

Speech for The Development Office of the College of Europe **10th** anniversary.

His Excellency Emin Eyyubov,
Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Belgium, Luxembourg and to the EU,
gave a talk on the relations between Azerbaijan and the EU at the 10th anniversary celebration of the Development Office of the College of Europe,
at **the Bibliothèque Solvay on 3 May 2007, 7pm.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me, first of all to thank the College of Europe for inviting me as a keynote speaker to this important gathering devoted to the 10th anniversary of the Development Office of the College of Europe.

It is an honour for me to be given the opportunity to address this distinguished auditorium and to share with you some of my thoughts on EU-Azerbaijani cooperation and to speak about the noble role that our today's hosts are playing by contributing to our integration.

Azerbaijan-EU relations have been steadily developing alongside with the Azerbaijani internal state building and improving economic performance. The EU has been very instrumental in early years of the Azerbaijani independence in helping to cope with diverse socio-economic problems. The total EU assistance rendered to Azerbaijan since 1992 amounts to €399.674 million and we are thankful for this.

Since that time a lot has changed in the EU-Azerbaijani relations. This change is mainly based on a strong performance of the Azerbaijani economy and the political-social stability that we have managed to built despite tremendous difficulties. Just to give an idea on Azerbaijani economy, I will tell that the last year (2006) Azerbaijani GDP growth measured in an impressive figure of 34,5%.

Thus, today when we speak about the EU-Azerbaijani relations we refer to partnership. This fact was particularly underlined during the last visit in November 2006 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan H.E. Ilham Aliyev to Brussels which culminated in signing of the MoU on strategic partnership between the EU and Azerbaijan in the field of energy. Notwithstanding its energy nature, the document also reflects the possibility of launching strategic partnership in education, agriculture and transport spheres.

The cooperation with the EU is of strategic importance for Azerbaijan and we proclaimed the integration into the European Structures as a foreign policy priority. We are glad that there is also the increasing understanding in the EU of the importance of our region and key role that Azerbaijan plays in and for the region.

With its huge proved hydrocarbon reserves Azerbaijan has opted for independent energy policy. But bringing the increasing volumes of oil and gas into the world market is as much challenge in itself as managing their upstream. Azerbaijan had been left with the legacy of the Soviet Union where all pipelines that could deliver Azerbaijani oil into the world markets were stretching northward. In addition they were not meeting the required capacity of augmenting volumes. Thus, at this crucial moment then President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Haydar Aliyev with his renowned political farsightedness had taken the groundbreaking decision of diversifying exportation routes and building new pipelines. At a time this decision was met with severe criticism from different players in the market. But Azerbaijan and its partners has demonstrated their firm conviction in the project and managed to withstand all difficulties.

Today, the very fact of functioning of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhun oil pipeline and the completion stage of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline are vivid example of groundless of all criticism and reveals their bias origin. As result of the realization of the launched projects, Azerbaijan will be able to reach 60 million tons of oil and 20 billion cubic meters of gas production by 2010.

Those two pipelines are backbone of the EU energy security which implies increased direct cooperation with the Caspian Sea basin producers. This is specifically crucial in terms of gas supplies. In this context Azerbaijan is ready to assume this important and responsible role in bridging the Central Asian gas into the European Markets.

In brief Azerbaijan is both able and willing to play a role of reliable partner in enhancing the European energy security both as a supplier and a transit country.

Today Azerbaijan is a part of the ENP and we highly appreciate this policy. We believe that this policy will allow both parties - EU and Azerbaijan to significantly foster mutually beneficial integration both in economic and political terms. We believe that the successful implementation of the ENP will substantially contribute to our stated goal of integration into the European structures.

From political point of view we hope that the ENP and implementation of its Action Plans could serve for strengthening of political independence and further consolidation of statehood of the EU partner countries. We are pleased with political provision of the EU-Azerbaijan Action Plan which is based on main principles of the PCA between the EU and Azerbaijan and reaffirms the respect of and support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of internationally recognized borders. I should also note that today the PCA remains to be the major legal framework regulating EU-Azerbaijani relations.

Summarising, I could say that the EU-Azerbaijani relations are developing along an ascending trajectory and these relations are increasingly mutually beneficial.

But, there is specifically important aspect in the EU-Azerbaijani cooperation that I would like to dwell on a bit more. Here I refer to education.

Azerbaijan's primary goal is to raise its international competitiveness. I refer to competitiveness in its wider sense, namely, to being competitive economically, socially, and environmentally. This competitiveness is first and foremost knowledge based and almost exclusively knowledge driven. That is why education stands as an important pillar of our cooperation with the EU.

That is why, as it was mentioned before, possibility of having strategic partnership in education is referred in the MoU on energy.

When speaking of education cooperation with Europe, I feel important also to speak about the College of Europe and about our collaboration with this renowned centre of academic excellence. We have started our cooperation just last year and we already have something to say, which is already good in itself. The first thing to say is I don't know where we have been before 2006. But, as we say "it's better late than never".

Genuine social, political and economic integration comes through the integration of ideas, through connecting the minds. In this regard, the mission of the College of Europe to promote the European integration through offering diverse educational, training and consultancy opportunities is certainly praiseworthy.

What we are doing with our partners from the Development Office is directly linked to strengthening Azerbaijan's capacity to be more mature partner internationally as whole and for the EU specifically. Our cooperation with the College is about human development, about increasing the understanding of the EU. Importantly, this is also about facilitation of the legal and regulative harmonization with the EU. Over the short period, we already have our students in the College's Master Programmes and managed to organize the visit of our experts to seminars. We believe this is just a beginning of a longstanding cooperation.

Using this floor I'd like to thank the Development Office for the dynamic spirit and professionalism of people working for it, for the flexibility of attitudes and result oriented approaches. I believe, these are main qualities that helped them to be the College of Europe that we all know and respect. I would like to wish them success in fulfilling their noble task.

We are keenly interested in strengthening our cooperation with the College of Europe and there are different opportunities and ways to do so and we are looking forward for their realization.

Thank you for your attention.
