from east to west, and north to south.
- Its location is also important to the US and EU, because the Ganja Gap allows the US and NATO to resupply military troops in Afghanistan with fuel, food, and supplies. As the only country that borders both Russia and Iran, its allegiance to the US and NATO are key for military and international relations.
- Turkey-Azerbaijan are creating an energy, transportation, and security belt. Caspian Energy resources flow to Europe via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines, and Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP).
- The BTK railway (Baku-Tbilisi-Kars) will eventually be able to transport around 17 million tons of cargo and up to 3 million passengers, meaning Azerbaijan has great potential to become a major transport hub between Europe and Asia.
- A European Commission representative said that Azerbaijan's growing position as a transportation hub, will increase EU-Azerbaijan cooperation in industry, tourism, transportation, agriculture, technology, education, and health.
- As part of the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey intergovernmental agreement, the BTK railway will improve economic relations between the countries and encourage foreign investment by connecting Europe and Asia.
- A new agreement between the EU and Azerbaijan is in the works and will replace the partnership and cooperation agreement of 1996, updating Azerbaijan's legislation and procedures to the international trade norms/standards of the EU, leading to improved access of Azerbaijani products to the EU markets.

- The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Elmar Mammadyarov, met with NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the South Caucasus and Central Asia, James Appaturai, where the two sides expressed satisfaction with the development of the partnership between Azerbaijan and NATO.
- Azerbaijan is marketing Baku, as the "Dubai of the South Caucasus region"- a free trade hub that will link the east to the west, and the north to the south.
- The new EU-Azerbaijan trade and political agreement will be ready for ratification in 2019, and will cover political, economic, social and cultural relations, including: trade and investment, human rights and rule of law, education, environment and other sectoral cooperation, including energy and transportation.
- Azerbaijan is the biggest economy of the region, comprising about 80% of the South Caucasus, making it a geostrategic place, as it is situated on the historical Silk Road, connecting Europe and Asia.
- The Ukraine and Azerbaijan are holding meetings to further bilateral relations, strategic partnership, and cooperation in areas, like: humanitarian aid, politics, trade and the economy, energy, transportation, culture, military, science, education, tourism, and are looking to increase investments in business.
- The Czech Republic wants to cooperate with Azerbaijan on many projects, including: agriculture, energy, chemical industry, education, defense, electrical engineering, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway.
- The Czech Republic is one of the top ten most important international investors in Azerbaijan, recently having invested over \$2.5 billion.
- Azerbaijan and the Ukraine's bilateral trade amounted to \$810.2 million in 2017.
- Azerbaijan and France will establish a joint commission to further develop relations in various areas, such as: agriculture, transportation, and technology.
- Azerbaijan is enhancing cooperation with South Korea on all fronts. Moon Duk-ho, Korean Ambassador for International Security Affairs, stated, "Azerbaijan is far from South Korea geographically, but it is close to the country culturally and emotionally", explaining that there's active economic cooperation between the two countries in energy and infrastructure.
- The UK is looking to further expand cooperation with Azerbaijan on priority projects in energy, the economy, education, healthcare, and agriculture. PM May wrote a letter congratulating Azerbaijani President Aliyev on the launch of the new Southern Gas Corridor.
- Azerbaijan's PM Mammadov and Japan's Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Hiraki, discussed prospects for developing relations between the two countries, and hailed their current bilateral ties in politics, culture, and the economy.
- Several international officials sent congratulatory notes to Azerbaijan's President Aliyev, on his victory in the presidential election, including: Tunisian President Mohamed Beji Caid Essebsi Alain Houpert, the Head of France-Caucasus Friendship Group, the Austrian Minister for Transport Innovation and Technology Norbert Hofer, the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Director General of UNESCO Irina Bokova.

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Azerbaijan Improves Infrastructure & Modernizes Laws

- Azerbaijan is making efforts to transform itself into a transportation and logistics hub with the North-South transport corridor, its existing East-West transport corridor, and developing South-West transport corridor.
- By increasing the transportation infrastructure, Azerbaijan is increasing its geopolitical importance regionally and internationally.
- Over the last 15 years, more than 15,000 kms of road have been constructed in Azerbaijan, and 7 new airports have been built.
- Azerbaijan is launching the Baku International Sea Trade Port and opening the Baku International Sea Trade Port Complex.
- It has also modernized its railway infrastructure and launched the BTK railway to connect Baku with Europe.
- With the largest fleet in the Caspian Sea (more than 260 vessels), Azerbaijan has recently added about 18 more.
- President Aliyev attended a ceremony on the reconstruction of the drinking water supply systems and establishment of sewage networks in the cities of Khizi and Altiaghaj.
- Along with these two projects, the government has provided drinking water to all northern cities, as well as a new hospital, 10 new schools, and provided infrastructure to make sure this region has no problem with electricity, and that its gas supply exceeds 90%.
- President Aliyev noted the overall socioeconomic development of the country is very positive and that Azerbaijan has become a model country on a global scale in terms of development, stability, and unity between the people and

government.

- Azerbaijan's education system is on a new path with several big reforms, like amendments to the Law on Education, which will require Azerbaijan's educational institutions and teachers to undergo certification testing every 5 years.
- President Aliyev has issued a decree on the establishment of a Financial Monitoring Service, which will be a legal public entity that will implement single regulation, control, and coordinated activities to prevent the laundering of criminally obtained funds and the financing of terrorism.

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Azerbaijan's Economy Sees Huge Improvements

- The World Bank expects significant growth of the Azerbaijani economy over the next three years, with predictions that GDP will grow by 1.8% in 2018, 3.8% in 2019, and 3.2% in 2020, due to the expansion of natural gas production.
- The World Bank also expects an increase in Azerbaijan's non-oil GDP due to an increase in public investment by 83%.
- In the first quarter of 2018, Azerbaijan's non-oil industry grew by 10%, the volume of non-oil exports increased by 35%, and the number of business entities increased by 4 times.
- The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) increased its growth forecast from 2% to 2.5% for 2018, and 3.5% for 2019.
- Inflation fell from 12.9% in the first quarter of 2017 to 4% in the first quarter of 2018.
- The Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) lowered the refinancing rate from 15% in February to 11% in April.
- The current account went from a deficit in 2016 to a surplus of 4.1% of GDP in 2017.
- The CBA's foreign exchange reserves increased from \$4 billion in December 2016 to \$5.5 billion in March 2018.
- The EBRD has invested over €2.8 billion in 165 projects in Azerbaijan since 1992, with the majority of funds going to energy and infrastructure projects.
- Investment from EU member states into the Azerbaijan economy currently exceed \$15 billion, with the bulk of investments going to the fields of energy, transportation, and trade. More than 1,500 companies registered in the EU member states currently operate in Azerbaijan.
- Austria is interested in sharing its experience in high technologies with Azerbaijan, by helping with relevant education, consulting services, and supporting the East-West transport corridor.

- Azerbaijan's trade with Austria has amounted to \$192.7 million in the first 4 months of 2018.
- The International Finance Corporation (IFC) wants to help Azerbaijan boost the agribusiness sector, which provides jobs and income for about 40% of the population in rural areas. Through the development of an agri-insurance program farmers will be able to mitigate the risk involved with agriculture production.
- Azerbaijan's Economy Minister stated that Azerbaijan is very much focused on the development of entrepreneurs and has taken strides to help increase business development by decreasing the number of licenses and red tape, by developing industrial parks and business incubators, and by reducing tax burdens.

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Azerbaijan Becomes New Energy Hub

- The Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) has the prospect of expanding into central and eastern Europe, including the Balkans. This large-scale infrastructure project not only ensures long term development of Azerbaijan as an energy exporter but also forms a model of multilateral cooperation.
- The Southern Gas Project is creating a new energy map of Europe, transporting gas 3,500 kms from the Caspian Sea to Europe, eliminating Europe's energy dependence on Russia.
- By 2020, the SGC is expected to bring around 10 billion cubic meters of natural gas to Europe a year, while another 6 billion cubic meters will go to Turkey.

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Azerbaijan Celebrates 100 Years As A Democracy

- A myriad of different cities and countries around the globe celebrated the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the first democratic republic in the Muslim East and a republic that led the global women's suffrage movement, a republic that protected gender equality, human rights, freedom of speech and freedom of the press.
- Azerbaijan's founding documents guaranteed full civil and political rights to all citizens, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, or class, and operated on the basis of equality, diversity, inclusiveness, education, tolerance, and democratic representation.
- US President Donald Trump sent Azerbaijan's President Aliyev a celebratory note in regard to the 100th anniversary of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, and stated "Azerbaijan and the United States share a close partnership, working together to solve difficult regional challenges. I appreciate your cooperation on security and

counterterrorism, as well as our longstanding commercial ties.”

- William Gill, US Embassy to Azerbaijan’s Chargé d’Affaires, stated, “Our common values – and enduring respect for them – are what underpin our long friendship. The United States cooperates most deeply with countries with which we have shared interests, values, and aspirations. That is why we join in celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, and that is why we will continue to support Azerbaijanis...”
- Turkmenistan’s President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov sent President Aliyev a celebratory note in regard to the 100th anniversary of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, and stated that their relations are based on equality, mutual benefit, mutual respect, and trust.
- Turkish President Erdogan sent President Aliyev a celebratory note in regard to the 100th anniversary of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. President Erdogan stated, “We are extremely happy to see your country as one of the leading states in the region in 2018.”
- Kazakh’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev, sent President Aliyev a celebratory letter in regard to the 100th anniversary of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. President Nazarbayev, stated, “Azerbaijan has achieved great success in strengthening the foundations of its statehood, improving the welfare of its people, increasing the country’s authority in the international community.”
- South Korean President Moon Jae-in, sent President Aliyev a celebratory letter in regard to the 100th anniversary of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. President Moon Jae-in, stated, “In the course of the last quarter century of history as an independent country, your nation has made an extraordinary height of achievement in every area.”
- Georgian PM Giorgi Kvirikashvili sent President Aliyev a celebratory letter in regard to the 100th anniversary of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. The two countries have close economic and cultural ties, and cooperate on transportation, trade, and energy projects, and invest heavily in one another.
- German politician Nikolas Lobel, hailed Azerbaijan on the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, calling Azerbaijan a “key partner of Germany”, and saying that it plays an important role in ensuring the energy security of Germany and all of Europe.
- Several countries sent President Aliyev celebratory letters or congratulations in regard to the 100th anniversary of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, including: French President Emmanuel Macron; Her Majesty, Elizabeth II, Queen of the UK of Great Britain and Ireland; Belarus’ President Alexander Lukashenko; Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko; Ireland’s President Michael Higgins; and Pope Francis.
- Ceremonies marking the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic were held in Madrid, Spain, London, UK and Islamabad, Pakistan, while The French International Diplomatic Academy hosted a conference celebrating the centennial.
- Several US cities, counties, and states proclaimed May 28th to be Azerbaijan National Day and joined in celebrating Azerbaijan’s contributions to the spread of democracy and equality in the regions of Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East, including: The State of Pennsylvania; The State of California; The State of Nebraska; Miami-Dade County, Florida; Little Rock, Arkansas; Jackson, Mississippi; Santa Fe, New Mexico; Pittsburg, Pennsylvania; and Los Angeles, California.
- A centenary celebration was held in New York City to honor Azerbaijan for its contributions to equality and human rights, with several UN officials and member state-ambassadors attending to mark the special occasion.

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All the best,

The Honorable Robert Wexler