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## **ROB SOBHANI: TRUMP'S SUPPORT FOR TAP DEMONSTRATES AZERBAIJAN'S RELIABILITY IN ENERGY EXPORTS**

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Spokesman for the Armenian Foreign Ministry Tigran Balayan has said that "Armenia is now actively discussing with CSTO partners the replacement for Secretary General Yuri Khachaturov.

The United States, Azerbaijan and Europe share a common geo-strategic goal: the uninterrupted export of energy resources from the Caspian Basin to consumers in Europe and beyond, Rob Sobhani, director general of the Caspian Group Holdings, told Trend.

He was commenting on the discussions held in Washington between the US President Donald Trump and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte on the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), which envisages transportation of Azerbaijani gas to Europe.

Sobhani said this shows that under the leadership of President Ilham Aliyev Azerbaijan has become a stable and reliable partner of Europe and the US for energy exports.

This is very important for the economy of Azerbaijan because it means that once natural gas from Shah Deniz (and other projects in Azerbaijan) starts flowing to Europe, Azerbaijan will be the beneficiary of stable revenues, he noted.

Sobhani went on to add that the independent foreign policy pursued by President Aliyev has put Azerbaijan on the energy map of the world.

Again, when investors look at Azerbaijan, they see a stable and reliable exporter of natural gas and oil. This is very important because it translates to predictable revenues in the future for Azerbaijan that in turn will benefit the people of Azerbaijan, he said.

Sobhani pointed out that many countries (such as Libya, Nigeria, Iraq and Iran) have failed to take advantage of their energy resources to benefit their country. Azerbaijan under President Aliyev is an exception. This puts Azerbaijan in the same league as countries such as Norway and Kuwait who have used their energy exports to benefit their citizens.

During the joint press conference in Washington, Italian Prime Minister Conte said that TAP is strategic work in terms of energy supply to Italy and to the south of Europe and the Mediterranean area.

The US President Donald Trump, in his turn, expressed hope that Italy will be able to build TAP.

As far as a pipeline is concerned, I'd like to see a competing pipeline. So, Mr. Prime Minister, I hope you're going to be able to do that competing pipeline, said Trump.

TAP project, worth 4.5 billion euros, is one of the priority energy projects for the European Union (EU), and has already attracted 1.5 billion euros from the European Investment Bank (EIB), which approved the loan in early February 2018.

Connecting with the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) at the Greek-Turkish border, TAP will cross Northern Greece, Albania and the Adriatic Sea before coming ashore in Southern Italy to connect to the Italian natural gas network.

The project is currently in its construction phase, which started in 2016.

Once built, TAP will offer a direct and cost-effective transportation route opening up the vital Southern Gas Corridor, a 3,500-kilometer long gas value chain stretching from the Caspian Sea to Europe.

TAP shareholders include BP (20 percent), SOCAR (20 percent), Snam S.p.A. (20 percent), Fluxys (19 percent), Enagas (16 percent) and Axpo (5 percent).

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