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## **AZERBAIJAN TO LAUNCH INTENSIVE NEGOTIATION WITH EU IN EARLY 2017**

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From the beginning of 2017 the intensive negotiation on strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and the EU will be launched, said Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov in his interview with Azerbaijan's state news agency AzerTAc.

Azerbaijan remains interested in the further development of equal and mutually beneficial cooperation with the EU, he said. For that reason Azerbaijan submitted to the EU a draft Agreement on strategic partnership between the Republic of Azerbaijan and European Union in the margins of Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga, May 21-22, 2015.

Council of European Union has already given a mandate to the EU Commission to launch negotiations with the Republic of Azerbaijan on strategic partnership agreement.

We consider that this new document will provide a legal framework to raise the level of bilateral relations to the strategic partnership and ensure comprehensive development of cooperation with the EU, Mammadyarov said. Currently, the delegations for the negotiations are under the formation. From the beginning of 2017 the intensive negotiation will be launched.

Legal basis of the relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the European Union constitutes the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed on April 22, 1996 and entered into force on July 1, 1999.

Within this agreement large-scale cooperation in the fields of political dialogue, human rights, trade, investment, economy, legislation, cultural and other spheres are envisaged. During the last 20 years since the signing of the agreement Azerbaijan has established close and fruitful cooperation with the EU in many areas of mutual interest.

Azerbaijan is a part of Eastern Partnership initiative of the EU since 2009, he said. Azerbaijan enjoys close economic and trade relations with the EU. Azerbaijan also remains a main trade partner of the EU in the South Caucasus region and the EU member states are major trade partners of us.

They are also among the major investors in Azerbaijan, he said. The strategic partnership ties were established between Azerbaijan and the nine EU member states.

There are ample prospects for the development of cooperation in energy security area as in all other fields between Azerbaijan and the EU, Mammadyarov said. On January 13, 2011, Joint Declaration on Southern Gas Corridor between Azerbaijan and the EU was signed as a result of

implementation of Memorandum of Understanding.

Azerbaijan will be able to provide Europe with 10 billion cubic meters gas after 2018, 25-30 billion cubic meters gas per year from 2030 by starting this important project which will transport natural gas to European markets, he said. It means that Azerbaijan will contribute to the diversification of Europe's energy supply sources and energy security of Europe for the long term period.

In a newly adopted Global Strategy European Union has also identified that the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of states, the inviolability of borders are key elements of the European security order, he said. These principles apply to all states, both within and beyond the EUs borders.

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Kaynak/Source: