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**PARTNERSHIP WITH EU IS ONE OF KEY PRIORITIES OF AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY**

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APA (25 November 2017)

Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev attended the European Union`s Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels at the invitation of President of the European Council Donald Tusk.

The head of state addressed the plenary session of the summit, APA reported.

The Azerbaijani president said that the partnership with the European Union is one of the key priorities of Azerbaijan's foreign policy.

This year in February, we started active negotiations on a new agreement. I hope these negotiations will end soon. This agreement will create opportunities for further cooperation between our countries. The European Union is the major trade partner of Azerbaijan. Fifty percent of the countrys trade accounts for the share of EU member countries. Since Azerbaijan gained its independence, the investments of the European Union to the Azerbaijani economy have exceeded \$20 billion. This demonstrates the presence of a good investment climate, the president said.

The head of state noted that Azerbaijan continues its policy of political and economic reforms.

We attach great importance to the development of democracy, protection of human rights and we are strictly committed to it. We have reduced the unemployment rate to 5 percent. Foreign debt, compared to gross domestic product, is low than 20 percent, the president added.

President İlham Aliyev said that the main challenge that Azerbaijan faces, is the continuation of the Armenian occupation of its territories: Almost twenty percent of the internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan is under occupation by Armenia more than 20 years. As a result of the occupation, more than one million Azerbaijani people have become refugees and internally displaced and we have been exposed to ethnic cleansing policy. The UN Security Council has adopted four resolutions which demand immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from our territories, which are not fulfilled by Armenia. Separatism, aggressive separatism are intolerable in the 21st century. All forms of separatism must be condemned and a single approach to all aspects of separatism should be applied. The territorial integrity of Azerbaijan has the same value as the territorial integrity of any other state and it must be restored.

Referring to the energy policy, the president noted that Azerbaijan is closely cooperating with the European institutions in this sphere. The Southern Gas Corridor, a large-scale energy project, is worth over \$40 billion and it will allow us to extract more natural gas and transport it from

Azerbaijan to European markets. The 3500-kilometer gas pipeline will be a new route and will carry gas to the European market from news sources. This is a policy of energy diversification along with the energy security policy. Thus, Azerbaijan's gas fields will be only new natural gas source of Europe and the pipeline will significantly change the energy map of the European continent. Azerbaijan's proven gas reserves are at the level of 2.6 trillion cubic meters which will be enough to transport natural gas to Europe in the coming decades, said Ilham Aliyev.

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Kaynak/Source: