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British Minister for neighbourhood affairs visits Baku

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On 8 February, the UK Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas Wendy Morton visited (<https://www.azernews.az/nation/176001.html>) Baku, where she met with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and the country's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov.

Morton arrived in Baku for a two-day official visit, to attend the annual UK-Azerbaijan Strategic Dialogue Summit. The visit seeks to strengthen the relationship between the UK and Azerbaijan around areas of cooperation in green energy and tackling climate change, as well as advancing the rights of women and countering gender-based violence.

Women's rights and renewable energy issues

Local news sources earlier reported, quoting Morton that the “two countries share strong links between our people, cultures and in education. I look forward to meeting President Aliyev and his government to discuss further areas of cooperation, as Azerbaijan embraces renewable energy and builds back greener following Covid-19 and the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.”

She added that “the UK has been a strong global advocate for women’s rights, and I am also looking forward to meeting inspiring female leaders who are advancing women’s rights in Azerbaijan and working to combat domestic abuse.” “The UK is working closely with Azerbaijan on its first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security to encourage the government of Azerbaijan to strengthen women’s legal rights by signing up to the Istanbul Convention.”

Morton highly assessed the fact that Azerbaijan has a National Action Plan to tackle domestic violence. “I was humbled to meet survivors of domestic abuse today and hear their stories. Gender-based violence is a huge global issue. Excellent that Azerbaijan has a National Action Plan to tackle domestic violence,” Morton said on her official Twitter page. She added that as part of her visit to Baku she is “working with ministers, parliamentarians and activists to promote women’s rights and ensure that women’s perspectives are heard at all levels.” The UK minister stressed that it is “fantastic that women achieved universal suffrage in Azerbaijani nine years before the UK. But there is still a lot to do to achieve equality.”

She also expressed satisfaction with her meetings with the human rights champions in Baku. “Respect for human rights and a free press is the foundation of a thriving society and democracy. It was a pleasure to meet the inspiring leaders who are standing up for human rights and defending media freedom in Azerbaijan and I reiterated the UK’s strong support for their work,” she wrote on Twitter.

It should be noted that prior to Morton’s visit, a protest action (<https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/53592/>) against domestic violence was held in Baku on 4 February, which was triggered by the murder of a 32-year-old woman. The activists stated that they had already tried to draw the authorities’ attention to the problem of domestic violence on 8 March 2020 (Caucasus Watch reported (<https://caucasuswatch.de/news/2482.html>)).

As part of the visit, Morton also met the ecology and natural resources and energy ministers to discuss how the UK can work with Azerbaijan to transition to renewable energy and achieve a significant greenhouse gas emissions reduction ahead of COP26 in Glasgow in November.

The UK Minister Morton also met with Azerbaijan’s Minister of Education Emin Amrullayev to discuss the positive impact that the British Council is making to the lives of young people through their English language programmes and attended the British Council’s UK Alumni Awards to meet graduates of leading UK institutions in Azerbaijan.

Meetings with Aliyev and Bayramov

Ilham Aliyev emphasised (<https://apa.az/en/foreign-news/President-Ilham-Aliyev-received-UK-Minister-for-European-Neighbourhood-and-the-Americas-coloredUPDATEDcolor-342210>) during the meeting that energy cooperation was a very important part of the UK-Azerbaijani partnership, expressing his satisfaction with the completion of the Southern Gas Corridor. “Investments from the UK to Azerbaijan helped us a lot to modernise the country. These investments were mainly in the energy sector, almost 30 billion dollars. But it allowed us to use properly the revenues from oil and gas sales to diversify the economy. Therefore, I am sure that for the coming

years our major area of concentration will be the non-energy sector development of Azerbaijan. I looked at some information before our meeting so that almost 600 British companies registered in Azerbaijan, and this is really a good sign of diversification of our economic partnership,” he added.

“In the liberated territories we have great potential for reconstruction and we already started our contacts with British companies. One of them is involved in the city-planning in the development of infrastructure on the liberated territories. And I hope there will be more, because a lot of things are to be done there. Everything is destroyed. There is big potential in renewable energy. And I know that there is interest from British companies to work on these issues,” he added in relation to UK involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh.

At the meeting with Azerbaijan’s Foreign Minister, Bayramov noted (<https://apa.az/en/foreign-news/Azerbaijani-FM-meets-with-UK-Minister-for-European-Neighborhood-and-Americas-coloredUPDATEDcolor-342188>) with satisfaction the level of development of bilateral cooperation between the two countries. He also stressed the role the trilateral statement played in the construction of a new transportation corridor and that it would serve to ensure progress and normalise relations among people in the region.

It should be noted that on 3 February, the UK’s ambassador to Azerbaijan James Sharp spoke publicly on the prospects of UK’s involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh. He underscored that agriculture, tourism, mining were the most promising sectors where the UK could invest (Caucasus Watch reported (<https://caucasuswatch.de/news/3520.html>)).

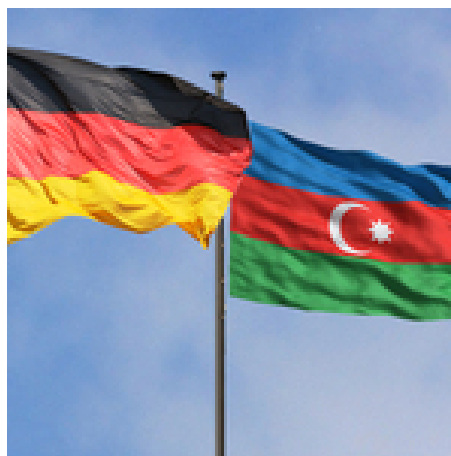
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