

Transcript: Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza's Press Conference
March 7, 2006
U.S. Embassy, Armenia

Ambassador: Ladies and gentlemen, very nice meeting you this afternoon and to welcome back to our midst also "Haykakan Zhamanak." And it is our great pleasure today to have with us Mathew Bryza, who is the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia at the State Department. And I think you have all received his curriculum vitae; he is a distinguished officer at the State Department and particularly knowledgeable about energy matters. But I will let him say why he is here and what he has done today.

Bryza: Thanks very much, Mr. Ambassador. Thank you all for coming here today and taking the time to listen to what I might have to say. The reason I am here is because I want to do everything I possibly can to strengthen the already strong cooperation between the United States and Armenia. I've tried to come here several times in recent months and the weather hasn't cooperated with me, but I am thrilled finally to be here on an absolutely beautiful perfect day. I am so thrilled to see how Yerevan has changed since my last visit about eighteen months ago or so. Actually, it was almost two years ago, now that I think about it. The city was always beautiful; now it's full of even more economic activity, dynamism, a real sense of movement. It reflects your strong economic growth. I hope it reflects the pace of our cooperation and your internal reforms, both democratic and market economic, and it reflects our confidence in the people of Armenia that you are on the right path, as expressed by the participation of Armenia in our Millennium Challenge Account. So one reason I am here is to find out how we can continue and deepen our cooperation on Armenia's democratic transformation. I am also here to explore our shared interests in Armenia's energy independence and how we can cooperate also to strengthen the energy security of the entire South Caucasus region, and for that matter, pretty much all of Europe, the rest of Europe, sorry. And finally, the third set of interests I am here to discuss is shared security interests. We are working hard together to help Armenia realize its own desire to have stronger relations with the Euro-Atlantic family. We are pleased with the considerable progress in this regard that Armenia has made certainly since my last visit and in the last year quite significant progress. I had a chance today to discuss these matters with most of your top leaders. I just came from a very constructive meeting with President Kocharian, but I also had a very detailed and interesting discussion on energy security with Energy Minister Movsisian and a whole group of experts, I had an all-encompassing meeting on all these topics I've just discussed with Defense Minister Sargsian earlier today, and a similarly all encompassing and strategic discussion with Foreign Minister Oskanian, whom I feel particularly close to because he, like myself and a member of the presidential staff, all attended the same graduate school, although at different times. Although, I attended it before Foreign Minister Oskanian--the Fletcher School. And tomorrow I am very much looking forward to our meeting with Speaker Baghdasarian as well. So that's the general outline of what I've been up to today and what I'll do tomorrow, working with Ambassador Evans and our fantastic staff here at the Embassy in this beautiful building--one of the most impressive American embassies I've seen, actually. It's my first time here. I hope you like this building as much as we do, and I welcome any questions you may ask.

Emil Danielian, Radio Liberty: My first question refers to the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh. Does the United States still believe that these years can be a breakthrough for the settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh, particularly given the failure at Rambouillet and the recent discussions between the two parties? And my second question, you mentioned energy security. How can Armenia strengthen its energy security? There is a pipeline constructed between Iran and Armenia--what do you think will it be the way out?

Bryza: Thank you. And it is very nice for me to put Emil's face with his voice since I've spoken him on a telephone a couple of times. I always enjoy the chance to see the actual human being. I wouldn't characterize Rambouillet as a failure or agree with anyone who would argue that the process has stopped or that the Minsk Group has run its course. Rambouillet did not result in a breakthrough, but that doesn't mean it's a failure. The sides are very close to an agreement, or a framework agreement or an interim agreement, but it's always the last few steps that are most difficult. The issues that now remain to be resolved are the most difficult ones--the types of issues that require heads of state to make very tough decisions. And it's up to the heads of state to decide what their timetable is for the resolution. What I can say is, we will do everything we possibly can to get them to agreements as quickly as possible. On energy, I think the key to energy security for Armenia, as for any country, is diversity. Armenia has a long and positive experience working with Russian gas suppliers, and that needs to continue. Armenia is also, as you said Emil, looking at the gas pipeline from Iran as a way to help with diversification of the gas supply. Obviously, the United States, like the entire international community, is in a position where we are trying to apply maximum, how to put it, encouragement on Iran to abide by the international community's views, and any nuclear program that is anything other than peaceful. Armenia's sovereign decision to explore a gas pipeline, one could argue, is not directly related to this situation that's unfolding in the IAEA. These are different problems, although with the same country. But the United States, like the entire international community, of course is not in favor of any steps that will lead to a significant expansion of Iran's ability to project economic or any other type of power. But when we talk about diversification, we are talking about, our government and the government of Armenia, diversification beyond gas--not just natural gas, but other types of energy as well, which is hydropower, of which Armenia is blessed with significant resources, geothermal power, as well as a generation of new nuclear power. You had a question as well, right?

Hayastani Hanrapetutian: I want to continue the question on energy. From here you will be traveling to Georgia, and Georgia also is dealing with this issue. Are there other discussions on regional energy programs, and it would be nice if you could talk a bit more about other ways of diversifying energy security.

Bryza: Of course. We are discussing ways to have the whole region work together more on energy, energy security. Yes. And people who are true experts on energy and finance need to come together from Georgia, from Armenia, we assume from Turkey, from the United States, from the European Union to discuss the commercial viability of a variety of projects, which could involve natural gas, but definitely that would involve electricity. On diversification, again I think what we really should be looking at together is all sorts of energy, as I said a moment ago, besides gas. Gas, yes, but also hydro and geothermal, and if you decide, potentially nuclear. But a new generation of nuclear technology of course. And we would hope finally that progress,

a so-called breakthrough on Nagorno-Karabakh, would then lead to all sorts of new opportunities both for the export of electricity and the import fuel sources.

Los Angeles Zhamanak: Three short questions. Is it a mere a coincidence that you are here in Armenia while in Washington the OSCE Minsk Group is having their wrap-up discussion? The second question: To what extent is it possible that there will be an attack on Iran by the United States or by Israel? And the third question: Is it true that the Ambassador Evans is retiring [in Armenian: being recalled]?

Bryza: Thank you. Yes, it's a pure coincidence that I am here at the same time that the Minsk Group Co-Chairs are in Washington. Pure coincidence. I planned this trip before I knew their schedule and frankly I was deeply embarrassed to change my trip plan again. With regard to Iran, the plan is, as you know, to use international diplomacy at the United Nations, both in terms of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Security Council, to make clear, as the Ambassador to the United Nations Ambassador John Bolton said, I don't remember the exact quote, but it was that the international community has made clear that Iran must stop any non-peaceful development of nuclear technology for non-peaceful purposes, and if it does not do so, the consequences will be tangible and painful, I think this is what he said. So, right now we are in a period where we all are focused on international diplomacy, foreign diplomacy. Regarding Ambassador Evans, he can certainly comment on his plans to retire, which I hope are non-existent, because he is a fantastic ambassador. He, like all of us, serves at the pleasure of the President of the United States. I used to work in the President's staff and one thing I learned is that I will not speak about any decision of the President. It's up to the President to make his own decisions. I advise him, but he makes his decisions, including on personnel. But I would like to say that Ambassador Evans has built a wonderful team here at this Embassy. It's really impressive. Like anyone from Washington, part of my job is travel all around to various countries that we have some responsibility for and get to know the teams. And this is a great one. Deeply experienced, many experts, two of them here have beautiful Armenia language. Mr. Phillips is one of the most insightful and experienced experts on assistance and democratic and market economic reform, whom I have known for 14 years, I guess--it seems like a hundred. The DCM, Mr. Godfrey, is one of the shining stars in the Foreign Service. And with all that talent, it is hard sometimes to form a team spirit, but Ambassador Evans has really succeeded brilliantly in doing this. So, we are lucky to have you. But it's not only luck, we planned it, too. And you have been waiting, you sir, and then you Ara.

Question: I would like to continue this question, if you don't mind. You mentioned that the Ambassador is not retiring [in Armenian: being recalled], but there was a publication in the "California Courier" about this and it mentioned that the Ambassador used the word "genocide" to describe the Armenian tragedy. So, what are your comments on this?

Ambassador: Let me just say this. I want to echo what Mr. Bryza said. We all serve at the pleasure of the president. I hope nobody expects any Ambassador to stay forever. The fact of the matter is I do not know when I will be leaving Armenia. And I have not submitted my retirement papers. One other thing, and that is, as long as I am the ambassador here, until the day I step on the airplane, I will be in charge of this mission.

Bryza: Which we hope will be as late as possible.

Question: You met Defense Minister Sargsyan today. I would like to know whether the United States is planning to extend its relations with Armenia in the military-political sphere, because in this area we are falling behind Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Bryza: Well, the pace at which we expand our relationship depends on the Government of Armenia, of course, right? We have our doors wide open. I don't think that the Government of Armenia could move at a pace that is too quick. But we are very happy with the level of cooperation and this has been a significant year for U.S.-Armenia security cooperation. There are many indicators, and one of them is Armenia's preparations for a deeper relationship, closer cooperation with NATO, the so called- IPAP process. And we are also deeply appreciative of all the support and all the help Armenia provides to the international community, to its peace keeping operations. And we do everything possible to allow that to deepen.

Ambion newspaper: You talked about the weather in Armenia, but it is usually very difficult to get opinions about the political weather. So I want a specific answer from you. Being a deputy assistance secretary working for this region, what do you think about Armenia--is it a democratic, autocratic or totalitarian society? In case of a possible attack on Iran, which country of the region is likely to be your ally?

Bryza: Thank you. The first question--there is no label that I would apply to Armenia other than that it is a democratizing country. What matters for us is that democracy is a process after all. We clearly have a lot of faith in the process of democratization here, or we would not have extended the Millennium Challenge Account program to our friends here, to all you here in Armenia. But as with any process, advancing it requires constant attention and in this case a lot of work. Democracy requires will, political will at the top of society...And it also requires [efforts] the grassroots, as Mr. Philips likes to talk about, as well the building of a culture of democracy. And the culture of democracy requires voters to believe that their vote really is worthy of value, that it matters. It requires voters to participate in a process of democracy, through civil society, through actual voting, and it requires all political parties, especially opposition political parties, to operate constructively, actively and fully. And so, we hope in the next few months and years to use all of our assistance levels, activities, and assistance to build democracy not only from the top down, but most importantly from the bottom up. Regarding Iran, now is not the time to talk about any sort of military action against Iran. The action is at the United Nations, both in Vienna and at the IEA, and in New York at the Security Council.

Mediamax: I know that Turkey is one of the countries included in your portfolio, and I just want to know whether Armenian-Turkish relations were discussed. And there is an impression that during recent years the United States has been paying less attention to Turkish-Armenian relations. Is that true?

Bryza: Anytime I am involved in a discussion with senior officials in Turkey or Armenia, Turkey and Armenia both are always on the agenda. We have every expectation that if and when, and as the process of working toward the Karabakh settlement moves forward, a natural and in fact necessary outgrowth will be the normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey. And in all of our meetings today, Turkish-Armenian relations came up, be it on energy, trade, or broader strategic issue and Armenia's relationships with Euro-Atlantic family, Turkey is relevant to all these discussions.

Question: When Georgia wanted Russian military bases to leave its country, America supported Georgia greatly. If our government makes such a decision, can we expect similar assistance from you?

Bryza: What we did with Georgia was encourage Georgia to, while expressing its sovereign opinion, be moderate in its expressions. It's not for the United States to support or oppose a sovereign decision taken by the parliaments or the government of Armenia, Georgia, or any other country in the region. At the end of the day, Armenia and Russia, Georgia and Russia, Azerbaijan and Russia, Turkey and Russia, all will have to find ways to work with each other, to live with each other and to profit from each other, because Russia will be your major trading partner for a long time. But diversification is, I think, the wisest strategy not only for the energy security, but for all security.

Question: My question refers to the fact that cross stones in Old Jugha were destroyed. Are any steps being taken by the United States Government to stop this destruction of cultural heritage?

Bryza: That is tragedy. It is a horrible thing that has happened in Jugha. It's not really up to the United States to take steps to stop it. I mean, this is happening in a foreign country. But of course we are in repeated contact with the Government of Azerbaijan at the very highest level. There is no question in my mind, since I have been doing a lot of the contact, that the senior leaders in Azerbaijan know how serious we take this matter. And all I can say is I hope those who did it will be held responsible, but most importantly, let's make sure this never happens again, anywhere, in the Caucasus, where there are so many vital cultural heritage sites and spiritually important sites that are threatened in all three countries, frankly, in the Caucasus. And if I don't finish now, Ambassador Evans won't let me come back soon to this beautiful Embassy here. So I thank you, we have another meeting with a bunch of people waiting for us. Thank you for your questions, thank you for your cooperation.