



# ARMENIAN ASSEMBLY OF AMERICA

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March 13, 2017

The Honorable Devin Nunes  
Chairman  
The Honorable Adam Schiff  
Ranking Member  
House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence  
Capitol Visitor Center HVC-304  
US Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515-6415

Dear Chairman Nunes and Ranking Member Schiff:

As the Committee continues to investigate Russian activity in the United States during the 2016 presidential election, we are writing to express our concern regarding the undue influence of yet another foreign government on America's democratic institutions, namely Azerbaijan. We are deeply troubled by recent reports about Azerbaijan's ties to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its nexus to both the Mammadov family and the highest levels of the Azeri government. We therefore respectfully request that the congressional investigations of Russian influence be expanded to include Azerbaijan's influence peddling and any materials it may have potentially compromising U.S. officials.

The Mammadov family consists of Azerbaijan's recently removed Transport Minister, billionaire Ziya Mammadov, and his son, Anar Mammadov. In 2011, Anar Mammadov founded the Azerbaijan America Alliance in Washington, DC. To say that they wined and dined Members of Congress would be an understatement. According to a 2013 Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) filing, and as reported by *RFE/RL*, "the group spent \$430,000 for its 2012 dinner," and overall they spent over \$12 million from 2011 to 2015.

Several Members of Congress that attended the organization's events also later participated in a 2013 convention in Azerbaijan. The trip was the subject of an Ethics Committee investigation. As highlighted in a January 3, 2017 *Bloomberg News* article entitled "Azeri Oil Money Got a Pass From This Ethics Committee," the columnist writes: "In May and June, 2013, a delegation of 11 U.S. Congress members and 32 congressional staff members visited Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, to attend a conference called 'U.S.-Azerbaijan: Vision for the Future.' It was ostensibly funded by two non-profit groups, from which the U.S. legislators and their staff were allowed to accept travel. The OCE [Office of Congressional Ethics] found, however, that the nonprofits received the money for the trip from the Azerbaijani state-owned oil company, Socar, and one of the groups -- paid \$750,000 by Socar -- had been set up just one month prior to the conference.

While in Baku, all the U.S. legislators received ‘rugs of various sizes and value’ as gifts, and some legislators and staffers also got crystal tea sets and silk scarves.”

Azerbaijan’s caviar diplomacy is also amply documented in the December 2016 European Stability Initiative (ESI) report, wherein expensive watches, jewelry, computers, and large sums of money, among other gifts, were provided to several politicians from a number of countries in Europe. ESI states that “the ease with which democratic institutions and safeguards can be undermined has emerged as a fundamental threat to European democracy.”

All Americans are deeply troubled by such reported activities, which constitute a flagrant disregard for the law and strike at the core of our constitutional government through blatant foreign influence peddling. This is especially disconcerting given that Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev is the recipient of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project’s first ever “Person of the Year” award.

The Aliyev regime is known for its ties to radical jihadist mercenaries and is also engaged in attempts to control American and European officials to distract from its efforts to resolve the Nagorno Karabakh conflict by eliminating the Christian Armenians. Its deadly cease-fire agreement violations continue. Last April’s evidence of ISIS branded mutilations and beheadings of Armenians have gone without consequence.

Azerbaijan’s activities in the United States come at a time when the Aliyev regime continues to deprive its citizens of basic human rights and freedoms. Last fall, Human Rights Watch reported that the Azerbaijani government has renewed its vicious crackdown on critics and independent groups. Per this report, "Arrests in Azerbaijan increased sharply as activists and other citizens spoke out about the economic downturn, currency devaluation, and inflation in early 2016, and ahead of a September constitutional referendum that expanded presidential powers, Human Rights Watch found."

Azerbaijan, rather than relent, continued to repress freedoms through changes to its criminal code, of which then Helsinki Commission Chairman Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ) stated in December 2016, “Make no mistake, anyone imprisoned under the new provisions of Azerbaijan’s criminal code – which make online ‘insults’ of the president a punishable offense – will be a political prisoner. These new provisions clearly violate international human rights standards and Azerbaijan’s OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] commitments.” Moreover, according to a February 16, 2017 article in *POLITICO* entitled “Allegations of dodgy deals rock Council of Europe,” it is alleged that Azerbaijan paid nearly 2.4 million euros in exchange for political favors. In addition, recent articles in *The New Yorker* and *Foreign Policy* magazines have also highlighted the corrupt practices employed by the Azeri government and the corrosive influence of bribery.

The Justice Department has previously brought some cases involving Azerbaijan through the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), but much more is needed. According to the “Azeri Oil Money Got a Pass From This Ethics Committee” article in *Bloomberg News*, Azerbaijan continues

to shell out over \$45,000 monthly to the Podesta Group, of which the columnist states “It's hard to tell whether it's this creativity and generosity or any real U.S. strategic interest that makes the U.S. overlook the country's brutal dictatorship. A combination of both is likely: Without the ‘caviar diplomacy,’ Azerbaijan might be considered too small to defy declared U.S. values and principles for its sake.”

When it comes to the integrity of America’s democracy, the rule of law, and our governance process, we must not turn a blind eye to Azerbaijan’s influence peddling, authoritarian regime and human rights atrocities. Further, we must ensure that Azerbaijan’s rampant corrupt practices do not compromise U.S. policies and objectives. Additional evidence on Azerbaijani as well as Turkish wrongdoing is available and growing; we would welcome the opportunity to help advance a thorough investigation and United States response.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Anthony Barsamian  
Co-Chair, Board of Trustees



Van Z. Krikorian  
Co-Chair, Board of Trustees

cc: The Honorable Paul Ryan, Speaker of the House  
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Democratic Leader