

AZERBAIJAN'S RELATIONS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS
DURING ILHAM ALIYEV PERIOD

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DURING ILHAM ALIYEV PERIOD**

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ABSTRACT

AZERBAIJAN’S RELATIONS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS DURING ILHAM ALIYEV PERIOD

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This study examines Azerbaijan’s relations with its neighbors during Ilham Aliyev’s presidency within the framework of political, economic, security, and socio-cultural dimensions. The main aim of the thesis is to deeply understand the role of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy in the regional and international system during Ilham Aliyev’s presidency. The research aims to explain why Azerbaijan’s relations with neighboring countries have different and complex dynamics. This complexity arises from the combination of various factors such as regional security concerns, the strategic importance of energy resources, the historical legacy of relations, and cultural ties. The thesis aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on foreign policy formation processes by analyzing the motivations behind these multilayered relationships and how Azerbaijan makes strategic decisions within these dynamics. Eventually, this thesis aims to make a significant contribution to literature. In existing academic studies, Azerbaijan’s bilateral relations with neighboring states have generally been addressed in a fragmented manner or focused on specific issues. However, this thesis will provide a comprehensive picture by analyzing Azerbaijan’s relations with all its neighbors in a holistic manner, including diplomatic, security,

economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. This integrated analysis will reveal the unique dynamics of each relationship with the neighbors, while also showing the place of these relationships within Azerbaijan's overall foreign policy strategy and how they interact with each other. Thus, by adding a new dimension to field studies and foreign policy analyses, it will help policymakers and researchers develop a deeper and more contextual understanding of Azerbaijan's foreign policy behaviors.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, foreign policy, constructivism.



ÖZ

İLHAM ALİYEV DÖNEMİNDE AZERBAYCAN'IN KOMŞULARIYLA İLİŞKİLERİ

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Doktora, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

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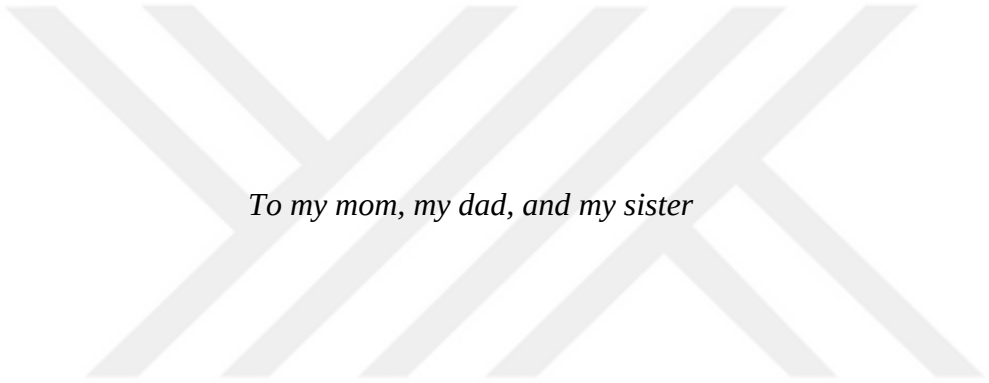
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Bu çalışma, İlham Aliyev'in cumhurbaşkanlığı döneminde Azerbaycan'ın komşularıyla ilişkilerini siyasi, ekonomik, güvenlik ve sosyo-kültürel boyutlar çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Tezin ana amacı, İlham Aliyev döneminde Azerbaycan dış politikasının bölgesel ve uluslararası sistemdeki rolünü derinlemesine anlamaktır. Araştırma, Azerbaycan'ın komşu ülkelerle olan ilişkilerinin neden farklı ve karmaşık dinamiklere sahip olduğunu açıklamayı hedeflemektedir. Bu karmaşıklık, bölgesel güvenlik endişeleri, enerji kaynaklarının stratejik önemi, ilişkilerin tarihsel mirası ve kültürel bağlar gibi çeşitli faktörlerin birleşiminden kaynaklanmaktadır. Tez, bu çok katmanlı ilişkilerin ardındaki motivasyonları ve Azerbaycan'ın bu dinamikler içinde stratejik kararları nasıl aldığını analiz ederek dış politika oluşum süreçlerine kapsamlı bir bakış açısı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu tez, literatüre önemli bir katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Mevcut akademik çalışmalarda, Azerbaycan'ın komşu devletlerle ikili ilişkileri genellikle parçalı bir şekilde ele alınmış veya belirli konulara odaklanılmıştır. Ancak bu tez, Azerbaycan'ın tüm komşularıyla ilişkilerini diplomatik, güvenlik, ekonomik ve sosyo-kültürel boyutları dahil olmak üzere bütüncül bir şekilde analiz ederek kapsamlı bir tablo sunacaktır. Bu bütünlüğe

analiz, komşularla her bir ilişkinin kendine özgü dinamiklerini ortaya koyarken, aynı zamanda bu ilişkilerin Azerbaycan'ın genel dış politika stratejisi içindeki yerini ve birbirleriyle nasıl etkileşimde bulunduklarını da gösterecektir. Böylece, alan çalışmaları ve dış politika analizlerine yeni bir boyut ekleyerek, politika yapıcılarının ve araştırmacıların Azerbaycan'ın dış politika davranışlarına ilişkin daha derin ve bağlamsal bir anlayış geliştirmelerine yardımcı olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Azerbaycan, İlham Aliyev, dış politika, inşacılık.





To my mom, my dad, and my sister

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Association Agreement
AAF	Azerbaijani Armed Forces
ADP	Azerbaijan Democratic Party
ADR	Azerbaijan Democratic Republic
AIG	Armament Industries Group
AIP	Azerbaijan Islamic Party
AMOCO	American Oil Company
APG	Azerbaijan People's Government
AzRevKom	Provisional Azerbaijani Revolutionary Committee
ArSSR	Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic
AZAL	Azerbaijan Airlines
AzSSR	Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic
BP	British Petroleum
BTC	Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan
BTE	Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum
BTK	Baku-Tbilisi-Kars
CEZ	Common Economic Zone
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoE	Council of Europe
CPA	Communist Party of Azerbaijan
CPC	Council of People's Commissars
CPE	Congress of the Peoples of the East
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSCE	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EACU	Eurasian Customs Union
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EaP	Eastern Partnership

EAPC	Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ESC	Eurovision Song Contest
EU	European Union
EurAsEC	Eurasian Economic Community
FETÖ	Fethullah Terror Organization
FIFA	International Federation of Association Football
FNCA	Federal Azerbaijanis National Cultural Autonomy
FRA	First Republic of Armenia
FSB	Federal Security Service
Georgian SSR	Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic
GNAT	Grand National Assembly of Türkiye
GPS	Global Positioning System
GRU	Main Directorate of the General Staff
HLSCC	High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council
IAC	Islamic Army of Caucasus
INSTC	International North-South Transport Corridor
IPAP	Individual Partnership Action Plan
IPP	Individual Partnership Program
IR	International Relations
IRMTO	Iran's Road Maintenance and Transportation Organisation
IRNA	Islamic Republic News Agency
IAI	Israel Aerospace Industries
KBE	Knowledge-Based Economy
KGB	Committee for State Security
LoN	League of Nations
MG	Minsk Group
MLRS	Multiple Rocket Launcher System
MoDI	Ministry of Defense Industry
MoU	Memorandums of Understanding

MUM	Muslim Unity Movement
NACC	North Atlantic Cooperation Council
Nakhchivan ASSR	Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
Nakhchivan SSR	Nakhchivan Soviet Socialist Republic
NAP	New Azerbaijan Party
NAR	Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCA	National Council of Azerbaijan
NKAO	Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OCC	Operational Capabilities Concept
OE	Ottoman Empire
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OTS	Organization of Turkic States
OZaKom	Special Transcaucasian Committee
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PAP-DIB	Partnership Action Plan on Defence Institution Building
PAP-T	Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism
PARP	Planning and Review Process
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PCFA	People's Commissariats for Foreign Affairs
PFA	Popular Front of Azerbaijan
PfP	Partnership for Peace
POW	Prisoner of War
PSE	Partnership for Peace Staff Element
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
RTJMC	Russian-Turkish Joint Monitoring Centre
SANAM	Southern Azerbaijan National Awakening Movement
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SMP	Strategic Modernisation Partnership
SOCAR	State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic

SovNarKom	Council of People's Commissars
SSUSSR	Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
TAF	Turkish Armed Forces
TAKM	Organization of the Eurasian Law Enforcement Agencies
TANAP	Trans-Anatolian Pipeline
TAP	Trans-Adriatic Pipeline
TCP	Trans-Caspian Pipeline
TDFR	Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic
TEU	Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit
TFF	Turkish Football Federation
TITR	Trans-Caspian International Transport Route
TRACECA	Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia
TRNC	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
TSFSR	Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
UCAV	Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UN SC	United Nations Security Council
UN GA	UN General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCAL	Union Oil Company of California
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VAK	All-Russian Azerbaijani Congress
WB	World Bank
WEF	World Economic Forum
WTO	World Trade Organization
ZakavKom	Transcaucasian Commissariat

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Scope and Objective

This doctoral thesis examines Azerbaijan's foreign policy during the Ilham Aliyev period. The study focuses on the factors influencing the formation of foreign policy since Azerbaijan restored its independence. Especially the relations with neighboring states constitute the main area of examination in this thesis. The thesis aims to investigate the fundamental dynamics of the policies implemented under the leadership of Ilham Aliyev and the motivations behind these policies. In this context, Azerbaijan's relations with Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Türkiye, and Iran will be examined in detail, and the impact of these relations on regional balance will be revealed.

The main analysis period of the study covers the process from Ilham Aliyev's accession to the presidency in October 2003 to the present day. During this specified period, the multifaceted relations Azerbaijan maintains with its neighbors will be comprehensively examined. For each bilateral relationship with Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Türkiye, and Iran, the thesis will specifically analyze the diplomatic, security, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. This approach will reveal how these distinct aspects collectively shape Azerbaijan's foreign policy and influence regional dynamics.

The main aim of this thesis is to deeply understand the role of Azerbaijan's foreign policy in the regional and international system during the Ilham Aliyev period. The study aims to explain why Azerbaijan's relations with neighboring states have different and complex dynamics. This complexity arises from a combination of

several factors such as regional security concerns, the strategic importance of energy resources, the historical legacy of relations, and cultural ties. The thesis aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on the formation processes of foreign policy by analyzing the motivations behind these multilayered relationships and how Azerbaijan makes strategic decisions within these dynamics.

In this thesis, the constructivism approach will be used as the basis for understanding Azerbaijan's foreign policy processes. The constructivist approach, that focuses on identities, norms, and social constructs, provides an appropriate framework for explaining Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors, especially in a region like the South Caucasus where historical, ethnic, and religious identities are various. The normative emphasis in Azerbaijan's foreign policy discourse and actions, particularly the importance placed on international law and sovereignty norms, supports the suitability of the constructivist approach. In addition, the impact of historical narratives and collective memory, particularly events such as the Karabakh issue and Soviet-period experiences, on shaping relations with neighboring states will also be examined within this framework. Constructivism will make a significant contribution to illuminating discourses and actions in foreign policy that cannot be explained by material elements, by emphasizing the role of Azerbaijani identity and Azerbaijanism. The effects of this identity and the accompanying Turkism ideology on foreign policy will also be examined.

This thesis aims to make a significant contribution to literature. In existing academic studies, Azerbaijan's bilateral relations with neighboring states have generally been addressed in a fragmented manner or focused on specific topics. However, this thesis will provide a comprehensive picture by analyzing Azerbaijan's relations with all its neighbors in a holistic manner, including diplomatic, security, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. This integrated analysis will reveal the unique dynamics of each relationship with its neighbors, while also showing the place of these relationships within Azerbaijan's overall foreign policy strategy and how they interact with each other. Thus, by adding a new dimension to area studies and foreign policy analyses, it will help policymakers and researchers develop a deeper and more contextual understanding of Azerbaijan's foreign policy behaviors.

1.2. Research Questions

The main research question of this doctoral thesis is as follows: What are the key factors and dynamics shaping Azerbaijan's foreign policy during the Ilham Aliyev period, and how do these dynamics explain the differentiation and complexity in Azerbaijan's relations with neighboring states from a constructivist perspective?

This main question will guide all sections of the study and determine the analytical focus of the thesis. In this context, the aim is to reveal how Azerbaijan's foreign policy decisions are connected not only with materialist interests but also with constructivist elements such as identity, norms, collective memory, and shared meanings.

While seeking an answer to this fundamental question, the following sub-research questions will also allow for a more detailed examination of the topic:

- How have Azerbaijan's foreign policy priorities evolved from the time Ilham Aliyev took office to the present?
- To what extent have energy resources, defense cooperation, the Karabakh issue, and relations with regional/international organizations determined Azerbaijan's interactions with its neighbors?
- What results have Azerbaijan's bilateral diplomatic, economic, and security policies with its neighbors produced in terms of regional stability and cooperation?

By answering these research questions, the fundamental trends, areas of conflict and cooperation, and potential future developments in Azerbaijan's relations with neighboring countries will be analyzed more comprehensively. The findings obtained at the end of the thesis will both provide a theoretical contribution to the constructivist foreign policy literature and offer new and original insights into the complex web of relations in the South Caucasus region. These results will allow policymakers and researchers to develop a more holistic and in-depth understanding of Azerbaijan's regional and international role.

1.3. Literature Review

Looking at the literature, it is evident that there is a gap in studies written on Azerbaijan's foreign policy in general, and specifically on its relations with all its neighbors. What is written consists either of studies examining Azerbaijan's relations with each of its neighbors separately, or of books describing the post-independence period, or of a few pages of insignificant articles that have lost their relevance.

It is also possible to classify the literature about Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors according to three theoretical approaches: realism, liberalism, and constructivism. First, studies that approach Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors from the perspective of realist theory have mostly touched upon the points of interstate competition and power struggles. Second, those who approach Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors from a liberal view have touched upon points such as cooperation, interdependence, the role of international institutions, and common interests. Third, studies approaching Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors from the perspective of constructivist approach would likely focus on shared identities, norms, and the social construction of interests between Azerbaijan and its neighbors. Yet, while Azerbaijan's foreign policy and relations with its neighbors are rarely examined from the perspective of International Relations theories, when they are, they are studied more from a Realpolitik standpoint, with an emphasis on materialist factors. These factors have generally been examined through the Karabakh conflict, energy policy, relations via organizations, and cooperation for the defense industry. While these aspects are important, studies in the literature are generally insufficient in understanding Azerbaijan's foreign policy and its relations with its neighbors. Among the studies conducted in terms of bilateral relations, theses stand out. While scanning theses written on this subject, the ProQuest and YökTez thesis databases were used. One of these theses, Khayala Amiraslanova's master's thesis, titled *Russian – Azerbaijani Relations During and After Dmitry Medvedev's Term in Office*,¹ is the first example of bilateral relations on this topic. Although there is no comprehensive doctoral thesis on Azerbaijan-Russia relations, this thesis examines

¹ Khayala Amiraslanova, *Russian – Azerbaijani Relations During and After Dmitry Medvedev's Term in Office*, (MA thesis, Khazar University [Azerbaijan], 2016).

the development of Azerbaijan-Russia relations during the 2008-2013 period. It presents the historical background of the relations between these two states and analyzes the changes in diplomatic relations, security cooperation, and economic ties during the period when Dmitry Medvedev was the President of Russia. Due to the narrow time frame of the thesis (4 years) and the fact that it was written almost a decade ago, it falls short in explaining bilateral relations.

Another work, Nazakat Karimova's master's thesis in Turkish, titled *Russia's Caucasus Policy and Relations with Azerbaijan*,² addresses the strategic importance of the Caucasus and the power vacuum that emerged in the region following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The thesis briefly outlines Russia's foreign policy and its bilateral relations with regional countries under the title of Caucasus policy, while the relations with Azerbaijan cover periods before the Ilham Aliyev period. Aysel Mikayılzade's master's thesis in Turkish, titled "*Conflict and Cooperation Cycle in Russia - Azerbaijan Relations (1991-2018)*"³ does not have sufficient content on Azerbaijan-Russia relations, contrary to its title. Afet Sadigli's master's thesis in Turkish titled "*The Azerbaijani Diaspora and Its Effect on the Relationship of Azerbaijan - Russia*"⁴ highlights the importance of the diaspora as "soft power" and its complex role in Azerbaijan-Russia relations.

In addition to the scarcity of theses on Azerbaijan-Russia bilateral relations, there has been almost no thesis on Azerbaijan-Georgia relations. However, Maia Paksadze's master's thesis in Turkish, titled *Post-Soviet Georgia-Azerbaijan Relations: Gaining Independence Through Interdependence*⁵ addresses the position of Georgia and Azerbaijan in international politics and their relations within the framework of interdependence theory following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. According to a

² Nazakat Karimova, *Rusya'nın Kafkasya Politikası ve Azerbaycan ile İlişkileri*, (MA thesis, Sakarya University [Türkiye], 2019).

³ Aysel Mikayılzade, *Çatışma ve İşbirliği Döngüsünde Rusya-Azerbaycan İlişkileri (1991-2018)*, (MA thesis, Çanakkale University [Türkiye], 2019).

⁴ Afet Sadigli, *Rusya'daki Azerbaycan Diasporası ve Azerbaycan-Rusya İlişkilerine Etkisi*, (MA thesis, İstanbul University [Türkiye], 2019.)

⁵ Maia Paksadze, *Sovyet Sonrası Gürcistan-Azerbaycan İlişkileri: Karşılıklı Bağımlılık Kurarak Bağımsız Olmak*, (MA thesis, Necmettin Erbakan University [Türkiye], 2020.)

master's thesis, the study, which is sufficiently broad, has successfully addressed the relations between the two states. This thesis, which has a theoretical background within the framework of liberal interdependence, has been a relatively successful study by focusing on the post-2003 period. Liane-Sophie Hamamciyan's bachelor thesis titled *Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Armenia and Azerbaijan between Conflict Resolution and Human Rights*⁶ examines the Karabakh issue in the topics of conflict resolution and human rights. The study emphasizes that the Karabakh conflict is defined as a clash between two fundamental principles of international law: territorial integrity (for Azerbaijan) and the right to self-determination (for the Armenians in Karabakh). The other thesis on Azerbaijan-Armenia relations is Emin Şihaliyev's doctoral thesis in Turkish, titled *The Russian and Iranian Factors in Azerbaijan-Armenia Relations*.⁷ Being a thesis in the discipline of History, this work is naturally devoid of the theoretical framework of the discipline of International Relations. Moreover, this thesis, which has a structural disorder, has not adequately addressed the Azerbaijan-Armenia relations.

Despite there being over a hundred theses on Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations, most of them are master's theses. However, the studies conducted on the relations between the two states after Azerbaijan's independence stand out as more frequently repetitive works. During this period, various phases after 1991 are addressed, but it is observed that most of the studies are repetitive of each other with only minor changes in names and scope.⁸ Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning the doctoral theses. But first, a successful master's thesis written on this topic should be mentioned. It is *Azerbaijan - Türkiye Relations (1988 – 2018): "Evaluating 'One Nation Two States' Discourse"*⁹, written by Ahmet Gencehan Babiş. In this thesis,

⁶ Liane-Sophie Hamamciyan, *Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Armenia and Azerbaijan between Conflict Resolution and Human Rights*, (BA thesis, Webster University [United States], 2014.)

⁷ Emin Şihaliyev, *Azerbaycan – Ermenistan İlişkilerinde Rusya ve İran Faktörü (1828–2000)*, (PhD thesis, Ankara University [Türkiye], 2019.)

⁸ Mehmet Okur, "Türkiye'de Azerbaycan tarihi ve iki ülke arasındaki siyasî ve ekonomik ilişkiler üzerine yapılan lisansüstü çalışmalar (1991-2016)," in *T. C. Kastamonu Üniversitesi I. Milletlerarası Türkiye-Azerbaycan Münasebetleri Sempozyumu (12-14 Mayıs 2016) Bildiriler*, Mayıs 12-14, 2016, (Kastamonu, 2016), 756-757.

⁹ Ahmet Gencehan Babiş, *Azerbaijan - Turkey Relations (1988 – 2018): "Evaluating 'One Nation Two States' Discourse"*, (MA thesis, Middle East Technical University [Türkiye], 2018).

the relations between the two states are examined based on “strategic partnership.” The 200-page thesis, which is almost at the level of a doctoral thesis, explains the views of the intellectual elite in both states about the other state through in-depth interviews and media analysis.

Aynura Baghirova’s doctoral thesis in Turkish, titled *Türkiye - Azerbaijan Relations from the Perspective of Global Energy Supply*¹⁰ examines the relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan from the perspective of global energy supply. The thesis analyzes the new geopolitical situation that emerged in Eurasian geography following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the impact of global energy policies on the countries in this region. Despite its theoretical foundation, the thesis, which is relatively short for a doctoral dissertation, examines bilateral relations solely from an economic perspective. Another thesis that describes the recent history of Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations is Elsever Salmanov’s doctoral thesis in Turkish, titled “*Azerbaijan - Türkiye Relations and Heydar Aliyev (1993-2003)*.”¹¹ Although the year of writing the thesis is recent, the period it covers predates İlham Aliyev. This has prevented it from being up to date. Furthermore, despite being a thesis in the field of International Relations, there is a lack of theoretical background.

The acceptable thesis written on Azerbaijan-Iran relations is Erkan Yılmaz’s doctoral thesis in Turkish, titled *Azerbaijan - Iran Relations During the İlham Aliyev Period*.¹² This thesis, which has the closest scope and limitations to the thesis currently being read, has been addressed alongside historical processes due to the historical roots of the fundamental disagreements. The thesis, which has a well-established theoretical framework, examined relations through *Realpolitik*. In this thesis, from realist perspective, it is claimed that Azerbaijan-Iran relations are conducted according to structural changes in the international system and the principle of balance of power. According to the main argument of the thesis, the

¹⁰ Aynura Baghirova, *Küresel Enerji Arzı Perspektifinden Türkiye - Azerbaycan İlişkileri*, MA thesis, Trakya University [Türkiye], 2021).

¹¹ Elsever Salmanov, *Azerbaycan-Türkiye İlişkileri ve Haydar Aliyev - 1993-2003*, (PhD thesis. Gazi University [Türkiye], 2019).

¹² Erkan Yılmaz, *İlham Aliyev Dönemi Azerbaycan-İran İlişkileri*, (PhD thesis, Çanakkale University [Türkiye], 2020).

anarchic structure of the international system has caused many areas between Azerbaijan and Iran to turn into security issues.

Another acceptable thesis on this subject is Azar Malikahmadov's doctoral thesis in Turkish, titled "*The Freedom Struggle of Turks Living in Iran and Its Impact on Azerbaijan-Iran Relations*."¹³ Like my thesis, this one with a constructivist theoretical framework begins with the historical background of the independence struggle that developed in South Azerbaijan from the 1917s. The thesis, which successfully examines the connection between the Azerbaijani state and this independence movement in the post-Soviet Union dissolution period, has yielded good results by focusing on the İlham Aliyev period.

Aside from these theses written on bilateral relations, there are important books by significant scholars on Azerbaijan's foreign policy and its relations with its neighbors. However, a significant portion of these books were written in the 2000s and focus on the history of the Republic of Azerbaijan during the Soviet and pre-Soviet periods. For example, the reprinted book *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community*¹⁴ by Tadeusz Swietochowski provides the historical background of the Azerbaijani identity that formed on the path to independence in 1918. Similarly, in the following decade, Jamil Hasanli's book, *Khrushchev's Thaw and National Identity in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1954-1959*,¹⁵ is a history-focused book written about the efforts to preserve this identity in an early period of the Soviet Union. However, there are also important books that describe the period after the restoration of independence. Among these, Brenda Shaffer's book, *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity*,¹⁶ while focusing mostly on Soviet-period Azerbaijan, discusses how Azerbaijani identity

¹³ Azar Malikahmadov, *İran'da Yaşayan Türklerin Özgürlük Mücadelesi ve Azerbaycan – İran İlişkilerine Etkileri*, (PhD thesis, Uludağ University [Türkiye], 2023).

¹⁴ Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Jamil Hasanli, *Khrushchev's Thaw and National Identity in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1954-1959*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014).

¹⁶ Brenda Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002).

developed in both South and North Azerbaijan. Similarly, Audrey L. Altstadt's book, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule*,¹⁷ discusses the survival journey of Azerbaijani Turks from the beginning of Russian colonial rule in the 19th century to their re-independence. Another book along these lines is Thomas De Waal's *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Thru Peace and War*.¹⁸ The book, which focuses on the Karabakh issue and the renewed hostility between Armenia and Azerbaijan, attempts to detail the events that occurred in this regard up to 2001.

Nevertheless, there are also valuable studies, mostly books, from the post-1991 period. However, these also focus on developments from the recent past, specifically those that occurred immediately after the restoration of independence. However, there are also books that describe the politics of Azerbaijan in the 2000s. Audrey Altstadt's book, *Frustrated Democracy in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*,¹⁹ examines Azerbaijan in the 2000s more from the perspective of democracy and human rights, while also separately analyzing the presence and future of Islam in the country. Another book written about this period is Svante E. Cornell's *Azerbaijan Since Independence*.²⁰ This book, in line with the content of this thesis, addresses the foreign policy of the Ilham Aliyev period and its relations with neighbors. However, the biggest drawback of the book written in 2011 is that it was written a very long time before current developments.

In addition to all the books, there are also a considerable number of articles about Azerbaijan. As mentioned above, some of these are poorly prepared articles of a few pages, while others are articles that will contribute to the literature, albeit on a small scale. Nevertheless, all these articles have been studies that are far from the content intended and covered by this thesis. One of these articles with a theoretical

¹⁷ Audrey L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2013).

¹⁸ Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War*, (New York: NYU press, 2003).

¹⁹ Audrey Altstadt, *Frustrated Democracy in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

²⁰ Svante E. Cornell, *Azerbaijan Since Independence*, (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2011).

background is Araz Aslanli's article in Turkish, titled "Analysis of Azerbaijan-Iran relations within the framework of neo-realism theory."²¹ This study emphasizes that in Azerbaijan-Iran relations, the parties perceive risks over opportunities, particularly highlighting that security concerns generally overshadow cooperation.

Another similar article is Valiyev and Mamishova's "Azerbaijan's foreign policy toward Russia since independence: compromise achieved."²² While the article again uses a realist framework, this time it addresses Azerbaijan-Russia relations. Finally, the article "Azerbaijan's dual foreign policy strategy toward Israel: a realist alliance and a neoliberal knowledge-based economy cooperation, 2011–2022"²³ by Traub, Cohen, and Kertcher claims that Azerbaijan pursues a benevolent foreign policy based on realism and neoliberalism. Although many of the theses, books, and articles mentioned above are written about Azerbaijan's foreign policy, they do not comprehensively cover its relations with all its neighbors. Her bilateral relationship with her neighbors is also generally framed within the framework of *Realpolitik*, while the power of her Azerbaijani identity in Azerbaijani foreign policy is overlooked.

In conclusion, this doctoral thesis makes a significant contribution to the literature by comprehensively examining Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors. Unlike the limited studies that focus on a single neighboring state in the region, this thesis addresses Azerbaijan's relations with all its neighbors from a multidimensional perspective. In this way, it fills the current gap in the literature on Azerbaijan's bilateral relations, providing "fresh blood" to the field. The study stands out with its strong theoretical and conceptual framework, analyzing the subject in depth from various perspectives, not just from a single angle, ranging from diplomacy to

²¹ Araz Aslanlı, and Agil Memmedov. "Neo-Realizm kuramı çerçevesinde Azerbaycan-İran ilişkilerinin analizi," *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi* 5, no. 6, (2016): 1520-1532, <https://doi.org/10.15869/itobiad.256057>.

²² Anar Valiyev, and Narmina Mamishova, "Azerbaijan's foreign policy towards Russia since independence: compromise achieved," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 19, no. 2, (2019): 270-271, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2019.1578053>.

²³ Daniela Traub, Ronen A. Cohen, and Chen Kertcher, "Azerbaijan's dual foreign policy strategy toward Israel: a realist alliance and a neoliberal knowledge-based economy cooperation, 2011–2022," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 11, no. 1, (2024): 6-7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2335763>.

security. Unlike the outdated studies frequently encountered in literature that receive few citations, this thesis offers a detailed examination covering recent events. By going beyond the commonly known aspects of Azerbaijan and focusing on less explored topics, the thesis makes itself unique. Most importantly, being one of the rare studies written in English in this field increases the thesis's accessibility and impact on the international literature.

1.4. Main Argument

The main argument of the thesis is that the factors shaping Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors during Ilham Aliyev's period are not only limited to geopolitical and economic interests but are also deeply influenced by Azerbaijan's continuously evolving national identity and the "Azerbaijanism" ideology. The way this identity and ideology interpret perceptions and policies towards neighboring states in different ways constitutes the fundamental explanatory power behind the complex and diverse dynamics observed in Azerbaijan's relations with Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Türkiye, and Iran.

The thesis argues that foreign policy decision-makers are influenced not only by materialist factors but also by constructivist factors such as the norms imposed by national identity, historical narratives, and collective memory. In this context, the main argument of the thesis is that the differentiation in neighborly relations cannot be fully understood solely through traditional variables such as power balances or economic dependencies; the key determining factor is the unique interpretation of the historical and identity-based relationship with each neighbor. This approach offers a significant contribution to understanding Azerbaijan's foreign policy from a holistic and constructivist framework, surpassing the tendency of most studies in the existing literature to address bilateral relations or narrow-scope factors.

In this context, identity has served as a central mechanism determining the nature of the relationship with each neighbor. For example, in relations with Russia, the emphasis on the historical Soviet legacy and sovereignty norms has influenced security and energy policies. In relations with Georgia, although regional cooperation

and common interests around energy corridors have been dominant, the identity situations of ethnic minorities have occasionally influenced the dynamics. In relations with Armenia, the painful collective memory and perception of national victimhood shaped around the Karabakh issue have complicated the normalization processes. In relations with Türkiye, the shared Turkic identity and the slogan “one nation, two states” have reinforced diplomatic and security cooperation, while the presence of the Azerbaijani population in South Azerbaijan has created cultural ties and potential sensitivities in relations with Iran. Thus, the thesis argues that the differentiation in neighborly relations is not solely due to traditional variables such as power balances or economic dependencies, but rather the main determining factor is the unique interpretation of the historical and identity-related relationship with each neighbor.

1.5. Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research method has been predominantly adopted to analyze Azerbaijan’s relations with neighboring countries during the Ilham Aliyev period. Throughout the research process, official documents (government reports, strategy documents, bilateral and multilateral agreements, diplomatic correspondence, and press releases) will be meticulously examined. These official sources will provide direct and authoritative information on decision-making mechanisms, forming a critical foundation for understanding the official stance behind Azerbaijan’s foreign policy preferences.

Within the scope of the literature review, academic works related to the subject (books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and doctoral theses in the fields of international relations, area studies, and history) will be evaluated in depth. These academic sources will enhance the analytical depth of the study through theoretical frameworks and previous empirical findings, guiding the identification of the thesis’s original contribution. To provide concrete data such as economic and security indicators, statistical data will also be used in a supportive manner. These data will provide the opportunity to quantitatively observe changes in areas such as trade relations, energy flows, and defense expenditures. Moreover, local and international

press publications and media analyses will also be evaluated to understand public perceptions, expert opinions, and current commentary on events.

Thanks to this holistic methodological approach, the key trends and turning points in Azerbaijan's relations with Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Türkiye, and Iran will be more clearly revealed. From diplomacy and defense cooperation to trade, energy projects, and socio-cultural interactions, a comparative approach will be adopted to identify the similarities and differences in Azerbaijan's interactions with its neighbors. In this way, by analyzing mutual diplomatic efforts, security-focused collaborations, and economic ties, along with insights obtained from media and press reports, a comprehensive view will be presented that includes both public and expert perspectives. Ultimately, through the integration of theoretical and empirical dimensions, this study will provide a multifaceted analysis of the factors shaping Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors under the leadership of İlham Aliyev and draw conclusions about possible future trajectories.

Lastly and most importantly, in this thesis, the terms Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Türkiye, and Iran, mentioned as Azerbaijan's neighbors, have been used to refer to the full and official names of the respective states rather than geographical locations. Especially, throughout the text, no abbreviations (for example, RF instead of the Russian Federation) have been preferred for these states. This approach has been adopted to ensure that the reader can read the text more smoothly and seamlessly. However, instead of writing the full name of each state every time, they were written with their commonly known names. For example, when referring to Russia, the Russian Federation is meant; when referring to Georgia, Georgia is meant; when referring to Armenia, the Republic of Armenia is meant; when referring to Türkiye, the Republic of Türkiye is meant; and when referring to Iran, the Islamic Republic of Iran is meant.

1.6. Structure of Thesis

This thesis consists of ten main chapters that comprehensively examine Azerbaijan's foreign relations with neighboring countries during the İlham Aliyev period. The first

chapter of the study, the Introduction, presents the overall framework of the research. Here, detailed information about the scope of the thesis, its main objectives, the primary research question, and the adopted methodology is shared with the reader. The second chapter, titled Theoretical Framework, which forms the conceptual basis of the thesis, investigates deeply into the realist, liberal, and particularly constructivist approaches in the discipline of international relations. In this chapter, the potential of these theoretical approaches to understand and analyze Azerbaijan's foreign policy is discussed.

The third chapter, Historical Background, examines the evolution of Azerbaijan's foreign relations from a historical perspective, using Azerbaijan's history as the starting point. This chapter focuses on the pre-independence period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the period under the administration of the former Soviet Union, and the process of regaining independence. The fourth chapter, Foreign Aspects, addresses the main pillars of the current period's foreign policy strategy. In this chapter, the central role of the Karabakh issue in foreign policy, the strategic importance of energy diplomacy, defense collaborations, and Azerbaijan's multilateral interactions with international and regional organizations are subjected to detailed analysis.

The fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth chapters form the heart of the thesis's empirical analysis and focus on Azerbaijan's bilateral relations with Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Türkiye, and Iran, respectively. The development of diplomatic relations, security collaborations and challenges, the depth of economic ties, and socio-cultural interactions are comprehensively examined under separate subheadings for each country. In these chapters, the unique dynamics, historical legacies, and identity dimensions of relations with each neighbor are detailed, revealing the complex motivations behind foreign policy decisions. The final chapter of the study, the Conclusion, summarizes the key findings obtained throughout the research, reevaluates the main argument of the thesis, and presents analytical inferences regarding the possible future trajectories of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. The thesis is concluded with a Bibliography section that includes a complete list of all the academic and official sources used.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

In the discipline of International Relations (IR), three fundamental theoretical approaches have emerged out for understanding states' foreign policy decisions: realism, liberalism, and constructivism. This chapter aims to systematically examine the fundamental assumptions of these approaches and their applicability to Azerbaijan's foreign policy. The realist perspective focuses on the anarchic structure of the international system and the struggle for power, while the liberal view emphasizes elements such as cooperation, institutionalization, and economic interdependence. Constructivism, on the other hand, offers a more innovative viewpoint that seeks to explain state behavior through identities, norms, and social constructions.

Azerbaijan's geographical location and historical background demand the use of the analytical tools of these three theoretical approaches. Azerbaijan, that regained independence in the post-Soviet times, both observes realist balances in its relations with regional and world powers and also implements liberal principles via cooperation with international organizations. On the other hand, the role of identity and norms in historical issues like the Karabakh problem highlights the necessity of the constructivist perspective. Therefore, the example of Azerbaijan offers an ideal environment for the comparative application of IR theories.

The main goal of this chapter is to examine the relevant theoretical frameworks comprehensively and to demonstrate how they can be used to understand Azerbaijan's foreign policy. Particularly, it will focus on how the Azerbaijani

identity has shaped over historical processes and how this development has reflected in foreign policy decisions. First, the fundamental assumptions and historical development of each theory will be addressed. And then, the discussion will focus on how these theories can be applied specifically in the context of Azerbaijan. Finally, it will be demonstrated how constructivism offers a more comprehensive viewpoint in the analysis of Azerbaijan's foreign policy compared to other theories. In this way, a solid theoretical foundation will be prepared for the analysis of Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors in the following sections.

2.2. Realpolitik and Foreign Policy

Realism has been a term used in many disciplines in different ways. In the discipline of International Relations (IR), political realism, alternatively known as *Realpolitik* or "power politics", is the oldest and most widespread theory. *Realpolitik*, as addressed later, is explained using several sets of assumptions. Yet, in the simplest words, it may be stated as follows: conflictual nature of international affairs; the group as essence of social reality; primacy of power and security.²⁴ The basis of realism is power politics, which emerges from the combination of egoism and anarchy. In the 20th century, names such as George Kennan, Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Thompson, Kenneth Waltz, Randall Schweller from the US; Martin Wight and Herbert Butterfield (despite affiliation with English School) from the UK came to the fore²⁵ while Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes are generally accepted as the pioneers of realism in Western political thought.²⁶

Realists argue that they are heirs to an intellectual tradition rooted in antiquity. Realism can be traced in important works from Ancient Greece, Rome, India and China. For example, Thucydides' (460-400 BCE) *The Peloponnesian War* reflects

²⁴ Robert Gilpin, "The richness of the tradition of political realism," in *Neo-Realism and Its Critics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane, 301-321, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 304-305, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300026710>.

²⁵ Jack Donnelly, "Realism," in *Theories of International Relations*, edited by Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater, 29-54, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 30.

²⁶ Donnelly, "Realism," 22-24.

realism's skepticism of the limiting effects of morality.²⁷ Similarly, in India, Kautilya's (375-283 BCE) *Arthashastra* contains realist arguments focused on power expansion and conquest.²⁸ Realists include Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) and his work *The Prince* in their tradition because Machiavelli, with a pessimistic view of human nature, advocates strong and effective rulers who prioritize power and security. According to him, every action necessary for the survival of the state is legitimate, regardless of moral constraints.²⁹ Realists also embrace the idea of the 'state of nature' in Thomas Hobbes' (1588-1679) *Leviathan*. Hobbes argues that in the absence of higher authority, people will follow their desires without limits. According to him, in the state of nature; men are on equal footing, live in an anarchic environment, and are driven by impulses such as competition, fear and desire for fame.³⁰

The 20th century's *classical realism* is usually traced back to Edward. H. Carr's *Twenty Years Crisis* in 1939. Classical realists emerged in reaction to the dominant liberal approaches to international politics of the period. Besides Carr, some other scholars such as Niebuhr (1940), Wight (1946), Morgenthau (1948), Kennan (1951) and Butterfield (1953) form the basis of the modern realist tradition. However, Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* became the undisputed pioneering work of political realism in this century.³¹

Edward H. Carr's book made realism an influential theory of international order. Written in 1939 in the shadow of the Second World War, Carr argued that ancient realists should be consulted to understand the root causes of the crisis. He

²⁷ Richard Ned Lebow, "Classical Realism," in *International Relations Theories*, ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith, 59-76, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 60, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780198814443.003.0002>.

²⁸ Deepshikha Shahi, *Kautilya and Non-Western IR Theory*, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 2-4, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-01728-6>.

²⁹ Steven Forde. "Varieties of realism: Thucydides and Machiavelli," *The Journal of Politics* 54, no. 2, (1992): 373, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2132031>.

³⁰ Donnelly, "Realism," 32.

³¹ Colin Elman, "Realism," in *International Relations Theory for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Martin Griffiths, 11-20, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 12, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203939031>.

emphasized the role of fear in explaining the First World War and dedicated his book to “the architects of future peace.”³² Carr emphasized the role of power politics and how the neglect of this factor led to the First World War. Carr argued that utopians rejected reality and believed in something that could replace it, while realists analyzed an unchanging reality. While the utopian sees the future with a creative eye, the realist focuses on causality by drawing strength from the past.³³

Like Carr, Hans J. Morgenthau is considered one of the most influential theorists who adapted realism to International Relations. In his work, he analyzed the similarities between human nature and state behavior.³⁴ Morgenthau summarizes the six principles of political realism as follows: (1) Politics is governed by objective laws based on human nature. (2) Interest in international politics is defined by power. (3) Interest is not fixed because it changes according to the political and cultural context. (4) There is a tension between morality and political action. (5) The moral goals of a nation cannot be identified with universal laws. (6) Interest defined by power gives international politics an independent status.³⁵

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the arguments of classical realism regarding an anarchic system and human aggression led to significant disapproval in the field of international relations. In response to these criticisms, certain realists attempted to protect the theory against claims of its deterioration. Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* (1979) aimed to establish a more theoretical basis for classical realist theory. This work was regarded as the primary foundation of neorealism (a.k.a. structural realism).³⁶ Waltz restored realism by highlighting the impact of the competitive system on states. Nonetheless, this “rescue attempt” for realism faced

³² Mark V. Kauppi, and Paul R. Viotti, *International Relations Theory*, (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023), 206-207.

³³ Edward H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919–1939*, (London: Macmillan, 1946), 11-14.

³⁴ Kauppi, and Viotti, *International Relations Theory*, 208.

³⁵ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948), 4-15.

³⁶ Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511612510>.

severe intellectual criticism. These critiques motivated additional scholars, such as Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, to strengthen Waltz's neorealist theory.³⁷

From here on, to comprehend it better, it is essential to talk about main arguments of political realism after its historical evolution touched above. First of all, political realism's most significant argument is the concept of worldwide anarchy. Anarchy basically defines the absence of a dominant authority capable of enforcing regulations inside a system.³⁸ Realists maintain that there is no suprastate worldwide power that regulates or restricts the actions of sovereign states. This circumstance allows the nation-states of the world to be the sole primary actors in the international system. While political realists acknowledge the significance of non-state actors, including multinational corporations, international institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in shaping international relations, they insist that the state remains to be the primary actor in the system.³⁹

Secondly, there are arguments from political realism regarding the cause of war. Today, the definition of war has moved beyond the criteria of the "Westphalian System" (declaration of war, inter-state nature, distinction between combatants and civilians),⁴⁰ and from the perspective of realists, the cause of war is attributed to unavoidable events. In the classical sense, while human nature is seen as evil,⁴¹ sin in man's nature has been viewed as the cause of war.⁴² Neorealists, on the other hand, see more "societal" reasons as the source of war, rather than "individual" reasons.

³⁷ Stephen M. Walt, "The enduring relevance of the realist tradition," in *Political Science: State of the Discipline*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner, 197-230, (New York: WW Norton Company, 2002), 204-210.

³⁸ Thomas Diez, Ingvald Bode, and Aleksandra Fernandes da Costa, *Key Concepts in International Relations*, (London: Sage, 2011), 1.

³⁹ Robert Gilpin, *Global Political Economy: Understanding the International Economic Order*, (Princeton University Press, 2001), 17.

⁴⁰ Diez, Bode, and da Costa, *Key Concepts*, 155.

⁴¹ Erica Benner, "Political Realism and Human Nature," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Political Realism*, ed. Robert Schuett and Miles Hollingworth, 11-22, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 13, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474423298-003>.

⁴² Menno R. Kamminga, "Reinhold Niebuhr," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Political Realism*, ed. Robert Schuett and Miles Hollingworth, 252-264, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 259, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474423298-022>.

Because, for example, while the evil of a bad person can be prevented in a good society; however in a bad society, even good people are inclined to do evil. Adapting this to international relations, according to Waltz, the anarchic system caused by poor organization drives states to war.⁴³ Thirdly, for the state's main aim, realists have different arguments. According to classical realists, this goal is the struggle for power; while according to neorealists, it is survival. Some neorealists believe that a certain level of power is sufficient for survival, while others argue that the state seeks to maximize its power for survival.⁴⁴ In general realist view, the state engages in a struggle for power for these aims, and this mutual struggle of states creates a *balance of power*.⁴⁵ In a system with a balance of power, when a state becomes strong enough to disrupt the balance, other states try to strengthen themselves to catch up with that state. This situation is described as *security dilemma*.⁴⁶ For classical realists, some aspects of human behavior do not change across time and space. They argue that there are fixed laws governing the behavior of individuals and states. In this context, just like people, states are selfish and naturally aggressive. An example of a billiard table is often used to explain realism: Balls [of different sizes] on the table represent the interaction of states in the international system.⁴⁷

Fourthly, another realist argument has been about the polarity of the system. In realist literature, there is a debate about which pole structure is less war prone. According to the consensus, world politics had been multipolar until the Cold War. But during the Cold War, the world had become bipolar.⁴⁸ Neorealists, like John Mearsheimer, argue that bipolarity has been more effective in preventing a war

⁴³ Cynthia Weber, *International Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 2010), 16.

⁴⁴ Or Rosenboim, "Realism," in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, ed. John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, 132-146, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 135, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780192898142.003.0009>.

⁴⁵ Michael Sheehan, *The Balance of Power: History & Theory*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 4-7.

⁴⁶ Diez, Bode, and da Costa, *Key Concepts*, 205.

⁴⁷ Jill Steans, et al., *An Introduction to International Relations Theory: Perspectives and Themes*, (Harlow: Pearson, 2010), 53.

⁴⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," in *International Relations Theories*, ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith, 77-93, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780198814443.003.0003>.

between great powers.⁴⁹ But other scholars, like Dale C. Copeland, claim that bipolarity is less stable than multipolarity.⁵⁰ Furthermore, there are general views in the International Relations literature regarding the unipolar nature of the post-Cold War period.⁵¹

In addition to the fundamental arguments, it is also beneficial to touch upon the varieties of political realism. Although political realism in its modern form is known as classical realism, as was previously mentioned; *neorealism*, which approaches the international system in a more structural way, has emerged with the evolution of IR discipline.⁵² As neorealism emerged from the 1980s, researchers started to link realist analyses of the interwar era and the initial phases of the Cold War to classical realism. Researchers examining Waltz's theory suggest that Waltz emphasizes significant distinctions in International Relations, particularly concerning geography and technology. Depending on how these factors are conceptualized, similar neorealist ideas also have very different inferences about the dynamics of interstate politics. As a result, two new theoretical subschools emerged that did not break with the main views of neorealism: defensive realism and offensive realism.⁵³

Defensive structural realism, although it develops from neorealism, differs from neorealism in some fundamental points. Essentially, like neorealism, defensive structural realism also emphasizes that the primary goal of states in an anarchic international system is security.⁵⁴ However, it is necessary to mention three main

⁴⁹ Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," 85.

⁵⁰ Dale C. Copeland, "Neorealism and the myth of bipolar stability: Toward a new dynamic realist theory of major war," *Security Studies* 5, no. 3, (1996): 30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636419608429276>.

⁵¹ Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," 86.

⁵² Henry R. Nau, "Realism," in *Routledge Handbook of American Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven W. Hook, Christopher M. Jones, 61-74, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 64, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203878637>.

⁵³ William C. Wohlforth, "Realism," in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, 131-149, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 138-139, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199219322.003.0007>.

⁵⁴ Charles L. Glaser, "Structural Realism in a more complex world," *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 3, (2003): 409, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210503004030>.

differences between Waltz's neorealism and defensive structural realism. First, while there is uncertainty in the cause of state behavior in neorealism, according to defensive structural realism, states only make rational choices. Secondly, defensive structural realism assumes that the balance between offense and defense is variable. For example, the difficulties encountered in conquest due to factors such as technology and geography push states to be more defensive. Thirdly, defensive structural realists assume that states should support the status quo by combining the first two differences.⁵⁵

The best-known variant of defensive structural realism is Walt's "balance of threat" theory. As Stephen Walt points out in *The Origins of Alliance* (1987), the underlying reason for states forming alliances is nothing more than their desire to protect themselves in a worldwide anarchy. Their behavior is determined by the threats they perceive.⁵⁶

Offensive structural realism opposes the defensive structural realist view that states are only in pursuit of "sufficient" power. In the flagship work of this view, John Mearsheimer's *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001), states operate in an uncertain international environment where any state may use its power to harm others.⁵⁷ In such a context, relative power becomes the most critical factor, and states must maximize their power to ensure security.⁵⁸ Due to the stopping power of water, the highest goal a state can achieve is to become a regional hegemon, while ensuring no other regional hegemon exists elsewhere in the world.⁵⁹ In the view shaped by Mearsheimer, there are five assumptions: the structure of the current international

⁵⁵ Colin Elman, and Michael Jensen, "Introduction," in *The Realism Reader*, ed. Colin Elman and Michael Jensen, 1-30, (London: Routledge, 2014), 6-7, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315858579>.

⁵⁶ Stephen M. Walt, "Testing theories of alliance formation: The case of Southwest Asia," *International Organization* 42, no. 2, (1988): 279-281, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300032823>.

⁵⁷ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 129.

⁵⁸ Colin Elman, "Realism," 18.

⁵⁹ Steven E. Lobell, "Structural realism/offensive and defensive realism," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies (Volume X)*, ed. Robert A. Denemark, 6651-6669, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 6653, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.304>.

system is anarchic; no state trusts another; survival is the primary goal; states are rational; states possess aggressive military capabilities.⁶⁰

New realist approaches emerged because of the changes that political realist theory struggled to explain unexpected phenomenon after the Cold War ended. Under the guidance of individuals like Gideon Rose, Randall Schweller, and Fareed Zakaria, a theoretical approach, known as *neoclassical realism*, was developed.⁶¹ Neoclassical realism, according to Gideon Rose,⁶² is a realist approach that systematically addresses both internal and external factors⁶³ while reexamining and improving some of the core claims of classical realism. This view, like neorealism, accepts that a state's foreign policy is primarily determined by its position in the international system and its material power capacity, and is considered realist in this regard. However, it is called neoclassical realism because it argues that systemic factors influence foreign policy not directly but through unit-level intervening variables (for example, state structure, leader perception, internal political dynamics).⁶⁴ In summary, neoclassical realism asserts that political elites and leaders ultimately decide foreign policy. Thus, what is decisive in these choices is not just the state's simple material power but the decisionmakers' readings of the power balance.⁶⁵

The other perspective that should be mentioned within the framework of this theory is rise and fall realism. According to this view, the functioning of the international

⁶⁰ Peter Toft, "John J. Mearsheimer: An offensive realist between geopolitics and power," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 8 (2005): 383, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jird.1800065>.

⁶¹ Jonathan Paquin, "Foreign policy analysis," in *The Sage Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Dirk Berg-Schlosser, Bertrand Badie and Leonardo Morlino, 1214-1230, (CA: Sage, 2020), 1223, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529714333.n75>.

⁶² Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1, (1998): 146, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1017/s0043887100007814>.

⁶³ Steven E. Lobell, "Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: a neoclassical realist model," in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, 42-74, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 43, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511811869>.

⁶⁴ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical realism."

⁶⁵ Randall L. Schweller, "The progressiveness of neoclassical realism," in *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field*, ed. Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, 311-348, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003), 336-337, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/5627.003.0012>.

system is shaped by the preferences of the most powerful state. Due to the advantages provided by being the leader state, other major powers desire to seize this position. In conclusion, this realist perspective analyzes the dynamics of rise and fall in the struggle for leadership among states, the impact of this process on foreign policy decisions, and especially the major wars that cause changes in leadership.⁶⁶

2.3. Liberal View and Foreign Policy

Liberalism, emerging with the Enlightenment in Europe, has become one of the most lasting and wealthy philosophical traditions still present. Very briefly, it has been a political philosophy supporting freedom, human progress, and scientific rationalism. Liberalism, which promotes individual competition within civil society, holds the view that market capitalism generates prosperity for all by managing scarce resources in the most efficient way. Liberalism, together with its several schools of thought, has had an impact on the discipline of International Relations (IR) as it has shaped many fields in the social sciences.⁶⁷

The concept of “liberalism” entered literature terminologically in the 19th century, but the origins of this system of thought were shaped during the political events in 17th century England. The English philosopher John Locke is considered the first thinker to systematize the liberal view into a political doctrine with his work *Two Treatises of Government*, published in 1689.⁶⁸ In Locke’s theory, individual rights and freedoms occupy a central position. According to this theory; the legitimacy of political power should be based on the consent of the people, the powers of the government should be limited, and the principle of religious tolerance should be adopted. This approach laid the foundation for modern constitutional democracies by offering a radical alternative to the absolute dominance of religious and monarchical

⁶⁶ Elman, “Realism,” 15.

⁶⁷ Scott Burchill, “Liberalism,” in *Theories of International Relations*, ed. Richard Devetak and Jacqui True, 36-59, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 36.

⁶⁸ Martyn P. Thompson, “Reception and Influence: A Reply to Nelson on Locke’s ‘Two Treatises of Government’,” *Political Studies* 28, no. 1, (1980): 100, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1980.tb01236.x>.

authorities.⁶⁹ In modern constitutional democracies, universal principles such as free and fair elections, equal voting rights for every individual, the equal worth of all people, and respect for fundamental rights form the basis of the state's impartial functioning.⁷⁰

Liberal concepts on international relations also appeared in the late 17th century. They were united by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant in a short essay titled *Perpetual Peace* (1795).⁷¹ From the perspective of liberal thinkers, the existence of peace is normal in the order of international relations. As Kant put it, 'perpetual peace' is indeed possible. Harmony and cooperation among peoples are inevitable due to the laws of nature. Therefore, war is an action that is not only contrary to nature but also incompatible with human reason. So, war is not actually an inevitable result of human nature.⁷²

It is an artificially constructed phenomenon. One of the fundamental assumptions of the liberal tradition is that the human condition can be continuously improved and perfected. A common view extending from Kant to today's scholars is that wars are created by militarist and undemocratic regimes for their own interests. Wars provide governments with the opportunity to increase their control over citizens, raise taxes, and expand their bureaucratic apparatus. In contrast, people are inherently peaceful. However, they are dragged into conflict by the arbitrary decisions of unrepresentative rulers.⁷³

According to Jørgensen, the liberal tradition is characterized by five primary elements. First of all, liberalism places great trust in human reason. It is believed that

⁶⁹ James L. Richardson, "Liberalism," in *An Introduction to International Relations: Australian Perspectives*, ed. Richard Devetak, Anthony Burke and Jim George, 43-53, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 44, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139168557.005>.

⁷⁰ Karol Edward Soltan, "Constitution making at the edges of constitutional order," *William & Mary Law Review* 49, no. 4, (2007): 1440.

⁷¹ James L. Richardson, "Liberalism," 44.

⁷² Susan M. McMillan, "Interdependence and conflict," *Mershon International Studies Review* 41, no. 1, (1997): 36, <https://doi.org/10.2307/222802>.

⁷³ Scott Burchill, "Liberalism," in *Theories of International Relations*, ed. Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater, 55-83, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 58-59.

by using human reason, man can reach the truth against dogmas and thus achieve liberation.⁷⁴ Secondly, the idea of historical progressivism is prominent in liberalism. Since history progresses along a linear line rather than a cycle, the constant state of conflict claimed by realists is not inevitable. Thirdly, liberalism emphasizes the linkage between the state and the individual. It argues that the regime of a state significantly influences its foreign policy, based on Kant's *Perpetual Peace*. Fourthly, liberalism draws attention to the importance of states' economic relations. There is a belief that states with strong economic ties are less likely to come into conflict with each other. Fifth and finally, in liberalism, the institutionalization of international relations plays an important role in preventing or resolving interstate conflicts. Even in the presence of international anarchy, the existence of international organizations is necessary for "perpetual peace."⁷⁵

Like realism, liberalism has also established new approaches from within. The most well-known of these is neoliberalism, that is considered a more refined version of liberalism. Neoliberalism, unlike realism, emphasizes the effectiveness of non-state actors in an anarchic system. Neoliberals, like realists, view the state as an important actor that pursues its own interests, however they argue that it is more inclined towards cooperation than conflict. Because, unlike conflict, cooperation serves the state's interests much better. In addition, liberal institutionalism, which will be discussed soon, have emerged as another variant of neoliberal thought.⁷⁶

Liberal theorists believe that war is not inevitable in international relations, grounding their arguments in the three essential mechanisms suggested by Kant: democratic peace theory, economic interdependence, and international organizations.⁷⁷ This formula, known as the "Kantian triangle," systematically

⁷⁴ Knud Erik Jørgensen, *International Relations Theory: A New Introduction*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 66.

⁷⁵ Jørgensen, *International Relations Theory*, 67-68.

⁷⁶ Diez, Bode, and da Costa, *Key Concepts*, 131-132.

⁷⁷ Bruce Russett, "Liberalism," in *International Relations Theories*, ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith, 94-113, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 101-102, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780198814443.003.0004>.

explains the structural benefits of interstate cooperation against the realist emphasis on the balance of power.⁷⁸

As a first mechanism, the democratic peace theory is rooted in Kant's idea of "perpetual peace". He argued that republican states with representative governments and divided powers are less war prone. Because citizens suffer war's costs deeply, leaders act cautiously to avoid public backlash. Democracies therefore declare war only if it is necessary, such as in self-defense. Kant believed shared institutions and mutual interests promote peace among such states.⁷⁹

Some theorists explain the democratic peace theory with two fundamental explanations. The first one is that the main characteristic of democracies is the principle of resolving political differences without applying violence. Democratic states consider this principle as much in domestic politics as in their foreign policy. The other one is that the people and capital owners, who will bear the cost of a war, avoid war against another democracy. In democracies, the possibility of war decreases according to the demands of these two forces that have an influence on governance.⁸⁰

The second mechanism, economic interdependence, is based on the criticism of mercantilism, the reason for the emergence of liberalism. Against mercantilism, which disrupted relations with other states through aggressive policies aimed at increasing exports and reducing imports, liberals like Adam Smith believed that the overall wealth level could be increased through interstate economic activities. Thus, this emerging progressive role perception has resulted in many classical liberals making free trade a fundamental belief.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Russett, "Liberalism," 106.

⁷⁹ Diez, Bode, and da Costa, *Key Concepts*, 17.

⁸⁰ Peter Sutch, and Juanita Elias, *International Relations: The Basics*, (London: Routledge, 2007), 71, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203960936>.

⁸¹ John MacMillan, "Liberal internationalism," in *International Relations Theory for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Martin Griffiths, 21-34, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 25-26, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203939031>.

Today, liberals, functionalists, and neo-functionalists who base their views on this classical perspective argue that the expansion of ties between states in one area promotes greater cooperation in other areas. Starting with economic ties, inter-state connections not only enhance mutual communication but also reduce misunderstandings and bring emerging conflicts of interest to manageable levels. As a result, these ties, established through the recognition of mutual benefits and the overlap of national interests via cooperation, serve to support peace.⁸²

The third and the last mechanism is international institutionalism, that is related to the first two mechanisms. Liberal institutionalism holds that interstate cooperation can be organized within institutional structures. In this context, “institutions” refer to the set of rules that shape state behavior in specific policy areas. Liberal theorists, while accepting the realist “anarchic system” theory, believe that even in the absence of a hegemonic power to enforce agreements (even if temporarily), interstate cooperation can be developed. This situation can soften “international anarchy” while also increasing predictability in interstate relations.⁸³

Liberal institutionalists claim that international law and treaties cannot be addressed solely with a structure composed of states. Beyond that, it needs to be supported by international organizations to create an international system. With such international organizations, mutual trust can be established between the acting states. Among these organizations, the most comprehensive one is the United Nations (UN), which is the successor of the League of Nations (LoN). The UN, while bringing together the resources of member states in the context of common goals such as worldwide counterterrorism, provides an almost uninterrupted diplomatic environment between friendly and adversary states and grants all member states a voice in the international community.⁸⁴ Nowadays, the dominant liberal understanding presents more advanced structural claims than for the international institutionalism theory.

⁸² Katherine Barbieri, “Economic interdependence: A path to peace or a source of interstate conflict?,” *Journal of Peace Research* 33, no. 1, (1996): 30-31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343396033001003>.

⁸³ Burchill, “Liberalism,” (2022), 44-45.

⁸⁴ Jeffrey W. Meiser, “Liberalism,” in *International Relations Theory*, ed. Stephen McGlinchey, Rosie Walters and Christian Scheinpflug, 22-27, (Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing, 2017), 24.

Neoliberal institutionalism addresses the relationships between state actors and non-state actors in the anarchic world system.⁸⁵

2.4. Constructivist Approach and Foreign Policy

Constructivism is an approach that emerged in the 1990s and is considered one of the fundamental theories of today's International Relations (IR) discipline. In the previous decade, the third and fourth ones of the periods of debate, known as the "great debates" in the discipline, dominated the field. The third of these was the microeconomic debate between neorealists and neoliberals, while the fourth was the methodological debate between rationalists and critical theorists. With the end of the Cold War, these debates initiated a new process where constructivists questioned the rationalist and positivist approaches of the neo-neo debate and similarly directed critical theorists towards empirical thinking.⁸⁶

After the widespread adoption of constructivism following the Cold War, discussions in the IR discipline also took a new direction. Constructivism, that derives its foundation from the critical theory but primarily focuses on empirical analysis, has attempted to answer the unexplained issues that the rational neo-neo debate could not explain. It has tried this by highlighting the communication and social aspects of humanity. It has occurred by applying the anti-positivist methods (interpretive, discursive) of the critical theory it originated from in empirical research, allowing it to move away from theoretical abstraction.⁸⁷

Simpler terms can be used to describe the idea that the present international relations order is a social construct. Building something is an action that creates a subject or object that would not exist if it were not built. Whether a constructed thing is a material entity or a thought, it is a product of human creation. This thing, once built

⁸⁵ Sutch, and Elias, *International Relations*, 72.

⁸⁶ Christian Reus-Smit, "Constructivism," in *Theories of International Relations*, ed. Richard Devetak and Jacqui True, 188-206, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 188.

⁸⁷ Reus-Smit, "Constructivism," 190.

for a purpose, gains a special meaning and use in a specific context. Similarly, human-made states, alliances, or international institutions in world politics also utilize the fundamental materials of human nature. Thus, international actors are characterized by specific historical, cultural, and political forms that are the result of human interaction in a social environment. These structures are not natural or inevitable. They are outcomes that are shaped by social processes and can evolve over time. Therefore, the constructivist approach emphasizes that the international system is not fixed and unchangeable. But it is continuously reproduced by people's actions, beliefs, and mutual expectations. For instance, fundamental concepts in international relations such as the principle of sovereignty or the legitimacy of war have undergone transformations in different societies throughout history. The constructivist approach centers on social context and systems of meaning to understand this change.⁸⁸

Constructivism, similar to Marx's view that "people make their own history, but not under circumstances of their own choosing, rather under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past," argues that the international system is continuously reproduced by the actors' past experiences. The most well-known scholar of this approach, Alexander Wendt, with his thesis "anarchy is what states make of it," clearly emphasizes that, contrary to the claims of conventional theories, international structures are not fixed, but actually they are social constructs that can be shaped and transformed by the interpretations of actors.⁸⁹

There are four reasons that explain the rise of constructivism by the 1990s. The first was the lack of "empirical analysis" in the critical theory. This situation provided constructivists with the opportunity to present new ideas. Secondly, the most well-known was the unexpected peaceful end of the Cold War. The new order not only questioned the explanatory power of the rational neo-neo debate but also encouraged

⁸⁸ Karin M. Fierke, "Constructivism," in *International Relations Theories*, ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith, 187-204, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 188-189, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780198814443.003.0009>.

⁸⁹ Martin Weber, "Constructivism and Critical Theory," in *An Introduction to International Relations: Australian Perspectives*, ed. Richard Devetak, Anthony Burke and Jim George, 96-108, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139168557.010>, 97.

critical scholars to conduct more concrete analyses. Thirdly, there was a new generation of scholars that emerged in this decade. This generation, on the one hand, reviewed old issues (such as the control of Weapons of Mass Destruction) that rational theories had failed to explain in previous decades. On the other hand, they began to examine more critical topics like the role of non-state actors. Fourth and finally, the decline of Marxism and the increasing distrust in mainstream rational theories have caused constructivism to move from a marginal position to a more central one.⁹⁰

In the discipline of IR, it is important to note that constructivism is not a theory but an approach that reconstructs general assumptions about discipline. This situation distinguishes constructivist research from international relations theories such as realism's balance of power theory or Marxism's theory of social and historical change conducted through class relations. In the broadest sense, constructivism expands the scope of inquiry in international relations by incorporating actors and factors that are often overlooked in the dominant theoretical currents of the discipline, namely realism and liberalism, and their derivatives. Constructivists, who believe that actors and factors such as international organizations, multinational corporations, think tanks, and even social movements can change the international relations order under certain conditions, differ from realist and liberal theorists who hold a restrictive view of seeing states as the sole and main actors.⁹¹

Due to this multi-actor and flexible international system perception, constructivism can be presented superficially and misleadingly by some. The source of the superficiality claim is the misconception that it is a substantive theory. The claim of deception is that it is presented as a coherent position. However, constructivism is neither a substantive IR theory nor does its origin come from this discipline. Constructivism should be understood as a broad social theory approach capable of generating various material theories about social relations.⁹²

⁹⁰ Reus-Smit, "Constructivism," 190-191.

⁹¹ Weber, "Constructivism and Critical Theory," 98.

⁹² Jørgensen, *International Relations Theory*, 171.

In summary, constructivism is a social theory approach and not a concrete theory of international relations. Social theories, on the other hand, are concerned with how the relationship between actors and structures should be conceptualized. In the discipline of IR, constructivism questions how the relationship between states and the structure of international politics should be conceived. Concrete theories, on the other hand, present specific claims and hypotheses about patterns in world politics. In the case of liberalism, for example, they ask the question of why democratic states tend not to go to war with each other.⁹³

At this point, it is necessary to address the similarities and differences between constructivism and these concrete theories. Like realists, conventional constructivists also see states as the main actors in the international system. However, what is most important for constructivism is the interaction of states within this system with other actors. Because, the actors in the international system are influenced and changed by their environment. This situation results in various socially constructed factors, such as social norms and identities, or the attitudes and beliefs of decisionmakers, determining the behavior of states. Likewise, while the primary focus in constructivism is the state, similar to the liberal perspective, the internal aspects of the state are also examined, in addition to the structural analysis level. At the individual or social level, it suggests that events occurring within the state shape the actions of the state, directly. Therefore, as the interests or values of internal groups within the state change, the state's behavior will also change. In this regard, with the rise to power of a new leader with a different worldview, a state's behavior can significantly change.⁹⁴

Despite these similarities, unlike realism and liberalism, constructivism is not clearly tied to a specific philosophical tradition although its foundation is from the critical theory. According to some scholars, this situation prevents constructivism from

⁹³ Michael Barnett, "Social constructivism," in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, ed. John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, 194-212, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 197, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780192898142.003.0013>.

⁹⁴ Joyce P. Kaufman, *Introduction to International Relations: Theory and Practice*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 65.

having an internal consistency like realism, liberalism, or Marxism has.⁹⁵ In addition, the different perspectives of constructivism on the progressive social change and human nature set it distinct from realism and liberalism.⁹⁶

Some scholars like Jørgensen argue that constructivism can produce various material theories on the issues of the IR discipline. He sees the way to this in making comparisons between constructivism and existing material theories. For example, in terms of power and identity, realism and constructivism can work together effectively and complement each other within a single analytical framework. Or, Wendt's theory of international cooperation could be a constructivist liberal theory in terms of international cooperation. Or, Manning's theory of international society can be seen as a constructivist theory of international society.⁹⁷

In this regard, it can be said that constructivism can propose a new perspective in the IR discipline by surpassing materialist and rationalist approaches and centering social, historical, and normative analysis. Constructivism, unlike power-centric approaches, has created a new sociological sensitivity within the discipline by emphasizing the role of shared ideas, identities, and social practices in shaping international politics. At the same time, with its emphasis on historical specificity, it has questioned traditional universalist claims and enabled the discipline to reconnect with history. Its contribution to normative theory has been concretized with the concept of "empirical idealism." That is, by empirically demonstrating the transformative power of ideas and values, he tried to overcome the artificial distinction between idealism and realism.⁹⁸

Constructivism, developed on a modernist foundation to study international relations, aims to combine the processes of explaining and understanding. This approach

⁹⁵ Martha Finnemore, and Kathryn Sikkink, "Taking stock: the constructivist research program in international relations and comparative politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4, no. 1, (2001): 393, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.4.1.391>.

⁹⁶ Andrew Bradley Phillips, "Constructivism," in *International Relations Theory for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Martin Griffiths, 70-84, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 70, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203939031>.

⁹⁷ Jørgensen, *International Relations Theory*, 172.

⁹⁸ Reus-Smit, "Constructivism," 196-197.

argues that the activities of science and interpretation are not actually radically distinct from each other. Both methods require careful descriptions, deep understanding of phenomena, asking qualitative questions, generating testable hypotheses based on general theories, and collecting data to evaluate these hypotheses. Constructivism, thanks to this methodological flexibility, can be a useful approach in the study of international relations.⁹⁹

This flexibility makes constructivism “middle ground” between rationalist and poststructuralist approaches in the IR discipline.¹⁰⁰ Constructivism initially emerged as a post-positivist critique of the mainstream theories in the discipline, but over time, a distinction began to be made between “conventional” constructivism, which is said to represent a “middle path,” and critical variants of constructivism. “Conventional” constructivists have not explicitly opposed the assumptions of positivist science in the way that postpositivist approaches have rejected them. Because their debates with rationalists are ontological in nature, not epistemological.¹⁰¹

It is also worth briefly mentioning the diversification within the constructivism approach. According to Ruggie, it is possible to divide constructivism into three: neoclassical, postmodernist, and naturalistic. He states that neoclassical constructivism developed by adhering to the traditional roots of constructivism. He calls the first neoclassical constructivism, not just to strive for parity with the two mainstream “neo(s)” but to indicate that it remains rooted in the classical tradition. In this group, He puts himself together with other scholars such as Peter Haas, Friedrich Kratochwil, Emanuel Adler, Martha Finnemore, Peter Katzenstein and Nicholas Onuf who brought constructivism to the discipline.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Emanuel Adler, “Seizing the middle ground: Constructivism in world politics,” *European Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 3, (1997): 334, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066197003003003>.

¹⁰⁰ Weber, *International Relations Theory*, 81-82.

¹⁰¹ Fierke, “Constructivism,” 193.

¹⁰² John Gerard Ruggie, “What makes the world hang together? Neo-utilitarianism and the social constructivist challenge,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4, (1998): 880-881, <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081898550770>.

The intellectual roots of postmodernist constructivism, considered the second type, are based on Friedrich Nietzsche. With the works of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, it has been a reflection of a sharp epistemological break from modernism. The first person to bring this genre into the discipline was Richard Ashley. David Campbell, James Der Derian, and R. B. J. Walker are other scholars in this group. The third and final type is called naturalistic constructivism. This approach combines the assumptions of both types. Naturalistic constructivism, like the first type, shares some common features with mainstream theories, while similarly to the second type, it draws its philosophical foundation from the scientific realism doctrine that Roy Bhaskar worked on. Scholars like Alexander Wendt and David Dessler belong to this group.¹⁰³

Constructivism, while being a broad social theoretical approach that encompasses various perspectives, can be summarized as follows. First of all, one of the most important issues addressed in constructivism is the relationship between agent and structure. This issue has been addressed differently by various theories and approaches within the IR discipline, and constructivism has approached this issue in its own unique way. For example, approaches like cognitive and psychological approaches focus on domestic actors as the effective power in determining world politics,¹⁰⁴ while theories like neorealism claim that the worldwide structure determines the foreign policies of states.¹⁰⁵

According to constructivism, agent and structure are jointly formed.¹⁰⁶ Alexander Wendt emphasizes that these two levels cannot be separated from each other. At the same time, both shape each other over time. In this context, just as actors construct the structure while being in a relationship, the structure also affects the actors.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Ruggie, "What makes the world hang together?," 881-882.

¹⁰⁴ Walter Carlsnaes, "Actors, structures, and foreign policy analysis," in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, ed. Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, and Tim Dunne, 113-129, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 122, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780198708902.003.0006>.

¹⁰⁵ Carlsnaes, "Actors, structures, and foreign policy analysis," 119.

¹⁰⁶ Diez, Bode, and da Costa, *Key Concepts*, 210.

¹⁰⁷ Alexander E. Wendt, "The agent-structure problem in international relations theory," *International Organization* 41, no. 3, (1987): 338-339, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081830002751X>.

Agency can be understood as state's ability to take action, while structure refers to the international system composed of material and ideational elements. To give an example, Wendt states in his article that the 500 nuclear weapons belonging to the United Kingdom (UK) pose less of a threat to the United States (US) than the 5 nuclear weapons belonging to North Korea, because the UK is an ally of the US while North Korea is not.¹⁰⁸

This difference can be explained not by military or economic power balance, but by historically constructed identity perceptions, norms of friendship-enmity, and ideological attitudes.¹⁰⁹ This situation means that the social relationship of enmity between the US and North Korea reflects the intersubjective structure representing the shared ideas and beliefs between the two states. The US and North Korea are actors with the capacity, or agency, to change or strengthen the existing structure of enmity or social relationship. The change or strengthening of this social relationship ultimately depends on the beliefs and ideas held by both states. If these beliefs and ideas change, the social relationship can turn into friendship.¹¹⁰

However, although constructivism sees human interaction as important in determining norms, ideas, and identities, it is fundamentally considered a structuralist approach.¹¹¹ So, of course, while constructivists certainly acknowledge that the international system is perceived as anarchic, as Wendt also said, they argue that this situation arises from the meaning that states attribute to it.¹¹²

Thus, secondly, the issue of anarchy, which is another topic addressed by constructivism, can be mentioned. Yes, according to constructivism, current states

¹⁰⁸ Alexander E. Wendt, "Constructing international politics," *International Security* 20, no. 1, (1995): 73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539217>.

¹⁰⁹ Reus-Smit, "Constructivism," 191.

¹¹⁰ Sarina Theys, "Constructivism," in *International Relations Theory*, ed. Stephen McGlinchey, Rosie Walters and Christian Scheinflug, 36-41, (Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing, 2017), 36-37.

¹¹¹ Carlsnaes, "Actors, structures, and foreign policy analysis," 121-122.

¹¹² Alexander E. Wendt, "Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2, (1992): 391, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300027764>.

exist in an international structure characterized by anarchy because there is no higher authority above them. However, constructivists believe that states can shape this anarchy. So, unlike positivist theorists, constructivists argue that anarchy does not have to be in one specific form. Anarchy, which can take different forms, does not always have to foster conflict and tension. Ultimately, like everything else, the international system is also a social structure.¹¹³

For instance, according to Wendt, based on the roles that states possess (friend, rival, and enemy), there are at least three macro-level types of anarchy. Inspired by Martin Wight and the English School, Wendt called these structures Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian.¹¹⁴ In Hobbesian anarchy, inspired by Thomas Hobbes, states determine their interests from a self-centered perspective and perceive each other as enemies.¹¹⁵ In Lockean anarchy, named after John Locke, rival states can cooperate despite the absence of a higher authority.¹¹⁶ In Kantian anarchy, named after Immanuel Kant, states have common interests and therefore develop friendly relations with each other.¹¹⁷

According to Wendt, who holds optimistic views, although Hobbesian anarchy has been existed for most of history, a transition to Lockean anarchy occurred in later periods, especially among European states. With the new millennium, the international system has begun to transition to Kantian anarchy. In Kantian anarchy, the structure of the international system will not cause any problems.¹¹⁸ Wendt has shown this optimistic stance in his later article “Why a world state is inevitable.” According to him, due to technological developments, the military potential of states

¹¹³ Trine Flockhart, “Constructivism and foreign policy,” in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, ed. Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield and Tim Dunne, 79-94, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 82, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780198708902.003.0004>.

¹¹⁴ Alexander E. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 247.

¹¹⁵ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 259.

¹¹⁶ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 279.

¹¹⁷ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 297.

¹¹⁸ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 314.

will reach unimaginable levels, and a world state will inevitably come into being sooner or later.¹¹⁹

Thirdly, constructivism addresses the issue of identity. The concepts of identity and culture are almost completely disregarded in neorealism and neoliberalism, while for constructivism, identities are important factors in understanding politics. Similarly, interests should also be understood in relation to these factors. Despite focusing on culture, identities, institutions, and norms, social constructivists do not deny the importance of interests. However, in constructivism, interests are not seen as the primary explanatory variable. They argue that interests cannot be treated as independent variables. Instead, the processes of their formation should be examined.¹²⁰

In the matter of identity, constructivists argue that states can possess multiple identities that are socially constructed through interactions with other actors. Identities are representations of how an actor defines themselves, and its interests are determined accordingly. Identities are important for constructivists because they argue that identities shape interests and actions. For instance, the interests implied by the identity of a small state [like Azerbaijan] are not the same as the interests implied by the identity of a large state. While the primary priority of a small state is survival, a large state does not have such a concern. The great power is concerned with worldwide political dominance. That is, a state's actions are consistent with its identity.¹²¹

Fourthly, constructivism also places norms and rules at the center, just like identities. Norms can be defined as standards of appropriate behavior for actors with a specific identity. It is expected that states adhere to norms that are consistent with the identity they adopt. This situation refers to a process called "the logic of appropriateness."

¹¹⁹ Alexander E. Wendt, "Why a world state is inevitable," *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 4, (2003): 491, <https://doi.org/10.1177/135406610394001>.

¹²⁰ Diez, Bode, and da Costa, *Key Concepts*, 212.

¹²¹ Theys, "Constructivism," 37.

With this logic, actors exhibit certain behaviors simply because they believe it is appropriate.¹²² According to Finnemore and Sikkink, norms are generally examined in three basic categories. The first category is regulative norms, which constrain behavior. The second category is constitutive norms, which create new actors or spheres of action. The third is prescriptive norms, which mandate specific behaviors.¹²³ Regulative norms are simply norms that set rules and impose limitations. The trade rules introduced by the World Trade Organization (WTO) can be shown as an example of this. As examples of constitutive norms, norms related to sovereignty can be given. Norms related to sovereignty not only determine the practices of states. At the same time, it directly affects the statuses of states, shaping their identities as well.¹²⁴

In addition to norms, another topic emphasized by constructivists is rules. According to Nicholas Onuf, all social relations in general, and international relations in particular, are shaped by rules.¹²⁵ As with norms, again according to Onuf, rules are classified into three basic categories: instruction rules, directive rules, and commitment rules. Each of these three categories is associated with a specific set of words and rules.¹²⁶

Kratochwil also states that human behavior is determined by rules. Except for reflexes and conditioning, human action occurs through norms shaped by tradition and rules. Therefore, those observing the actions must also understand the normative background underlying those actions.¹²⁷ In international relations, some of these

¹²² Theys, "Constructivism," 38.

¹²³ Martha Finnemore, and Kathryn Sikkink, "International norm dynamics and political change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4, (1998): 891, <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081898550789>.

¹²⁴ Michael Barnett, "Social constructivism," in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, ed. John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, 155-168, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 159.

¹²⁵ Nicholas G. Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*, (London: Routledge, 2012), 173, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203722428>.

¹²⁶ Onuf, *World of Our Making*, 184.

¹²⁷ Friedrich V. Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 11, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511559044>.

rules are written and formal, like those in international law, while others can be unwritten and informal. According to Onuf, in international relations, peoples (a.k.a. agents) generally prefer to act according to rules because rules facilitate their achievement of goals.¹²⁸

2.5. IR Theories and Foreign Policy of Azerbaijan

Realism, liberalism, and constructivism, which are considered as the core theoretical approaches of the International Relations (IR) discipline and detailed in previous sections, offer unique analytical methods for understanding Azerbaijan's regional and worldwide policies. These approaches offer new perspectives in evaluating the dynamics that shape its foreign policy decisions. Shortly, all three theoretical approaches have been used in different works to analyze Azerbaijan's foreign policy.

Realism is used to analyze Azerbaijan's foreign policy, and this using is based on its doctrine of "balanced foreign policy" (balanslaşdırılmış xarici siyasəti). The foundations of this realist foreign policy are associated with the more cautious foreign policy undertaken by former president Heydar Aliyev when he returned to power at the end of 1993. The new foreign policy, seen as informal realism, began with the denial of the Pan-Turkic agenda during the late President Abulfaz Elchibey's and his Popular Front's period. This agenda, which centered on Ankara and garnered the enmity of the two major neighbors, Moscow and Tehran, ended with a change in administration due to domestic instability and the defeat in Karabakh. Heydar Aliyev's efforts to maintain the state's autonomy and improve relations with the three major geopolitical powers (US, Russia, and Iran) despite their hostile attitudes have been seen as an informal realist policy. Plus, with the initiation of the "one nation, two states" policy alongside Türkiye, it has been emphasized that Azerbaijan is also a distinct actor with its own interests.¹²⁹ In addition to these,

¹²⁸ Nicholas G. Onuf, *Making Sense, Making Worlds: Constructivism in Social Theory and International Relations*. (London: Routledge, 2013), 4-5, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203096710>.

¹²⁹ Jason E. Strakes, "Situating the 'Balanced Foreign Policy': The role of system structure in Azerbaijan's multi-vector diplomacy," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 15, no. 1, (2013): 37-38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2013.766085>.

Azerbaijan's "balanced foreign policy," which has continued during the Ilham Aliyev period, has shown compatibility with multi-vectorism, a "realist rational state behavior model" driven by self-interest and self-preservation.¹³⁰ If we consider it in a narrower sense, unlike the conventional neorealist approaches of balancing and bandwagoning, Azerbaijan's relationship with Russia is also explained by another rational realist approach: strategic hedging. During the presidency of the first president, Ayaz Mutalibov, Azerbaijan engaged in bandwagoning with Moscow. But under the second president, Abulfaz Elchibey, it attempted to balance Russia, yet due to its small size and weakness, it could not achieve stability. With Heydar Aliyev's middle ground position between pragmatic balancing and bandwagoning, Azerbaijan became more independent from Russia while also avoiding actions that would provoke it.¹³¹ Similarly, Azerbaijan's relations with Iran and Israel have also been examined from a neorealist perspective. According to Asgarov, Azerbaijan's defense cooperation with Israel to balance Iran's regional influence and enhance its military capacity against Armenia has been interpreted as a neorealist strategy.¹³²

Ultimately, it is believed that a small-sized state located in a challenging geography like Azerbaijan should pursue a balanced and rational foreign policy. As to Chiragov, it is possible to base the foundation of this strategy on four fundamental principles. Firstly, Azerbaijan's cooperation with one state aims not to pose a threat to another state, especially its neighbor ones. Secondly, efforts have been made to avoid the state's territory becoming a battleground for great powers. Thirdly, efforts were made to prevent external powers from using Azerbaijan as a strategic base. Finally, the principle of neutrality has been applied to the political preferences of neighbors as long as they do not interfere with Azerbaijan's national interests.¹³³

¹³⁰ Strakes, "Situating the 'Balanced Foreign Policy,'" 47-49.

¹³¹ Anar Valiyev, and Narmina Mamishova, "Azerbaijan's foreign policy towards Russia since independence: compromise achieved," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 19, no. 2, (2019): 270-271, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2019.1578053>.

¹³² Sirius Asgarov, "Navigating Geopolitical Alliances: Understanding Azerbaijan's Relationship with Israel over Iran," *Journal for Interdisciplinary Middle Eastern Studies* 10, no. 1, (2024): 86-87, <https://doi.org/10.26351/JIMES/10-1/3>.

¹³³ Fuad Chiragov, "Azerbaijan's foreign policy: Navigating regional security in a fragmented world," *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development* 25, (2024): 152.

Although Azerbaijan's foreign policy is generally approached from a realist perspective, there is an opinion that some policies are implemented in accordance with the liberal view. As mentioned in the section above, the liberal perspective emphasizes the importance of international institutions. As Asgarov mentioned, Azerbaijan's collaborations with international institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) demonstrate that it has not closed the doors to the intended liberal global system. These collaborations, which have materialized, focus on energy and economy with the EU, while the aim with NATO has been to strengthen defense capabilities.¹³⁴

Similarly, as Traub, Cohen, and Kertcher wrote, there is an opinion that Azerbaijan's transition to a knowledge-based economy (KBE) model since 2011 has led it to adopt neoliberal policies, resulting in a fundamental transformation in its foreign policy. The innovation, education, and technological investments required by the KBE have driven Azerbaijan to collaborate with developed economies like Israel. In this process, Azerbaijan has pursued a dual foreign policy strategy. On one hand, while receiving military support from Israel due to realist security concerns, on the other hand, it has established technology transfers and academic partnerships in line with neoliberal welfare goals.¹³⁵

Furthermore, the constructivist approach has also been used as an analytical method in works about Azerbaijan's foreign policy. According to Simons and Chifu, the resolution of the Karabakh issue, which occupied the state's foreign policy for many years, it is considered significant that actions were taken in accordance with this approach. Azerbaijan did this by showing the war in the 44-Day War to the international community as a legitimate struggle for liberation. In this policy, where Armenia is identified as the aggressor and Azerbaijan as the victim, it is stated that

¹³⁴ Asgar Asgarov, "Enhancing the geopolitical standing of the Republic of Azerbaijan: Insights from contemporary geopolitical theories," *Baltic Journal of Legal and Social Sciences* 4 (2024): 257-258, <https://doi.org/10.30525/2592-8813-2024-4-26>.

¹³⁵ Daniela Traub, Ronen A. Cohen, and Chen Kertcher, "Azerbaijan's dual foreign policy strategy toward Israel: a realist alliance and a neoliberal knowledge-based economy cooperation, 2011–2022," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 11, no. 1, (2024): 6-7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2335763>.

the history of the conflict goes back long before the massacre of Azerbaijanis in Khojaly.¹³⁶ Moreover, Azerbaijan has established legitimacy by highlighting the norms and rules of international law. By referencing the resolutions passed by the UN Security Council (SC) in 1993 (№ 822, № 853, № 874, № 884), it has presented its military operation as a form of self-defense and counterterrorism.¹³⁷

Finally, it should be added that according to the constructivism approach, the cause of a conflict is the confrontation of different identities. Since a state's foreign policy is shaped by identity, the reason for the conflict arising from this foreign policy is also identity-based. As Okhanashvili, just as the Karabakh issue, which determined Azerbaijan's foreign policy for many years, was resolved through constructivist methods, the source of this issue was also the identity emphasized by constructivists.¹³⁸

2.6. Theoretical Framework of Thesis

Constructivism is an approach that focuses on identities, norms, and social constructions rather than material elements in international relations. Therefore, it offers an ideal perspective for understanding Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors. This approach can be beneficial in analyzing a region like the South Caucasus, which is located on historical trade and pilgrimage routes, possesses multiple ethnic and religious identities, and is a focal point of interest for many major powers.

Normativity holds an important position in Azerbaijan's foreign policy discourse and actions. The constant emphasis on international law and UN SC resolutions in the Karabakh issue has reflected Azerbaijan's desire to resolve this problem through

¹³⁶ Greg Simons, and Iulian Chifu, "Realist and constructivist interpretations and representations of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War: As an event and as a process," *Journalism and Media* 6, no. 1, (2025): 8, <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia6010021>.

¹³⁷ Simons, and Chifu, "Realist and constructivist interpretations," 9.

¹³⁸ Nino Okhanashvili, "Causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the perspective of constructivism," *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)* 7, no. 4, (2018): 1264, <https://doi.org/10.21275/ART20181792>.

peaceful means. The increasing emphasis on the norm of sovereignty in recent years¹³⁹ is seen as a measure being taken against both Russia's desire to intervene in the region and Iran's attempts to interfere in internal affairs.

Another point is that historical narratives and collective memory play a decisive role in Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors. Primarily the Khojaly massacre, the place of the genocide faced by the Azerbaijani people in the last century in the national memory has become a reference point in relations with Armenia. Plus, the deportations and famines experienced during the Soviet period resulted in a more cautious approach towards Moscow. Historical references like these have shaped foreign policy and have also been used in domestic politics to establish legitimacy for ensuring stability.¹⁴⁰

From these points, it may be said that constructivism will be a useful approach in understanding Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors. Especially emphasizing the role of identity in shaping foreign policy will clarify the discourse and actions in Azerbaijan's foreign policy that cannot be explained by material elements well. Because of this, the development of Azerbaijani identity and Azerbaijanism will be detailed in the next section.

2.7. Azerbaijani Identity and Azerbaijanism

The most crucial key elements shaping the foreign policy of Azerbaijan, the largest political power in the South Caucasus, is the state's multi-layered identity structure. Azerbaijani identity as part of the Turkic world¹⁴¹ supports the *one nation, two states* motto developed with Türkiye, while the ethno-cultural ties with the Azerbaijani

¹³⁹ "Azərbaycan Respublikasında Dövlət Suverenliyi Gününün təsis edilməsi haqqında Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin Sərəncamı," *President.az*, September 19, 2024, <https://president.az/az/articles/view/66855>.

¹⁴⁰ Anar Valiyev, Ahmad Alili, and Fidan Namazova, "Azerbaijan Amid the Ukrainian crisis: Perceptions, implications and expectations," *Caucasus Analytical Digest* 130 (2022): 17. <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000579582>.

¹⁴¹ Babajide G. Iloba, "The multiple identities of Azerbaijan," *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 14, no. 2, (2011): 78.

(Turk) population in Iran and Georgia have created a complex relationship dynamic. In addition to these, Azerbaijanis who have lived in Armenia for centuries and have acquired their homeland have also constituted a different dimension of this complex relationship dynamic. While there is a significant Azerbaijani population in Dagestan, which is under Russia's control, it is primarily the Azerbaijani immigrants in and around Moscow who have played a role in shaping bilateral relations. This multi-layered identity structure led Azerbaijan to pursue different and sometimes seemingly contradictory strategies in its relations with neighboring states. In this regard, to use constructivism to understand and analyze Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors, it is necessary to make a brief evaluation of Azerbaijani identity and Azerbaijanism.

The Azerbaijani identity is complex due to their unique characteristics, including Shi'ism, Turkic heritage, Russian-style education, and other historical elements. These elements contribute to their uniqueness and make Azerbaijanis a distinct people with specific religious, language, and cultural backgrounds. Understanding these elements is crucial for establishing their identity.¹⁴² Azerbaijan's identity has formed through a historical process and is based on factors such as language, culture, geography, and religion.¹⁴³ During the Soviet period, this identity, officially traced back to the ancient Caucasian Albania,¹⁴⁴ was formed in its current ethnic and cultural foundation by the semi-nomadic Oghuz Turkic tribes from Turkistan who settled in the territories of Azerbaijan in the 11th century.¹⁴⁵

The Azerbaijani identity was not a widely embraced identity until the late 19th century. Until that time, the Oghuz Turks in the region were referred to as Tatar, Ajami, Iranian, or simply Turkoman. As a result of historical developments that will

¹⁴² Alberto Priego Moreno, "The creation of the Azerbaijani identity and its influence on foreign policy," *Revista UNISCI* 8 (2005): 1-2.

¹⁴³ Javid Huseynov, "Azerbaijani national identity: Historical and contemporary context," *Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN) Conference*, (2010): 2-3.

¹⁴⁴ Nora Dudwick, "The case of the Caucasian Albanians: Ethnohistory and ethnic politics," *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique* (1990): 381.

¹⁴⁵ Gulnara Habyzhanova, and Aknur O. Koshymova. "Influence of medieval Oghuz tribes on formation of Azerbaijan people." *Хабаршы: Тарих сериясы* 2, no. 93, (2019): 78-81.

be detailed in the next chapter, the modern Azerbaijani identity emerged in the first quarter of the 20th century.¹⁴⁶ However, if we are talking about the formation of modern Azerbaijani identity, it is necessary to touch upon some historical milestones as well.

The first of these milestones was the Gulistan and Turkmenchay Treaties. At the beginning of the 19th century, as a consequence of the wars fought on both banks of the Aras River between the Russian Empire and the Qajar Empire, Azerbaijani territories were split in two.¹⁴⁷ After the first campaign that the Qajars were defeated, leading to the signing of the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813, the eastern half of South Caucasus came under Russian control. After the Qajar defeat in the second war that began in 1825, the Treaty of Turkmenchay was signed in 1828, and all the territories of Azerbaijan north of the Aras came under the control of the Russian Empire. The new border, largely determined along the Aras River, placed the Azerbaijanis under the control of two separate regimes, and these treaties came to symbolize the split of the Azerbaijani people in the eyes of the Azerbaijanis.¹⁴⁸

The second milestone was the three consecutive revolutions that occurred in the three big empires that would become Azerbaijan's neighbors in the future: Russian Revolution in 1905, the Iranian Constitutional Revolution in 1906, and the Young Turk Revolution in 1908.¹⁴⁹ The Russian Revolution, which grew with events such as worker strikes and peasant uprisings in 1905, was quelled the following year with the establishment of the parliament (Duma) and the implementation of elections. However, during this revolution, ethnic conflicts had occurred between the Azerbaijanis, known as the Caucasian Tatars, and the Armenians.¹⁵⁰ Another event that awakened Azerbaijan's national consciousness was the revolution in Iran under

¹⁴⁶ Brenda Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002), 15-16.

¹⁴⁷ Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Müslüman Cemaatten Ulusal Kimliğe: Rus Azerbaycanı (1905-1920)*, (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 1988), 25-26.

¹⁴⁸ Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, 22.

¹⁴⁹ Harun Yilmaz, "The Soviet Union and the construction of Azerbaijani national identity in the 1930s," *Iranian Studies* 46, no. 4, (2013): 514, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2013.784521>.

¹⁵⁰ Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37-39.

the Qajar dynasty in 1906. In the revolution, which had a nationalist character, demands for democracy and justice were at the forefront. As a result of the revolution, a constitution was declared, albeit for a short period, and a parliament (Majlis) was established.¹⁵¹ With the third revolution, the Young Turk Revolution in 1908,¹⁵² the Turkists who came to power in the Ottoman Empire caused the strengthening of Turkic national consciousness in Azerbaijan.¹⁵³

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Turkic identity consciousness in Azerbaijan gained momentum with the 1908 Revolution in the Ottoman Empire, but its roots lie in the struggle initiated by Crimean Turk Ismail Gaspirali with the motto *Unity in language, thought, and action!*.¹⁵⁴ Turkism, which took root in Istanbul with the work *Three Types of Policy* (Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset) by Kazanian Turk Yusuf Akchura,¹⁵⁵ spread to Azerbaijan with Azerbaijani Turks Ahmed Agaoglu and Ali bey Huseynzade, who were in Istanbul at that time. They played key roles in the affirmation of Turkism in the public and political life of early 20th century Azerbaijan.¹⁵⁶ Especially, Turkism, shaped by Ali bey Huseynzade's slogan *Turkify, Islamize, Europeanize* (Türkləşmək, İslamlaşmaq, Avropalaşmaq),¹⁵⁷ formed the ideological foundation of both democratic republics established in Azerbaijan in the 20th century under the leadership of Mahammad Amin Rasulzade.¹⁵⁸ This slogan was

¹⁵¹ Parviz Daneshvar, *Revolution in Iran*, (London: Macmillan, 1996), 5, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-14062-6>.

¹⁵² James H. Meyer, *Turks Across Empires: Marketing Muslim Identity in the Russian-Ottoman Borderlands, 1856-1914*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

¹⁵³ Yilmaz, "The Soviet Union," 514.

¹⁵⁴ Etibar Najafov, "The Role of Ismail Gaspirali, Ali Bey Huseynzadeh and Yusif Akchura in the Formation of Political Panturkism," *Din Araşdırmaları Jurnalı* 3, no. 5, (2020): 147.

¹⁵⁵ Erik-Jan Zürcher, "Ottoman sources of Kemalist thought," in *Late Ottoman Society*, ed. by Elisabeth Özdalga, 14-27, (London: Routledge, 2013), 19, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203481387>.

¹⁵⁶ Aydın Balayev, *Mamed Emin Rasulzadeh and the Establishment of the Azerbaijani State and Nation in the Early Twentieth Century*, (Bakı: "Jeko Print" çap evi, 2020), 10.

¹⁵⁷ Sevda Sulaymanova, "M. A. Rasulzadeh in search for national identity: Development of the national ideology from Turkism to Azerbaijanism," *Journal of Historical Studies* 2, no. 1, (2024): 6, <http://dx.doi.org/10.54414/AJYU5474>.

¹⁵⁸ Selma Akyıldız, *Reflections of Nationalism and the Role of Language Policies in National Identity Formation in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*, (MA thesis, Middle East Technical University [Türkiye], 2019), 35-36.

later adopted by Ziya Gökalp, the most important figure of Turkism in Türkiye,¹⁵⁹ in his work *The Principles of Turkism*, and it also had a significant impact on the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye.¹⁶⁰

Following the invasion of Azerbaijan by the Bolsheviks in 1920, the Soviet regime, [like in other Turkic lands,] began to pursue a mandatory Russification policy in Azerbaijan. They did this both to sever Azerbaijan's ties with its past and to integrate it into the Soviet system.¹⁶¹ This Russification policy initially started with an anti-Islam tendency, such as the banning of the Quran and the destruction of mosques. But over time, national traditions, national outfits, musical instruments, and national art were also targeted by this policy.¹⁶²

The reason for the transition from the Arabic alphabet to the Latin alphabet in 1924¹⁶³ was to cut Azerbaijan's ties with the newly established anti-Bolshevik Republic of Türkiye. However, after Türkiye also adopting the Latin alphabet in 1928, the Cyrillic alphabet was introduced in Azerbaijan starting from 1937.¹⁶⁴ At the same time, the official language¹⁶⁵ and identity were changed from *Turkic* to *Azerbaijani* to eliminate the pan-Turkic root in Azerbaijan's identity.¹⁶⁶ The main reason here was that Turkicness in the Azerbaijan's identity was seen as a danger.

¹⁵⁹ Alp Eren Topal, "Against influence: Ziya Gökalp in context and tradition," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 28, no. 3, (2017): 284, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etw059>.

¹⁶⁰ Svante E. Cornell, *The Politicization of Islam in Azerbaijan*, Silk Road Studies Program, (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2006), 19.

¹⁶¹ Narmin Guliyeva, *The Evolution of National Identity and Nationalism in Azerbaijan (1900-2018)*, (PhD thesis, Middle East Technical University [Türkiye], 2022), 85.

¹⁶² Guliyeva, *The Evolution of National Identity*, 89.

¹⁶³ Audrey Altstadt, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1920-40*, (London: Routledge, 2016), 69-70.

¹⁶⁴ Audrey L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2013), 124.

¹⁶⁵ Tadeusz Swietochowski, "Islam and the Growth of National Identity in Soviet Azerbaijan," in *Muslim Communities Reemerge: Historical Perspectives on Nationality, Politics, And Opposition in the Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia*, ed. Edward Allworth, 46-60, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 54.

¹⁶⁶ Lenore A. Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union*, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 123-125.

With the onset of World War II, Joseph Stalin somewhat had softened his Russification policy to persuade non-Russian peoples to fight on the front lines. Primarily, it was during the period of Nikita Khrushchev, who came to power after Stalin's death, that the Azerbaijani identity without the essence of Turkism could be able to be promoted.^{167 168}

However, the official expression of Azerbaijani identity was started during the Leonid Brezhnev era, that began in 1964. One of the main reasons for this development was that, by the end of the 1960s, Heydar Aliyev had risen to significant positions in Azerbaijan. Appointed as Chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB in 1967, Aliyev had brought Azerbaijani individuals to key positions despite the anti-nationalist regime's policies.¹⁶⁹

In 1969, with his appointment as the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev had made efforts to promote Azerbaijani interests despite the limitations of the Soviet regime. In addition to economic policies such as preventing Azerbaijanis from leaving the country in search of work, he also brought the remains of nationalist writer Huseyn Javid, who was accused of being a Pan-Turkist and was killed in 1937 in a Siberian labor camp during Stalin's purges, to Azerbaijan for burial.¹⁷⁰

Heydar Aliyev, as soon as he took office in 1969, showed to the public that the Azerbaijani language, its history, and its values would be preserved by delivering a speech in his native language at the 50th anniversary of Baku State University. Under his leadership in the next two decades, a series of state-level initiatives were launched to promote the Azerbaijani language.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Guliyeva, *The Evolution of National Identity*, 98-99.

¹⁶⁸ Jamil Hasanli, *Khrushchev's Thaw and National Identity in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1954–1959*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 9-10.

¹⁶⁹ Seljan Misirzade, *The Shaping of the Azerbaijani National Identity under the Russian and Soviet Sovereignty*, (BA thesis, Charles University [Czechia], 2025), x).

¹⁷⁰ Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren*, 67.

¹⁷¹ Fatma Ganiyeva, "Heydar Aliyev's language policy and the phenomenon of identity," *Kültür Araştırmaları Dergisi* 21, (2024): 189.

Similarly, during the same period, a group of university students led by Abulfaz Aliyev (Elchibey) aimed to engage in secret political organization for the goal of Azerbaijan's independence. One of them (Malik Rustam oğlu Mahmudov) wrote an organizational program based on the Musavat memorandum he obtained during his short-term education in Baghdad. The initial readers and developers of this organizational program, *Əbülfəz Qədirqulu oğlu Əliyev* [Elchibey], *Rafiq İsmayıl oğlu İsmayilov*, *Alim İmran oğlu Hasayev*, and *Abbas Məmmədağa oğlu Musayev*, formed the core cadre of this organization.¹⁷² This group had been in contact with more than 200 people between 1965 and 1975 who might be aligned with their program. Especially, between 1970 and 1975, they had established close relationships with an amount of intellectuals and scholars without mentioning the organization. Among these were important figures such as *Bəxtiyar Vahabzadə*, *Xudu Məmmədov*, *Ziya Bünyadov*, and *Nurəddin Rzaev*. The goal of students in the organization was for these figures to guide them. But owing to the regime's pressure, this did not happen, and Elchibey was arrested in 1975.¹⁷³

Until the "openness" (*glasnost* [гласность]) policy announced by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, Azerbaijani identity had been cautiously gathering strength, but with the developments in the last years of the Union, it had become unstoppable. This national consciousness, that had played an important role in the achievement of independence in 1991, has gone through different stages from that day to the present. During the Soviet period, the theses of Heydar Aliyev and Abulfaz Elchibey, who fought on different paths for Azerbaijani identity, became two "separate" ideologies of Azerbaijan's official identity after independence.¹⁷⁴

These two ideologies, coined as *Azərbaycançılıq* (Azerbaijanism) and *Türkçülük* (Turkism), have formed paths that characterize post-Soviet Azerbaijan's socio-cultural identity and shape its foreign policy. The importance of these two

¹⁷² Əbülfəz Elçibəy, *Bütöv Azərbaycan Yolunda*, (Bakı: "Nurlar" nəşriyyat-poliqrafiya mərkəzi, 2004), 148.

¹⁷³ Elçibəy, *Bütöv Azərbaycan Yolunda*, 151-152.

¹⁷⁴ Mehran Kamrava, "State-building in Azerbaijan: The search for consolidation," *The Middle East Journal* 55, no. 2, (2001): 222.

discourses, that appear different from each other but actually complement one another, lies in their role in defining Azerbaijani identity, that shapes Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors and its foreign policy.

It is necessary to briefly touch upon these two ideologies, that have historically developed along the same lines, as mentioned above. In Azerbaijan, the Turkism ideology has aimed to create a common Turkic national identity by emphasizing the cultural, linguistic, and historical unity of the Turkic peoples. According to those who adhere to this ideology, Azerbaijan, that traces its historical roots to ancient Turkic states such as the Scythians, Huns, Khazars, and Seljuks,¹⁷⁵ is an inseparable part of the contemporary Turkic world. This ideology, of which Elchibey was a very important ideolog in recent times, continues to exist without contradicting the Azerbaijanism ideology.¹⁷⁶

Today, the main ideology of the state, Azerbaijanism, is officially defined as follows: *“Azerbaijanism is the ideology of the Azerbaijani people, which has chosen as its strategic goal the independence of a sovereign Azerbaijan and the struggle for a secular, democratic state based on civil principles in this country.”*¹⁷⁷ But essentially, Azerbaijanism is the application of civic Turkic nationalism in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanism is an ideology based on the deep ethnographic foundations of the Azerbaijani people, established in the 20th century, and possessing a sufficiently complex history of development. Azerbaijanism, although seen as a separate ideology from Turkism, actually consists of three organic components, as in Ali bey Huseynzade's triad: Turkism, Islamism, and Modernism.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Laurence Broers, and Galina M. Yemelianova, “The ‘long millennium’: The Caucasus from the medieval to the early modern periods,” in *Routledge Handbook of the Caucasus*, ed. Galina M. Yemelianova and Laurence Broers, 87-106, (London: Routledge, 2020), 93-95, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351055628>.

¹⁷⁶ Brenda Shaffer, "Azerbaijan's foreign policy since independence," *Caucasus International* 2, no. 1, (2012): 74.

¹⁷⁷ “Azərbaycançılıq,” *Azərbaycan Diasporu*, Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin İşlər İdarəsinin Prezident Kitabxanası (2020): 1, <https://files.preslib.az/projects/diaspora/b1.pdf>.

¹⁷⁸ Nizami Cəfərov, Vüqar Sərdarov, and Altay Cəfərov, *Azərbaycançılıq İdeologiyasının Etnoqrafik Əsasları*, (Bakı: “Elm və təhsil” nəşriyyat, 2016), 3.

The person who implemented this ideology in Azerbaijan in a real sense is Heydar Aliyev. Heydar Aliyev, who had played a significant role in the development of the Azerbaijanism ideology, also made a major contribution to interpreting this ideology in accordance with modern conditions. With his efforts, Azerbaijanism has transformed from merely an ideology into an official doctrine that determines the fate of the Azerbaijani people.¹⁷⁹ Heydar Aliyev's statement, "*I have been always proud, and I am proud today of being an Azerbaijani,*" not only expresses his value for this national identity but also reflects the core of the Azerbaijanism ideology.¹⁸⁰

The generally accepted view is that with the rise to power of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA) under Elchibey's leadership, the ideology of Turkism had been transformed into a state policy and significantly influenced the state's foreign policy. In this very brief period, the official language and identity were changed from *Azerbaijani* to *Turkic* in domestic politics. In foreign policy, close relations were built with Türkiye, and it was thought that this closeness would also enable the establishment of relations with the West. At the same time, this ideology, which led to the pursuit of a foreign policy against the influence of Russia and Iran, significantly deteriorated the republic's relations with its two major neighbors.¹⁸¹

However, it should also be noted that Elchibey's understanding of Turkism did not contradict Azerbaijanism. He emphasized that the majority of Azerbaijan is composed of a Turkic-origin people, while also pursuing a policy to protect the rights of minorities in the country. With the decree titled "*Protection of the Rights and Cultural Development of National Minorities,*" issued in 1992 and still in effect, the protection of the rights of minor and ethnic groups was recognized as a state duty. Therefore, while Elchibey's understanding of nationalism emphasized Turkic

¹⁷⁹ Nizami Cəfərov, "Heydər Əliyevin Azərbaycançılıq ideologiyası: Müasirləşmənin metafizikası, yaxud metafizikanın müasirləşməsi," *Xalq qəzeti*, December 7, 2012, <https://old.xalqqazeti.com/az/news/politics/28221>.

¹⁸⁰ "Speech of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev at the I Congress of the World Azerbaijanis," "*Heydar Aliyev Heritage*" *International Online Library*, November 10, 2001, <https://lib.aliyev-heritage.org/en/94582725.html>.

¹⁸¹ Bayram Balci, and Thomas Liles, "Turkey and the Caucasus: Mutual interests and influences in the post-Soviet era," in *Routledge Handbook of the Caucasus*, ed. Galina M. Yemelianova and Laurence Broers, 331-346, (London: Routledge, 2020), 340, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351055628>.

identity, it also had a balanced approach that considered Azerbaijan's multicultural societal structure. This situation reveals that he had a concept of Azerbaijanism in which the rights of all citizens were guaranteed regardless of their ethnic origin.¹⁸²

However, the losses in Karabakh and the instability in the country, that began in 1993, led to the short tenure of Elchibey's presidency, and a new period began with Heydar Aliyev's arrival in Baku. During his decade-long administration, Aliyev had improved relations with Russia and Iran while maintaining ties with Türkiye despite some problems.¹⁸³ In the background of the stability that began to be established in domestic and foreign policy, there was the *ideological shift* implemented by Heydar Aliyev: from Turkism to Azerbaijanism.¹⁸⁴

As soon as Heydar Aliyev came to power, the first issue that got attention was shaping the national ideology of Azerbaijanism and ensuring the protection of Azerbaijan's independence by gathering the people around this ideology.¹⁸⁵ For this, the official language and identity were changed from *Turkic* to *Azerbaijani*, again. Heydar Aliyev implemented the ideology of Azerbaijanism as a higher identity encompassing all citizens in response to the threat of non-Armenian ethnic separatism and conflicts, that had been fueled by external influences, although attempts had been made to prevent any conflict through laws. With the definition of "Azerbaijani" in the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, this ideology was fully formalized. During İlham Aliyev's period [though in an upgraded form], Azerbaijanism has emerged as an ideology that outlines the main contours of

¹⁸² Arzu B. Abdullayeva, "Legislation and implementation of Azerbaijan's legal obligations towards its ethnic minorities," *Государственная служба* 20, no. 3, (2018): 105, <https://doi.org/10.22394/2070-8378-2018-20-3-104-110>.

¹⁸³ Ceylan Tokluoglu, "Definitions of national identity, nationalism and ethnicity in post-Soviet Azerbaijan in the 1990s," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 4, (2005): 728, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870500092951>.

¹⁸⁴ Ayça Ergun, "Citizenship, national identity, and nation-building in Azerbaijan: Between the legacy of the past and the spirit of independence," *Nationalities Papers* 50, no. 4, (2022): 815, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.81>.

¹⁸⁵ İlham Ömerova, "Azərbaycan Respublikasında dövlət idarəçiliyinin formalaşması prosesində Heydər Əliyevin rolu (Rusiya Federasiyası ilə münasibətlər kontekstində)," *Asia Minor Studies* 1, no. 1, Special Issue, (2013): 120.

Azerbaijan's domestic and foreign policy and has led the state to progress steadily over the past twenty years.¹⁸⁶

With the rise to power of Ilham Aliyev in 2003, the national identity understanding based on Azerbaijanism was inherited from former president, and the construction of an inclusive identity based on citizenship has continued. However, improvements in the concept of Azerbaijanism have also occurred compatible with the conjuncture. First, the issue of secularism has been brought to the forefront. However, the most significant development during this period has been the more conscious adoption of the Turkic ethnic component in Azerbaijani identity. This adoption has not occurred in contradiction to the concept of Azerbaijaniness.¹⁸⁷

The concept of Azerbaijaniness, that was strengthened during Ilham Aliyev's period, has allowed for a more inclusive citizenship. However, it is worth emphasizing that there has been an increase in awareness of the Turkic roots within the Azerbaijani identity. The Azerbaijani identity, shaped after the 44-Day War in 2020, encompasses all the characteristics of the ideologies of Azerbaijanism and Turkism. In this regard, these two ideologies, which might be considered contradicted to each other, complement each other within the Azerbaijani identity.¹⁸⁸

In conclusion, to summarize, during the Elchibey period, the general policy was *Turkism before Azerbaijanism*, while during the Heydar Aliyev period, it evolved into *Azerbaijanism before Turkism*. In 2003, when Ilham Aliyev came to power, while continuing the ideology of Azerbaijanism, he reconstructed the state's ideology as *Azerbaijanism with Turkism*. These two inseparable ideologies have formed a common Azerbaijani identity that has shaped both Azerbaijan's global foreign policy and its relations with neighboring countries over the past twenty years.

¹⁸⁶ David S. Siroky, and Ceyhun Mahmudlu, "E pluribus unum? Ethnicity, Islam, and the construction of identity in Azerbaijan," *Problems of Post-Communism* 63, no. 2, (2016): 99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2015.1082124>.

¹⁸⁷ Ergun, "Citizenship, national identity," 823.

¹⁸⁸ Ergun, "Citizenship, national identity," 815.

2.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, the fundamental theoretical approaches of the discipline of International Relations, namely realism, liberalism, and constructivism, are examined in detail. The main arguments, historical development, and various sub-schools of each theoretical approach have been examined. Then, the usefulness of these theoretical approaches in understanding Azerbaijan's foreign policy has been discussed. It has been observed that the realist perspective is useful in analyzing Azerbaijan's "balanced foreign policy" approach, especially in the post-Soviet period, as well as its power and security-focused strategies. The liberal view, on the other hand, can explain certain aspects of Azerbaijan's foreign policy through its collaborations with international organizations, its pursuit of economic interdependence, and the democratic peace theory.

However, this chapter has highlighted the cruciality of the constructivist approach. This approach is particularly useful in understanding certain aspects of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. These aspects particularly include non-material elements such as identity, norms, historical narratives, and social construction processes. The section has demonstrated that constructivism offers a more comprehensive analytical framework for understanding these non-material elements. In this regard, constructivism can provide an important perspective in understanding the complex dynamics of Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors and the state reasoning behind its foreign policy decisions.

In this context, the evolution of Azerbaijani identity and the Azerbaijanism ideology throughout historical processes, as well as the impacts of these identity definitions on foreign policy, can be explained through a constructivist analysis. In the last section, while emphasizing the historical development of various understandings of Azerbaijani identity, it was pointed out that despite appearing different during the periods of Elchibey and Heydar Aliyev after independence, the ideologies of Turkism and Azerbaijanism complemented each other in the Ilham Aliyev period. Ultimately, it has been noted that during the Ilham Aliyev period, these two ideologies reached a synthesis in the expression: *Azerbaijanism with Turkism*. It has

been concluded that this identity framework is one of the key elements shaping Azerbaijan's both worldwide and regional foreign policy.

Ultimately, this chapter argues that while not disregarding the contributions of realism and liberalism in analyzing Azerbaijan's foreign policy, the constructivist approach provides a more holistic understanding. This theoretical ground provides the necessary infrastructure for a more detailed examination of Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors in the later sections of the thesis.



CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. Introduction

This chapter provides the historical background necessary to understand the development of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. It addresses the strategic position of Azerbaijani lands, that have been the scene of struggles between the West, North, and South empires, starting from ancient civilizations. The section continues by examining the short-lived but critical foreign policy experiences of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR), established in the early 20th century. Then, it details Azerbaijan's international relations within the Soviet Union as the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (AzSSR) and how its foreign policy powers were restricted by Moscow. Finally, the post-re-independence period following the dissolution of the Soviet Union outlines the internal and external challenges the country faced, particularly the Karabakh conflict, relations with neighbors, and the shaping of energy policies. The chronological and thematic analysis presented in this chapter will provide a critical foundation for understanding the events and dynamics that laid the groundwork for modern Azerbaijan's foreign policy strategies.

3.2. The Land of Fire and Its Shortened History

In a narrow sense, Azerbaijan is the name of a piece of land bordered by the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus Mountains to the north, the Arpachay river where the Eastern Anatolian plateaus end to the west, the Aras river and the Mughan plain where this river flows to the south, and the Caspian Sea to the east, including the Talysh Mountains. However, Swietochowski states that, although similar to this

limitation, Azerbaijan's southern borders are less defined and merge with the Iranian plateau.¹⁸⁹

In a broader sense, the borders of Azerbaijan can be extended from the north to Derbent and from the south to the cities of Hamadan and Zanzan, while remaining fixed in the east-west direction.¹⁹⁰ This expansion can be sustained in the southeast up to Qazvin and up to Tehran, where one-third of the population is Azerbaijani or their descendants according to some estimates,¹⁹¹ while it is possible to extend Azerbaijan's cultural borders to the southwest up to Kirkuk and Erbil.¹⁹² Yet, Azerbaijani territories are divided into three regions: north, south,¹⁹³ and west.¹⁹⁴

There are various claims regarding the origin of Azerbaijan's name. One of these theories suggests that it is derived from the Persian satrap Atropatenes, who ruled during the time of Alexander the Great.¹⁹⁵ Another more well-known explanation is that its origin traces back to the Persian word *azer*, meaning "fire," hence Azerbaijan being called the "Land of Fire." They attribute the reason for this theory to the region's richness in hydrocarbons, which led to the widespread presence of Zoroastrian temples in ancient times.¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁹ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 1.

¹⁹⁰ Asim Jannatoglu Jannatov, "Historical approaches to the issue of etymology, statehood and identity of Azerbaijan," *Vakanüvis-Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 6, no. 1, (2021): 246, <https://doi.org/10.24186/vakanuvis.880424>.

¹⁹¹ Asim Jannatoglu, "The minority rights of Azerbaijani Turks in Iran," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 20, no. 1, (2016): 8.

¹⁹² Zahid Jihad Albayati, and Elham Albayati, "Turkmens of Iraq: The third ethnic component of Iraq," *Centre for Policy and Research on Turkey* 4, (2015): 1.

¹⁹³ Seçil Özdemir, "Southern Azerbaijan issue," in *Conflict Areas in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, ed. Arda Özkan, Göktürk Tüysüzoglu, 111-136, (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2022), 111.

¹⁹⁴ Laurence Broers, "Cartographies of Consensus and Grievance: Visualising the Territory of Azerbaijan," *Europe-Asia Studies* 72, no. 9, (2020): 1471, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2020.1813689>.

¹⁹⁵ Shahin Mustafayev, "Silk Road and the formation of the historical space of Azerbaijan," in *Intercultural Transfers and Processes of Spatialization*, ed. Michel Espagne, and Matthias Middell, 179-196, (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2022), 181-182.

¹⁹⁶ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 1.

From the early Middle Ages, while the region of present-day Southern Azerbaijan was referred to as Adorbigan in Syrian and Byzantine sources,¹⁹⁷ it was mentioned as Aturpatakan and Adurbadagan in Persian sources,¹⁹⁸ and finally as Azerbaijan in Arab sources.¹⁹⁹ However, there are also unsubstantiated claims that the name Azerbaijan was formed by the combination of the *Khazar* tribe's name with the Persian suffix *bayegân* (home).²⁰⁰

In the ancient lands of Azerbaijan, many historical states were established until the years when Islam spread. The first sources related to the tribes that lived in these regions were written in the Sumerian-Akkadian languages.²⁰¹ According to the oldest sources, in the third and second millennia BC, the southern part of present-day Azerbaijan was under the influence of the Sumerian civilization.²⁰²

These ancient sources provided information about ancient states such as Aratta, Lullubi, and Kuti, and associated them with the Sumerian civilization.²⁰³ Many ancient states, including those settled around Lake Urmia and similar areas, were within the expansion territory of the Assyrians and Urartians in the following centuries. Then, in the 9th and 6th centuries BC, the Manna state was established, along with its written language and advanced culture. The Media state, established

¹⁹⁷ Alexander Toepel, "Late paganism as witnessed by the Syriac cave of treasures," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 59, no. 3, (2019): 522.

¹⁹⁸ Mahir Khalifa-Zadeh, and Leyla Khalifazadeh, "Sasanian Adurbadagan and modern Azerbaijan: Historical roots and development," *Advances in Historical Studies* 12, no. 2, (2023): 64-65, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ahs.2023.122005>.

¹⁹⁹ Shahlar Sharifov, "Historical boundaries of Azerbaijan in Arab-language sources," *Hileya: Scientific Bulletin/Gileya* 147, no. 8, (2019): 155.

²⁰⁰ Şahap Bulak, "'Azerbaycan' isminin kökeni ve anlamı," *Journal of International Social Research* 9, no. 43, (2016), 54, <https://doi.org/10.17719/jisr.20164317589>.

²⁰¹ Nazim Huseynli, and Nigar Huseynova, "Continuous culture of Azerbaijan and Sumerian civilization," *Uluslararası Medeniyet Çalışmaları Dergisi* 2, no. 2, (2017): 113, <https://doi.org/10.26899/inciss.66>.

²⁰² Karim Shukurov, "Azerbaijani civilization: history and origins," in *Azerbaijan, Its Impact on Europe's Energy Security and Relations with Poland - Yesterday and Today* 18, ed. Pawel Stawarz, 7-16, (Warszawa: Studia Wschodnioeuropejskie, 2023), 8.

²⁰³ Bey Zardabli, Ismail, *The History of Azerbaijan: From Ancient Times to the Present Day*, (London: Rossendale Books, 2014), 32-34.

on the Manna state, was destroyed by the Achaemenid Empire a century later, and the lands of present-day Azerbaijan became part of this great empire.²⁰⁴

In 330 BC, in these lands conquered by Alexander the Great, the Seleucid Empire was established shortly after Alexander's death by one of his generals, Seleucus. However, in the northern part of this empire, a state called Atropatena emerged, with a significant portion of its territory located in present-day South Azerbaijan. This state came under the influence of the Parthian Empire after it grew and overthrew the Seleucid Empire in 150 BC.²⁰⁵ Similarly, after the death of Alexander the Great, the state of Caucasian Albania was established in the lands of Northern Azerbaijan.²⁰⁶ Established in the 3rd century BC, this state had continued to exist in the eastern Caucasus until it was destroyed by the Arabs in the 8th century AD.²⁰⁷ Thus, the lands of Azerbaijan had become a battleground between the Parthian Empire, that dominated Iran, and the Roman Empire, that expanded into the eastern part of Anatolia.²⁰⁸ This struggle had been just one of the ongoing west-east power conflicts in Western Asia for centuries.

While Northern Azerbaijan remained under the Kingdom of Albania for a long time, the lands of Southern Azerbaijan became part of a new empire in the 3rd century AD. In 224, Ardashir defeated the last Parthian emperor, Artabanus, and in 226, he was crowned and took the title of *shahanshah* (king of kings). Thus, after the four-century-long Parthian Empire, a four-century-long Sasanian Empire began.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴ Karim Shukurov, "The arrival of the Mada and Farsi tribes in Iran," *Visions of Azerbaijan*, Sep.-Oct., (2010): 58-60.

²⁰⁵ Farhad Tehrani, and Sara Mehralizadeh, "Azerbaijan, Khoy and Salamas," in *Persian Paradises at Peril: Landscape Planning and Management in Contemporary Iran*, ed. Fardanesh, Farzin, and Fatemeh Farnaz Arefian, 161-182, (London: Springer, 2021), 164.

²⁰⁶ İqrar Əliyev, *Azərbaycan Tarixi. Yeddi Cildə. I Cild (Ən Qədimdən - B.E. III Əsri)*, (Bakı: "Elm" nəşriyyatı, 2007), 273.

²⁰⁷ Farida Mammadova, *Caucasian Albania and Albanians*, (Baku: Baku International Multiculturalism Centre, 1993), 185.

²⁰⁸ Karim Shukurov, "The states of Atropatena and Albania: From their establishment to the Sassanids. The Seleucids, the Roman-Parthian wars in Azerbaijan (4th century BCE – 3rd century CE)," *Visions of Azerbaijan*, Mar.-Apr., (2011): 46.

²⁰⁹ Nailə Vəlixanlı, *Azərbaycan Tarixi. Yeddi Cildə. II Cild (III-XIII Əsrin I Rübü)*, (Bakı: "Elm" nəşriyyatı, 2007), 70.

Similar to the previous ones, the lands of Azerbaijan were again one of the main places where the Roman-Sasanian struggle took place. With the participation of the Khazar Khanate, which dominated Northern Azerbaijan, on the Byzantine side of this struggle, Azerbaijan became the intersection point of three major political powers in the conflict. These wars, in which both sides suffered great losses, coincided with the period when the Arabs, united by Islam, emerged on the historical stage.²¹⁰

With the beginning of Muslim conquests in the 7th century, the fates of the peoples living in the area expanding from the Maghreb to the Indian subcontinent have changed significantly. Although the primary aim of these conquests was spreading Islam to “pagan” societies, it was also the desire of an Arab state under the leadership of the Quraysh tribe to expand. Although the history of the first Muslim expeditions outside the Arabian Peninsula dates back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, more extensive campaigns occurred during the Rashidun Caliphate period.²¹¹

With the Arab victory in the Battle of Nahavand in 642 between the Rashidun Caliphate and the Sassanian Empire, the expansion of the Islamic Caliphate occurred not only to the east but also to the north, that is, to Azerbaijan. With the consolidation of Arab rule but the decline of caliphate authority, the Shirvanshahs State, established in northern Azerbaijan and ruled by an Arab dynasty, began to rule Northern Azerbaijan from 668 until it was captured by the Safavid Empire in 1539.²¹² Although some regions of Azerbaijan became part of this newly established Islam empire, the resistance against Arab conquests continued throughout Azerbaijan until the 9th century.²¹³

²¹⁰ Bey Zardabli, *The History of Azerbaijan*, 92.

²¹¹ Bey Zardabli, *The History of Azerbaijan*, 94.

²¹² David J. Roxburgh, “The authors and their milieu,” in *Prefacing the Image*, ed. David J. Roxburgh, 18-51, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 18.

²¹³ Marat Grebennikov, “The puzzle of a loyal minority: Why do Azeris support the Iranian state?,” *The Middle East Journal* 67, no. 1, (2013): 65, <https://doi.org/10.3751/67.1.14>.

Among these resistances, the most well-known is the Khurramite movement, centered in Azerbaijan and influential in various parts of Western Asia between 816 and 838.²¹⁴ The Khurramites were one of the most serious uprisings based on religion during the Abbasid period.²¹⁵ The ideological structure of the Khurramites was composed of a mixture of beliefs such as Zoroastrianism, Mazdakism, and even Islam.²¹⁶ This movement, which will be considered a symbol of freedom in modern Azerbaijani history,²¹⁷ spread under the leadership of Babak Khorramdin during the period of conflict in the caliphate administration.²¹⁸ Its main motto was “defend your land, eliminate the oppressors, and revive Mazdakism.” And as a result of this movement, the caliphate weakened both politically and economically.²¹⁹

However, Caliph Al-Mu'tasim sent one of his best generals, Afshin, against Babak, and as a result of his successful strategies, the rebellion was suppressed, and Babak and his supporters were executed.²²⁰ In addition, with the weakening of the Abbasid Caliphate, various dynasties ruled over the territories of Azerbaijan between the 9th and 11th centuries. At the forefront of these, as mentioned above, is the Shirvanshahs. While the Shirvanshahs had ruled Northern Azerbaijan for several centuries, the Sajid dynasty,²²¹ Sallarid dynasty,²²² Shaddadid dynasty,²²³ and Ravvadid dynasty²²⁴ had dominated Southern Azerbaijan.

²¹⁴ Maurice Lombard, *The Golden Age of Islam*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009), 152.

²¹⁵ Aynur Qadimova, “The ideology and religious basis of the Khurramite movement,” *Scientific Collection «InterConf»* 136 (2022): 252-255.

²¹⁶ Azimli, Mehmet. *Bir Direnişçi: Bâbek*, (Konya: Çizgi Yayınları, 2013), 61-62.

²¹⁷ Ebülfez Elçibey, and Muhammet Kemalöglü, “Babek ve Azərbaycan direniş hareketinin ilk dövəmləri,” *Gümüşhane University Electronic Journal of the Institute of Social Science/Gümüşhane Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Elektronik Dergisi* 4, no. 8, (2013): 37.

²¹⁸ Ziya Bünyadov, *Azərbaycan VII-IX əsrlərdə*, (Bakı: “Şərq-Qərb” nəşriyyatı, 2007), 309.

²¹⁹ Vesile Şemşek, “A review of the Hürremis and Babek revolution in the history of Islam according to local sources,” *The Journal of Social Sciences* 44, (2020): 212, <http://dx.doi.org/10.29228/SOBIDER.41739>.

²²⁰ Adam Ali, “Crushing a 9th-century heretical revolt,” *Medieval Warfare* 9, no. 5, (2019): 49.

²²¹ Bey Zardabli, *The History of Azerbaijan*, 141.

²²² Vəlixanlı, *Azərbaycan Tarixi*, 275.

²²³ Mustafa Shabanov, “Shaddadid ruler Abu'l-fath Mūsa bin Fażl and his coins,” *Elm və İnnovativ Texnologiyalar Jurnalı*, no. 7, (2019): 38, <https://doi.org/10.5782/2616-4418.7.2019.38>.

After the weakening of the Abbasid Caliphate, the Seljuk Empire emerged in Western Asia with vast territories and holds an important place in Azerbaijani history. The Oghuz tribes, settled in the Khorasan region, had begun to settle in the South Caucasus lands since the first quarter of the 11th century. Most of these Oghuz tribes settled in Khorasan, and they united around Toghrul Beg and Chaghri Beg from the Qiniq tribe to establish the Seljuk Empire.²²⁵

During the reign of Toghrul beg (1038-1063), after conquering the Khorezm and Khorasan regions in western Iran, the western part of Iran and Baghdad were also captured at the invitation of the Abbasid caliph Al-Qa'im.²²⁶ Having eliminated the influence of the Shia-origin Buyid dynasty in Baghdad,²²⁷ Toghrul Beg was granted the title of *the Sultan of the East and the West* by the Abbasid caliph Al-Qa'im in 1055. After this date, all Sunni Oghuz Turk rulers began to receive the title of *sultan*.²²⁸ During the Seljuk Empire period, parallel to the Turkification of Iran, Azerbaijan's Turkic identity was also consolidated.²²⁹

By the 12th century, Turkic dominance had become permanent in the territories of Azerbaijan. While the Seljuk Empire was collapsing within a century, in parallel, the territories of Iran came under the rule of the Khwarazmian Empire, which was of Karluk Turkic origin, and the territories of Azerbaijan fell under the control of the Ildenizids,²³⁰ a dynasty of Kipchak Turkic origin.²³¹ This period, which would last

²²⁴ Bey Zardabli, *The History of Azerbaijan*, 149.

²²⁵ Denison E. Ross, "Nomadic movements in Asia. Lecture III. – The Seljuks," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 77, no. 4011, (1929): 1089.

²²⁶ Ayşe Gül Fidan, "State organization and elements of the reign in Nishāpūrī's saljūqnāma," *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 57, no. 2, (2017): 749, https://doi.org/10.1501/Dtcfder_0000001536.

²²⁷ Favzan Sdeh, "The puppet caliphs and the titular heads of state: The Abbasid caliphate under the Buyids' reign," *Al-Jami'ah* 42, no. 1, (2004): 1-33, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2004.421.1-33>.

²²⁸ Gulzinat Mensitova, et al., "The migrations of the Oghuz in the medieval period: Causes, directions and consequences," *Вестник Новосибирского государственного университета. Серия: История. Филология* 21, no. 5, (2022): 141, <https://doi.org/10.31577/aassav.2022.31.1.05>.

²²⁹ Andrew CS Peacock, "Nomadic society and the Seljūq campaigns in Caucasia," *Iran & the Caucasus* 9, no. 2, (2005): 218, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157338405774829331>.

²³⁰ Gülay Ögün Bezer, "İldenizliler," *DİA-22. Ankara: TDV* (2020): 82-84.

for about a century,²³² began in earnest when the Seljuk Sultanate of Iraq came under the control of the Ildenizids in 1160.²³³

The Ildenizid rule in Azerbaijan ended when Khwarazmshah Jalal al-Din Manguberdi returned from India after the Mongol defeat and captured the Ildenizid capital, Tabriz, in 1225, during the period when the Mongols came to the region.²³⁴ However, the Khwarazmian Empire did not last long, as its existence was ended by the Battle of Yassıçemen against the Sultanate of Rûm. Thus, there was no obstacle left for the Great Mongol Empire in entering the lands of Azerbaijan.²³⁵

The Mongols' entry into Azerbaijan occurred shortly after Genghis Khan's death, when the Mongol armies under the command of Chormagan Noyan captured the entire region in 1231. In 1239, the Mongol armies, which also captured the Georgian and Armenian kingdoms, caused all the South Caucasus to come under the control of the Great Mongol Empire.²³⁶ However, Hulegu Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan, sent Baiju Noyan, who was subordinate to Chormagan Noyan, to Anatolia and captured the Nizari Ismaili (Alamut) state controlled by the Hashashins in 1256, Azerbaijan in 1257, and Baghdad in 1258, that was under the control of the Abbasid Caliphate. Having eliminated both the Alamut state and the Abbasid caliphate, Hulagu Khan established the Ilkhanates centered in Azerbaijan.²³⁷ With its capital cities being Maragheh, Tabriz, and Soltaniyeh in Azerbaijan, this Mongol state significantly influenced Azerbaijan's socioeconomics, ethnic structure, religious

²³¹ Lalə Əliyeva, *Azərbaycan Xalqının Etnogenezində Qıpçaqların Yeri*, (Bakı: "Bakı Universiteti" nəşriyyatı, 2015), 154.

²³² Ziya Bünyadov, *Azərbaycan Atabəyləri Dövləti - 1136-1225-ci illər*, (Bakı: "Şərq-Qərb" nəşriyyatı, 2007), 44.

²³³ Vəlixanlı, *Azərbaycan Tarixi*, 317.

²³⁴ Gurban Hüseynov, "Cələleddin Hərizməşah'ın Azərbaycan'ı istilasına və Atabeylər Dövləti'nin çöküşü." *Genel Türk Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi* 6, no. 12, (2024): 401-402, <https://doi.org/10.53718/gttad.1442348>.

²³⁵ Antony Eastmond, *Tamta's World*, (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 11-12.

²³⁶ Khadija Karim, and Sevinj Latifova, "Dominion of Khwarazmshah Jalal Al-din and the Mongol rule in Azerbaijan," *Journal of Historical Studies* 2, no. 2, (2024): 86, <http://dx.doi.org/10.54414/QLRJ7388>.

²³⁷ Oqtay Əfəndiyev, *Azərbaycan Tarixi. Yeddi Cildə. III Cild (XIII-XVIII Əsrlər)*, (Bakı: "Elm" nəşriyyatı, 2007), 18-19.

beliefs, and language throughout its existence, which lasted for over a century.²³⁸ However, during the period of the Ilkhanates, Azerbaijan had been again at the center of wars. Especially during the reign of Abaqa Khan, who ascended to the throne after the death of Hulagu Khan, Azerbaijan had been subjected to attacks from the Golden Horde state in the north. The Golden Horde had launched a series of raids into Azerbaijan starting from the year 1262.²³⁹

The Golden Horde state, founded by Jochi, the out-of-wedlock son of Genghis Khan,²⁴⁰ had formed an alliance with the Egypt-centered Mamluk Sultanate against the Ilkhanates from the time Berke Khan, Jochi's younger son, converted to Islam.²⁴¹ Therefore, in parallel, starting from Abaqa Khan, the Ilkhanates had aimed to establish diplomatic relations with European states.²⁴² Thus, it would be able to balance the two Muslim states located to the north and south. However, due to the intense influence of Islam in the region, the Ilkhanate khans also began to convert to Islam. With the conversion of Ghazan khan, the grandson of Abaqa khan, to Islam, the Ilkhanates transformed into a sultanate.²⁴³ With the death of the last khan, Abu Sa'id Bahadur Khan, in 1335, the Ilkhanate began to disintegrate,²⁴⁴ and rival states started to emerge within the territory of the state.²⁴⁵

²³⁸ Bey Zardabli, *The History of Azerbaijan*, 186.

²³⁹ Həsən Qəniyev, *Azərbaycan Tarixi: Ən Qədim Zamanlardan – XXI Əsrin İlk Onilliklərinədək*, (Bakı: "Bakı Universiteti" nəşriyyatı, 2019), 107.

²⁴⁰ Michal Biran, *Chinggis Khan*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2012), 35.

²⁴¹ Marie Favereau, "The Mamluk Sultanate and the Golden Horde: Tension and Interaction During the Mongol peace," in *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History: Economic, Social and Cultural Development in an Era of Increasing International Interaction and Competition*, ed. Reuven Amitai, and Stephan Conermann, 345-366, (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2019), 346, <https://doi.org/10.14220/9783737004114>.

²⁴² Jahangir Zeynaloglu, *A Concise History of Azerbaijan: Azerbaijan's History from the Medieval Turkic Dynasties to the first Turkic Republic*, trans. by F. Abasov (Riverbed Publishers, 2020), 27.

²⁴³ Devin DeWeese, "Cultural transmission and exchange in the Mongol Empire: Notes from the biographical dictionary of Ibn al-Fuwaṭī," in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff, 11-29, (Boston: Brill, 2006), 20, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047418573_007.

²⁴⁴ Michael Hope, "The Political configuration of late Ilkhanid Iran: A case study of the Chubaniid Amirate (738–758/1337–1357)," *Iran* 61, no. 2, (2023): 255, <https://doi.org/10.1080/05786967.2021.1889930>.

²⁴⁵ Michael Hope, "The Mongols in the eyes of the Iranians," in *The Mongol World*, ed. Timothy May, and Michael Hope, 814-825, (London: Routledge, 2022), 822, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315165172>.

Generally, the struggle to regain control over this politically vacated area centered in Azerbaijan was primarily managed through the surrounding regions. Although the administration of Azerbaijan, centered in Tabriz, was left to the Chobanids under the leadership of Amir Choban, a noyan of the Ilkhanate, it was soon taken over by another Mongol state, the Jalayirid Sultanate based in Baghdad, which ended Chobanids in 1338.²⁴⁶

The Jalayirid Sultanate, that had maintained its power for approximately fifty years, gradually had lost its strength with the arrival of the Timurid Empire in the region. After the control of Azerbaijan passing to the Timurid Empire, the Jalayirid sultanate, although not destroyed, suffered a loss to its central authority. And the rise of Jalayirid Sultanate's suzerain, the Qara Qoyunlu, began.²⁴⁷ The Golden Horde sultan Tokhtamysh Khan's raids into the Caucasus territories led to Amir Timur's first campaign beyond the Caucasus and into the north. Amir Timur, entering the territories of South Azerbaijan under the control of the Qara Qoyunlu and governed by the Jalayirid Sultans, captured Tabriz in 1385.²⁴⁸ Although Amir Timur's western campaign ended in 1402 with his defeat of the Ottoman Sultan Bayazid in Ankara,²⁴⁹ the Timurid Empire's campaigns in West Asia, particularly Azerbaijan, continued throughout the 15th century.²⁵⁰

Eventually, the Qara Qoyunlu rule in the region began to rise. With the death of Amir Timur, due to the power struggles in the Timurid Empire, the Qara Qoyunlu ruler Qara Yusif captured Tabriz (1406), Mardin (1409), and Erzincan (1410) in succession. Then, defeating the Jalayirid Sultan Ahmad, who sought to reclaim

²⁴⁶ Sara Nur Yıldız, "Post-Mongol pastoral policies in eastern Anatolia during the Late Middle Ages," *Publications de l'Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes* 25, no. 1, (2012): 33.

²⁴⁷ Patrick Wing, *The Jalayirids*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 147-148.

²⁴⁸ Ulug'bek Ismailovich Imamov, "Source studies of the history of Amir Temur's military campaigns," *Galaxy International Interdisciplinary Research Journal* 11, no. 4, (2023): 378.

²⁴⁹ Adam Knobler, "The rise of Tīmūr and western diplomatic response, 1390–1405," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 5, no. 3, (1995): 341, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S135618630000660X>.

²⁵⁰ Nagy Pienaru, "The Timurids and the Black Sea," in *From Pax Mongolica to Pax Ottomanica*, ed. Ovidiu Cristea, and Liviu Pilat, 113-145, (Boston: Brill, 2020), 136, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004422445_007.

Tabriz, and capturing Baghdad (1412), Qara Yusif eliminated the Jalayirids.²⁵¹ When the turmoil in the Timurid Empire came to an end and Shah Rukh ascended the throne, he launched a series of campaigns against the Qara Qoyunlu, based in Azerbaijan.²⁵²

However, the fall of the Qara Qoyunlu was not due to the decades-long Timurid campaigns, but rather the defeat of Jahan Shah by the Aq Qoyunlu ruler Uzun Hasan in 1467.²⁵³ Again, not long after, in 1501, the foundations of the Safavid Empire, which would become a turning point for modern Iran, were set in place. Sheykh Heydar's son, Shah Ismail, crushed the Aq Qoyunlu army that year and established a state that would encompass a significant portion of West Asia, centered around Tabriz, the heart of Azerbaijan.²⁵⁴

The Safavids, who gained power with the support of the Turkmen tribes known as *Qizilbash* (redhead) due to their distinctive titles and who identified as the protectors of Shia Islam,²⁵⁵ ruled Iran and Azerbaijan for over two hundred years (1501-1736) with Tabriz as their center.²⁵⁶ The Safavids, throughout their rule, made religious and political moves to incorporate Turkoman tribes in Anatolia who were like themselves and had Shia tendencies, and they had become a threat to the Ottomans. Although the Ottomans did not initially intend to directly intervene with a war against the Safavid threat, they launched a full-scale campaign against the Safavids in 1514. A triggering event for this campaign was the outbreak of the Safavid-leaning *Shahkulu* (servant of

²⁵¹ Yıldız, "Post-Mongol pastoral policies," 36.

²⁵² Jamshid Norouzi, and Wiryā Azizi, "Relationships between Timurid Empire and Qara Qoyunlu & Aq Qoyunlu Turkmens," *Journal of Novel Applied Sciences* 4, no. 11, (2015): 1197-1198.

²⁵³ Daniel Zakrzewski, "Local elites and dynastic succession: Tabriz prior to, under and following Mongol rule (sixth/twelfth to ninth/fifteenth centuries)," *Eurasian Studies* 16, no. 1-2, (2018): 381, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004434332_014.

²⁵⁴ Rıza Yıldırım, "The rise of the Safavids as a political dynasty: The revolution of Shāh Esmā 'Il, the founder of the Safavid state," in *The Safavid World*, ed. Rudi Matthee, 56-76, (Routledge, 2021), 56.

²⁵⁵ Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 16.

²⁵⁶ Maryam Ala Amjadi, "Safavid-Ottoman encounters in Persian travel prose and poetry (1505–1741)," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 7, no. 2, (2020): 115, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jotturstuass.7.2.08>.

the Shah) rebellion in the Teke region, centered around Antalya, under Ottoman control in 1510.²⁵⁷

In this first war, known as the Battle of Chaldiran, the Ottoman army with rifles and cannons achieved a decisive victory against the Safavid army armed with swords.²⁵⁸ The wars between these two Turkic states had continued for centuries as a struggle for territorial gain in West Asia, just like the Greek-Persian wars a thousand years ago.²⁵⁹ During these wars, Azerbaijani territories, especially the northern part, periodically had come under the control of the Ottoman Empire.²⁶⁰ In Southern Azerbaijan, however, the dominance of Turkic dynasties had continued, expanding to whole Iran as well.

One of these had been the Afsharid dynasty. The power of the Safavid dynasty began to weaken from the early 18th century, and the territories under its control started to fall into the hands of the Ottoman, Russian, and Afghan states. During this period, Nader Shah Afshar emerged on the historical stage. Driving the Russians from the Caspian border and the Afghans from the east, Nader Shah became the regent of the throne with a coup in 1732. In the war with the Ottomans in 1735, the entirety of Azerbaijan, both north and south, and some parts of the South Caucasus were reclaimed from the Ottomans.²⁶¹

However, with the assassination of Nader Shah Afshar, the Afsharid Empire disintegrated, and different dynasties emerged in the territories of Iran, primarily in

²⁵⁷ Abdurrahman Atçıl, "The Safavid threat and juristic authority in the Ottoman Empire during the 16th century," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49, no. 2, (2017): 297, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002074381700006X>.

²⁵⁸ Meirison, Meirison, Husnul Fatarib, and Desmadi Saharuddin, "The Safavid dynasty and the role of Shah Abbas I in the development of several field," *Hadharah: Jurnal Keislaman dan Peradaban* 15, no. 1, (2021): 50-51.

²⁵⁹ Halil Kürşad Aslan, "Ottoman-Persian Treaties," in *The Encyclopedia of Diplomacy* ed. Gordon Martel, 1-10, (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 3-4, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118885154.dipl0208>.

²⁶⁰ Jahanbakhsh Savagheb, and Ahmad Lobatfard, "The Iran-Ottoman conflicts over the Caucasus in the era of Safavid interregnum (1576-1587)," *Journal of Safavid Studies* 1, no. 1, (2022): 61, <https://doi.org/10.22108/ssj.2021.130678.1009>.

²⁶¹ Oktay Kızılkaya, and Erdal Sezgi, "Nadir Şah'in İran'da tahta geçmesi ve bazı faaliyetleri," *TURAN: Stratejik Arastirmalar Merkezi* 9, no. 35, (2017): 71, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15189/1308-8041>.

Azerbaijan.²⁶² One of these, the Turkic-origin Qajar dynasty that migrated from Anatolia,²⁶³ would rule over South Azerbaijan and Iran until the first quarter of the 20th century. In the north, the era of khanates will begin.

The Azerbaijani khanates emerged after the political vacuum created by the death of Nader Shah Afshar, because of the self-governance demands of the Turkic tribes in the North. After the state structure in northern Azerbaijan was formed in the form of khanates, these khanates had endeavored to pursue independent foreign policies from the southern dynasties centered in Tabriz. The main point of these independent policies was the khans' desire to maintain their own sovereignty and secure external economic relations.²⁶⁴ By the mid-18th century, the independent khanates of Azerbaijan had consisted of the khanates of Baku, Ganja, Karabakh, Shirvan, Sheki, Quba, Irevan, Nakhchivan, and Talish. The political structures of these khanates had been generally like each other.²⁶⁵

In the south, after the breakdown of the Afsharid Empire, different dynasties entered into a power struggle in the geography of Iran. Among these dynasties, one of the most important was the Lur-origin Zand dynasty.²⁶⁶ However, since the Safavid Empire, the state that had again established a long-lasting dominance in Iran has been the Qajar Empire.²⁶⁷ Both through methods of power-keeping such as violence and religion, and by relying on the Safavid tradition, the Qajar Empire had

²⁶² Rasul Ahmadlu, Mohammad Hassan Razanhan, and Seyyed Abulfazl Razavi, "Nasir Khan Lari Family and the Rise of the Qajar Dynasty," *Historical Sciences Studies* 16, no. 1, (2024): 2, <https://doi.org/10.22059/jhss.2024.378116.473727>.

²⁶³ Gavin Hambly, "Āghā Muḥammad Khān and the establishment of the Qājār Dynasty," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, and Charles Melville, 104-143, 7, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 105, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521200950.004>.

²⁶⁴ Dadash Mutallimov, "Political relationship Northern Azerbaijan with Ottoman in the period of Khanates," *International Journal of Social Inquiry* 8, no. 2, (2017): 155.

²⁶⁵ Mutallimov, "Political relationship Northern Azerbaijan", 158-159.

²⁶⁶ John Perry, "Zand dynasty," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed April 23, 2023, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/zand-dynasty>.

²⁶⁷ Ata Mohamed Tabriz, "Safevî Devleti'nden sonra İran'da siyasî iktidarların meşruiyet arayışları," *Bilig* 103 (2022): 99.

maintained its dominance for more than a century.²⁶⁸ After establishing unity in Iran, it sought to dominate South and North Azerbaijan, reentering territorial struggles with the Ottoman Empire.²⁶⁹ However, from the beginning of the 19th century, the arrival of the Russian Empire in the South Caucasus and naturally in the territories of Northern Azerbaijan significantly changed the fate of the region and Azerbaijan for the next two centuries.²⁷⁰

In 1801, to control transportation routes and increase its influence on global trade routes against Britain and France in the great power rivalry, the Russian Empire occupied the Georgian kingdom (Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti) in the South Caucasus. Subsequently, between 1804 and 1813, it occupied the khanates in North Azerbaijan under the protection of the Qajar Empire one by one. Owing to the Treaty of Gulistan signed after the war with the Qajar Empire, the Russian Empire gained control over all of North Azerbaijan's territories except for the Irevan and Nakhchivan khanates. Subsequently, they began settling Armenians fleeing the Russo-Persian War (1804-1813) and the Russo-Turkish War (1806-1812) in the Karabakh region.²⁷¹

In early 1825, following the occupation of the shores of Lake Gökçe in Irevan, which was under Qajar control, by the Georgian governor Yermalov and the mistreatment of the Muslim population, a jurist named Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba'i, who lived in Karbala, went to Tehran to request Fath-Ali Shah Qajar to declare a jihad. As a result, in the summer of 1826, the Qajar army entered the territories of Northern Azerbaijan.²⁷² The army commanded by Crown Prince Abbas Mirza aimed to first

²⁶⁸ Tabriz, "Safevî Devleti'nden sonra," 111.

²⁶⁹ Abdolvahid Soofizadeh, "Kaçar ve Osmanlı devletleri arasında belirsiz sınır meseleleri," *Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 42 (2017): 441-442, <https://doi.org/10.21563/sutad.377347>.

²⁷⁰ Nigar Gozalova, "The main stages of the Russian expansion on Azerbaijan at the XVIII and beginning of the XIX centuries," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 3, no. 8, (2012): 11-14.

²⁷¹ Tutku Dilaver, "A historical overview of the conflicts in the South Caucasus and Russian policy in the region," in *The Centennial of the Independence of the Three South Caucasus States: Historical Background, Contemporary Developments and Prospects of Peace and Prosperity*, ed. Tutku Dilaver and Nigar Shiralizade, 17-26, (Ankara: AVİM [Center for Eurasian Studies], 2018), 17-19.

²⁷² Reza Pourjavady, "Russo-Iranian wars 1804-13 and 1826-8." In *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Biographical History*, ed David Thomas, and John Chesworth, 24-28, (Boston: Brill, 2023), 26, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004526907_003.

capture Karabakh and then enter Tbilisi via Ganja.²⁷³ However, as a result of losing the war, the entire Northern Azerbaijan came under the continuous control of the Russian Empire for 90 years with the signing of the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828.²⁷⁴

During this period, the Russian Empire had divided the South Caucasus territories into four main administrative regions (guberniya): Baku governorate, Elizavetpol (Ganja) governorate, Irevan governorate, Tbilisi governorate.²⁷⁵ As a result of subsequent wars, these regions (especially Irevan), where Armenians from Iran and Anatolia settled, would be places where the Azerbaijani Turkish population would face massacres starting from the 20th century. The clash that will be called the ‘Armenian-Tatar War’ in 1905 was the first major ethnic conflict of this century.²⁷⁶

The 20th century had been an era of struggle for independence and democracy for Azerbaijan. While it is possible to start this period with Azerbaijani Hasan bey Zardabi in the North, Sattar Khan’s struggle for constitutional monarchy in the South can be seen as the first spark on this path of freedom. During the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, that had lasted from 1905 to 1911,²⁷⁷ Mohammad Ali Shah of the Qajar dynasty, of Turkic origin, bombed the Iranian Parliament in 1908 with the Persian Cossack Brigade, led by Russian officers,²⁷⁸ and sent his 40,000-strong army from Tehran to Tabriz to suppress the uprising. Resisting the Shah’s intervention in Tehran and receiving help from Baku, Sattar Khan prevented the fall of Tabriz by April 1909 and forced the Shah to accept the constitution and the parliament again.²⁷⁹

²⁷³ Mahmud İsmayilov, *Azərbaycan Tarixi. Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild (XIX Əsr)*, (Bakı: “Elm” nəşriyyatı, 2007), 33.

²⁷⁴ Pourjavady, “Russo-Iranian wars,” 27.

²⁷⁵ Solmaz Rustamova-Tohidi, “Massacres of Azerbaijanis in the 20th century,” *IRS*, 48, (2021): 30-31

²⁷⁶ Kamala Imranli-Lowe, “The Provisional government and the Armenian homeland project,” *Revolutionary Russia* 27, no. 2, (2014): 134-135, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546545.2014.971482>.

²⁷⁷ Saïd Amir Arjomand, “The 1906-07 Iranian Constitution and the constitutional debate on Islam,” *Journal of Persianate Studies* 5, no. 2, (2012): 152, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18747167-12341242>.

²⁷⁸ Vanessa Martin, “Hartwig and Russian policy in Iran 1906–8,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 1, (1993): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263209308700931>.

²⁷⁹ Cəmil Həsənlı, *Güney Azərbaycan: Tehran-Bakı-Moskva Arasında (1939—1945)*, (Bakı: “Diplomat” nəşriyyatı, 1998), 23-26.

In the North, however, an independent state was being formed. The civil war that began in the Russian Empire after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution allowed many peoples to gain their independence. One of these, the people of Azerbaijan, declared the first republic in the Turkic world in 1918. In 1920, with the Bolshevik invasion, the entire state structure of this republic was dismantled, and the territories of Northern Azerbaijan were governed by members of the Central Committee appointed from Moscow. In the early years, although it was nominal, the Central Committee, that included certain Azerbaijanis, took on a predominantly Russian and Armenian structure from the second half of the 1920s.²⁸⁰

3.3. Azerbaijan Democratic Republic Period: 1918-1920

After this “brief history” of Azerbaijan, to understand present-day Azerbaijan’s relations with its neighbors, it is necessary to discuss the formation of the first Azerbaijani republic and the foreign policy it implemented during its short existence. To fully understand the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic’s (ADR) early foreign policy, we must first grasp the political environment for that time. Understanding the complex dynamics and power shifts that occurred following the 1917 Revolution, is crucial for grasping how these factors influenced ADR’s diplomatic strategies and national priorities. This background is necessary to clarify the challenges and opportunities that Azerbaijan experienced during its early years as an independent state.

Following the February Revolution of 1917 in the Russian Empire, the authority of Transcaucasia was taken over by the Special Transcaucasian Committee (OZaKom).²⁸¹ After the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia with the October Revolution of 1917, a short-lived anti-Bolshevik government was established in Tbilisi in November 1917. The new government, composed of delegates who were

²⁸⁰ Rəna Bayramova, *Azərbaycan Rəhbərliyində İxtilafatlar və Daxili Siyasi Çəkişmələr, 1920-1925-ci illər*. (Baku: “Elm” nəşriyyatı, 2007), 24.

²⁸¹ Lasha Bakradze, “The German perspective on the Transcaucasian Federation and the influence of the Committee for Georgia’s Independence,” *Caucasus Survey* 8, no 1, (2020): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761199.2020.1714877>.

Georgians, Armenians, and Azerbaijanis,²⁸² take over the control of South Caucasus except for Baku. In Baku, the Baku Soviet government was already formed.²⁸³ Briefly, the dual governance system in Russian-controlled lands was also present in the territories of Azerbaijan.²⁸⁴

The members of OZaKom were representatives elected to the 4th Duma from the Caucasus region.²⁸⁵ After seizing power in Petrograd with the October Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks established the Council of People's Commissars (SovNarKom) to govern all of Russia. When the South Caucasus refused to recognize this authority, the OZaKom members were sent from Petrograd resigned. Instead of that, the Transcaucasian Commissariat (ZakavKom) was established in Tbilisi through an election held in November 1917.²⁸⁶

ZakavKom, whose existence was recognized because of the Erzincan Armistice signed with the Ottoman Empire (OE) in December 1917,²⁸⁷ continued border disputes in its west due to the presence of Georgian and Armenian delegates.²⁸⁸ In January 1918, the ZakavKom officially announced the Transcaucasian Sejm as the

²⁸² Mikayel Zolyan, "Between empire and independence: Armenia and the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic," in *The Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic of 1918*, ed. Adrian Brisku, and Timothy K. Blauvelt, 9-20, (London: Routledge, 2021), 12, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003156666>.

²⁸³ Timothy K. Blauvelt, and Stanislav Tumis, "Ukraine and the Transcaucasus in 1917–1918: parallels, interactions, influences," *Caucasus Survey* 8, no 1, (2020): 101, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761199.2020.1712910>.

²⁸⁴ Ramin Sadıgov, "Rus ihtilallerinin Azerbaycan'a etkileri: Bağımsızlığa giden yol." *Gazi Türkiyat* 16, (2015): 170.

²⁸⁵ Yaqub Mahmudov, *Azərbaycan Xalq Cümhuriyyəti Ensiklopediyası* (Bakı: "Lider" nəşriyyat, 2004), 304.

²⁸⁶ Mehmet Bilgin, "Osmanlı yönetiminin Kafkas Cephesinde ileri harekata karar verme sürecinde Kafkasya'nın durumu (Mart-1917-Mart-1918)," *Turkish Studies-Historical Analysis* 16, no. 2, (2021), 121. <http://dx.doi.org/10.47846/TurkishStudies.46082>.

²⁸⁷ Stefano Taglia, "Pragmatism and expediency: Ottoman calculations and the establishment of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic," in *The Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic of 1918*, ed. Adrian Brisku, and Timothy K. Blauvelt, 45-58, (London: Routledge, 2021), 57, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003156666>.

²⁸⁸ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 120-124.

legislative authority. In February of the same year, the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (TDFR) was formed.²⁸⁹

After the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918, the OE gained control of the city of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum in Transcaucasia.²⁹⁰ The turbulence in the region became more intense when Armenian Bolshevik Stepan Shaumyan, on March 31, 1918, launched a brutal onslaught in Baku, which resulted to the massacre of 12,000 Azerbaijanis.²⁹¹ Organized Armenian military units conducted prearranged and coordinated killings and destruction in Muslim quarters.²⁹²

This event caused tremendous turmoil, sometimes referred to as the March Days. The Azerbaijani deputies in the Sejm threatened that their group would withdraw from the Sejm if the Transcaucasian government did not make efforts to expel the Bolsheviks from Baku. Eventually, ZakavKom gathered a joint Georgian-Azerbaijani forces and sent it eastward. However, the Baku Soviet forces easily repelled the poorly coordinated and underpowered operation in April 1918.²⁹³

The Trabzon Conference in March-April,²⁹⁴ followed by the Batum Conference in May, was initiated to settle the conflict by the OE. Amid these discussions, German Empire founded a Georgian republic under its protection, forcing Georgia to separate from the Transcaucasian Confederation on May 26 and dissolve the Sejm.²⁹⁵

²⁸⁹ Georges Mamoulia, "Azerbaijan and the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic: Historical reality and possibility," in *The Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic of 1918: Federal Aspirations, Geopolitics, and National Projects*, ed. Adrian Brisku and Timothy K. Blauvelt, 34-47, (New York: Routledge, 2020), 41, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003156666>.

²⁹⁰ Brian Pearce, and William M. Thomson, "Introduction to 'Transcaucasia 1918-19'," *Revolutionary Russia* 10, no 1, (1997): 77-78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546549708575664>.

²⁹¹ Michael G. Smith, "The March Events and Baku Commune of 1918," *Russian History* 41, no. 2, (2014): 203-205, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18763316-04102006>.

²⁹² Anar Isgenderli, *Realities of Azerbaijan 1917-1920*, (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 76.

²⁹³ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 117.

²⁹⁴ İsmayıl Musa, *Azərbaycan Beynəlxalq Münasibətlər Sistemində (Mart 1917 - Aprel 1920-ci illər)*, (Bakı: "Bakı Universiteti" nəşriyyatı, 2011), 25.

²⁹⁵ Yalçın Murgul, *Baku Expedition of 1917-1918: A Study of the Ottoman Policy towards the Caucasus*. (MA thesis, Bilkent University [Türkiye], 2007), 182.

Independence movements gained momentum with the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) on May 28, 1918,²⁹⁶ in Tbilisi by the National Council of Azerbaijan (NCA).²⁹⁷ As the first democratic republic in the Muslim world, the ADR faced both opportunities and challenges in defining its place among newly emerging states in the region. Mahammad Amin Rasulzade headed the interim administration until the formal government was established. During these events, on June 4, the Batum Treaty was signed between the OE and the ADR.²⁹⁸

Despite the declaration of independence by the ADR, the Qajar State in Iran, being a Muslim state, initially hesitated to recognize the independence of the ADR. Iran's initial refusal to recognize the ADR was explained by the political concerns raised by the name "Azerbaijan." Iranian officials argued that Azerbaijan is the name of a historical region in northern Iran and that it is unacceptable to give this name to a region in the Caucasus. However, Iran's main concern was viewing the ADR as a political and ideological threat that could lead to the future unification of the Azerbaijani territories that were divided in 1828.²⁹⁹

In May 1918, the Bolshevik army in Baku launched its march from Baku to Ganja, that led to the first Azerbaijani government seeking aid from the OE on June 2, before signing Batum Treaty. Consequently, the government moved from Tbilisi to Ganja, where the second government was established under the leadership of Fatali Khan Khoyski.³⁰⁰ Between June and October of 1918, significant events took place in the Caucasus, specifically in Azerbaijan. With the signing of the Treaty of Batum

²⁹⁶ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 129.

²⁹⁷ Revaz Gachechiladze, "Geopolitics and foreign powers in the modern history of Georgia: Comparing 1918–21 and 1991–2010," in *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012*, ed. Stephen F. Jones, 71-104, (London: Routledge, 2014), 76, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315818207>.

²⁹⁸ Aygun Azimova, "The military-political situation in Azerbaijan in conditions of the conflict of the Bolsheviks and the national forces," *Reconstructing the Past: Journal of Historical Studies* 1, no. 1, (2023): 56-57, <http://dx.doi.org/10.54414/CEWZ6639>.

²⁹⁹ Ramiz Mehdiyev, *ADR-İran Diplomatiik Münasibətləri Qafqaz Fövqəladə Komissiyasının Sənədləri Işığında (1919–1920-ci illər)*, (Bakı: "Şərq-Qərb" nəşriyyatı, 2017), 5-6.

³⁰⁰ Jamil Hasanli, "Azerbaijan at the crossroads of epochs: The first attempt to join the free world (1917-1920)," *The Caucasus & Globalization* 3, no. 4, (2009): 123-125.

on June 4, the mutual recognition of territorial integrity was established between the newly formed three Caucasian republics and the OE.³⁰¹

This treaty held great significance for Azerbaijan, as the OE recognized Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. And, according to Article 4 of the Treaty, committed to ensuring its security. Just two days before the signing of the treaty, at the request of the Azerbaijani government, the Islamic Army of Caucasus (IAC) under the command of Nuri Pasha had already mobilized.³⁰² The situation in Baku remained tense with the presence of Armenian, British, and Russian forces. As the IAC advanced between Ganja and Baku, several clashes occurred in July as they approached Baku. In August, they laid siege to the city. On September 15, 1918, IAC under Nuri Pasha of OE, liberated Baku from Armenian and Bolshevik forces, marking a significant milestone in Azerbaijan's struggle for independence with this victory.³⁰³

Following the liberation of Baku, the national government led by Fatali Khan Khoyski immediately arrived in the city and formed the third government. Thus, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic gained its capital, that would continue to be the country's capital to this day.³⁰⁴ Moreover, the fourth and fifth ADR governments were established by Nasib bey Yusifbeyli between April 14, 1919, and April 1, 1920,³⁰⁵ while the sixth government, aimed to establish by Mammad Hasan Hajinski,³⁰⁶ could not stop the invasion on April 28, 1920. These newly established governments convened to appoint a representative to send to the Paris Peace

³⁰¹ Alexander E. Balistreri, "Revisiting millî: Borders and the making of the Turkish nation state," in *Regimes of Mobility: Borders and State Formation in the Middle East, 1918–1946*, ed. Jordi Tejel and Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, 29-58, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 36, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474487986-006>.

³⁰² Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 132.

³⁰³ Jamil Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan: The Difficult Road to Western Integration, 1918-1920* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 117, <https://doi.org/10.4324/97813156070126>.

³⁰⁴ Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Türkiye-Rusya*, (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1990), 538-539.

³⁰⁵ Nəsiman Yaqublu, *Cümhuriyyət Qurucuları*, (Bakı: "Nurlar" nəşriyyat-poliqrafiya mərkəzi, 2018), 75.

³⁰⁶ Yaqublu, *Cümhuriyyət Qurucuları*, 113.

Conference for the recognition of Azerbaijan's independence³⁰⁷ and deemed it appropriate for the delegation led by Alimardan bey Topchubashov to go to Paris on December 28, 1918.³⁰⁸

The long and short of it, the military intervention by the IAC was vital in establishing authority over most of the regions claimed by the ADR. It also highlighted the strategic military partnership between the ADR and the OE. This partnership significantly enhanced the ADR's position both domestically and regionally. Tragically, this time of cooperation was limited. The efforts of third government in Baku to stabilize the country were ongoing when the world political landscape shifted once again with the end of World War I and the signing of the Armistice of Mudros in October 1918, that led to the withdrawal of Turkish forces from the region.³⁰⁹ This withdrawal marked a new phase for the ADR, as it had to reassess its strategic alliances and prepare for the new challenges posed by the growing Bolshevik threat from the north.³¹⁰ Eventually, with the increasing Soviet influence, the 11th Red Army occupied Baku on April 28, 1920,³¹¹ and the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (AzSSR) was established.³¹²

Lastly, while these events were happening in the North, in early April 1920, the short-lived Azadistan State was established in South Azerbaijan under the leadership of Mohammad Khiabani. Khiabani and his followers named South Azerbaijan as "Azadistan" (Land of Freedom) because the name "Azerbaijan" was given to the

³⁰⁷ Jamil Hasanli, *Leadership and Nationalism in Azerbaijan: Ali Mardan bey Topchibashov, Founder and Creator*, (London: Routledge, 2018), 129-130.

³⁰⁸ Cəmil Həsənlı, *Azərbaycan Xalq Cümhuriyyətinin Xarici Siyasəti (1918- 1920)*, (Bakı: "Garisma" MMC, 2009), 176.

³⁰⁹ Peter Sluglett, "The waning of empires: The British, the Ottomans and the Russians in the Caucasus and North Iran, 1917–1921," *Middle East Critique* 23, no. 2, (2014): 204, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2014.905084>.

³¹⁰ Mahmud İsmayilov, and Nigar Maksvell, *Azərbaycan Tarixi. Yeddi Cildə. V Cild (1900-1920-ci illər)*, (Bakı: "Elm" nəşriyyatı, 2008), 350.

³¹¹ Zaur Gasimov, "Azerbaijan's lost statehood: The post-1980s historiography of occupation," *The Caucasus & Globalization* 1, no. 5, (2007): 144.

³¹² Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, 368.

Baku-centered ADR in the Caucasus. They attributed this naming to the “struggle shown by [South] Azerbaijan, the hardships endured, and the freedom offered to the Iranian people” during the constitutional process between 1905 and 1911.³¹³ However, Hiyabani’s movement was militarily suppressed in September 1920.

After all, to have a comprehensive understanding of the foreign policy of ADR, it was beneficial to first provide a chronological historical background. Once this background was established, then it can be proceeded to analyze the strategic maneuvers and diplomatic engagements that characterized the nation’s external relations. As it was mentioned above, ADR was established in the South Caucasus, marking a critical juncture in the region’s geopolitical landscape. This emerging state began the process of formulating its foreign policy with three main goals: securing independence and sovereignty, gaining international recognition, and ensuring internal stability along with robust regional relations. The steps taken during this period were instrumental in laying the groundwork for modern Azerbaijan’s international relations, shaping a legacy that would guide the nation’s future diplomatic strategies.

Central to the ADR’s foreign policy objectives was the pursuit of independence and sovereignty. The government made a deliberate effort to protect its borders and strengthen its early stage of independence amidst regional instability. In this aspect, the ADR had sought to cultivate relationships with significant external powers, initially with the OE and then with British occupying forces. These relationships were considered crucial for ensuring the ADR’s territorial integrity and gaining diplomatic support against foreign threats. International recognition was another cornerstone of the ADR’s diplomatic initiatives. The republic actively participated in international forums such as the Paris Peace Conference, with the aim of establishing its legitimacy and sovereignty on the world arena. This goal was boosted by efforts to establish diplomatic connections with other nations, so integrating the ADR into the international community and securing formal recognitions of its statehood.

³¹³ Mohammed Taghi Tabatabai-Khatambakhsh, *The role of Shaykh Muhammad Khiyabani and the Democratic Movement of Azerbaijan in the Socio-Political History of Iran 1910-1920*. (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh [Scotland], 1984), 181-182.

Domestic stability, particularly ethnic and political cohesion, was fundamentally linked to the ADR's foreign policy. It was crucial to keep friendly ties with neighboring states, considering their interconnected histories and close geographical proximity. The ADR's deeper foreign policy aims were supported by managing regional dynamics and conserving a stable periphery, with these relationships playing a significant role.

3.4. Soviet Azerbaijan Period: 1920-1991

In the early months of 1920, a complicated political situation had arisen in the South Caucasus. Georgia, that gained independence with the support of Germany, was trying to increase its influence along the Eastern Black Sea; while Armenia, seeking the support of the Allied Powers, had a desire to expand into territories many times larger than its own. Azerbaijan's stance, on the other hand, was based on maintaining its sovereignty among the great powers. Three independent republics that separated from the Russian Empire had become a geopolitical knot for Türkiye, Russia, Germany, and Britain. Following the 11th Red Army's invasion of Baku, the knot began to unravel with the declaration of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (AzSSR) on April 28, 1920. Shortly thereafter, the Provisional Azerbaijani Revolutionary Committee (AzRevKom)³¹⁴ was founded under the leadership of Nariman Narimanov in Baku, and it announced the government called the Council of People's Commissars (CPC). However, despite the declaration of the AzSSR, time was needed for the new regime to settle in.³¹⁵

The tense internal and external situation of the new regime required establishing friendly relations and economic ties with other Soviet republics, especially the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). In May 1920, in a private note sent by RSFSR People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Georgy Chicherin to

³¹⁴ Tadeusz Swietochowski, "National Consciousness and Political Orientations in Azerbaijan, 1905-1920," in *Transcaucasia: Nationalism and Social Change: Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny, 211-240, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 232.

³¹⁵ Cəmil Quliyev, *Azərbaycan Tarixi. Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild (Aprel 1920- İyun 1941)*, (Bakı: "Elm" nəşriyyatı, 2008), 7.

the head of the AzSSR's CPC, Nariman Narimanov, it was proposed to initiate negotiations on "*establishing permanent mutual relations that would facilitate the joint activities of the two republics.*"³¹⁶

As a result of the negotiations, a contract was signed between the AzSSR and the RSFSR on September 30, 1920. Although this agreement was initially intended to be an international treaty, it was signed as a half-hearted agreement resembling a treaty due to the intervention of high-ranking party members like Joseph Stalin and Anastas Mikoyan.³¹⁷ As a result of this agreement, the AzSSR committed to acting together with the RSFSR on matters such as military, finance, food policy, postal & telegraph, and foreign trade. As a result of this agreement, the RSFSR Consulate General was opened in Baku in November 1921, and a federal relationship began to be established between the two republics.³¹⁸

During this period, an important event for Azerbaijan's recognition on the international stage was the Congress of the Peoples of the East (CPE) held from September 1-7, 1920. The CPE, held in Baku, that had recently been occupied by the Bolsheviks, held a special place in the history of the Communist movement. The congress was the first comprehensive initiative calling for the unification of the struggles of the "oppressed" peoples in colonial regions under the umbrella of Marxism. The presence of experienced Bolshevik cadres active in Azerbaijan since before the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, Baku's former status as Russia's major oil capital, and its strong proletarian population made it an ideal setting for this congress to be held on AzSSR territory.³¹⁹

The CPE was organized with the aim of establishing the Bolsheviks' reputation among the Eastern peoples. At the same time, another goal was to incite revolutionary movements in the East through propaganda and agitation. However,

³¹⁶ Quliyev, *Azərbaycan Tarixi. Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild*, 53.

³¹⁷ Quliyev, *Azərbaycan Tarixi. Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild*, 54.

³¹⁸ Quliyev, *Azərbaycan Tarixi. Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild*, 56.

³¹⁹ *Congress of the Peoples of the East: Baku, September 1920*, Stenographic Report, trans. Brian Pearce, (London: New Park Publication, 1977), ix-x.

this attempt to rally the people of the colonial countries around revolutionary Russia ended in disappointment.³²⁰

It is also noted that Azerbaijan's sovietization did not allow for the improvement of its relations with its neighbors. Even the Armenian and Georgian republics, seizing the opportunity of Soviet Azerbaijan's weakness, began to occupy Azerbaijani territories. From the very first days of Soviet rule, the regular armed forces of Armenian Dashnaktsutyun were attacking the Azerbaijani regions of Karabakh, Qazax, Zangezur, and Nakhchivan. Similarly, the Georgian armed forces were advancing along the areas of Aghstafa and Zaqatala in Azerbaijan. Although the AzSSR government sent a note to Armenia and Georgia urging them to withdraw from their territories, this request went unanswered.³²¹

Taking advantage of this occupation, the 11th Red Army command in Azerbaijan launched a military operation against Georgia, and a peace treaty was signed between Soviet Russia and Georgia in May 1920. With this contract, RSFSR and Georgia recognized each other's independence, while active armed conflicts with AzSSR were halted and peace negotiations began.³²² The RSFSR's stance towards Armenia was more moderate, while until November 1920, the areas along Azerbaijan's front line were subjected to Armenian attacks.³²³

In the summer of 1920, in the battles conducted by the Caucasus Front under the command of Kazım Karabekir Pasha (1881-1948), Sarıkamış, Kars, and Gümrü were liberated from Armenian military units.³²⁴ As a result of the successful outcomes

³²⁰ Ramin Fatullayev, "Soviet orientalism and Congress of the Peoples of the East," *Journal of Historical Studies* 1, no. 1, (2023): 74, <http://dx.doi.org/10.54414/SSIB2826>.

³²¹ Jamil Hasanli, "Karabakh: Looking into the past in search of the truth," *The Caucasus & Globalization* 4, no. 3-4, (2010): 134.

³²² Grigoriy L. Bondarevsky, "Relations between RSFSR and Georgia during Civil War and intervention years," *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 3 (1991): 71.

³²³ Nigar Jamalova, "Diplomatic activity of the Azerbaijani Government against the territorial claims of the Republic of Armenia (1918-1920)," *Review of Armenian Studies* 47, (2023): 159.

³²⁴ İsmail İsmayilov, *Azərbaycan-Türkiyə Mədəni Əlaqələri XX Əsrdə*, (Bakı: Azərbaycan Dövlət Neft Akademiyasının Mətbəəsi, 2004), 45.

achieved by the Ankara Government in the East, the Treaty of Gumru was signed with Armenia on December 3, 1920, and Türkiye's eastern border was largely drawn.³²⁵

However, due to Armenia's rapid occupation by the Bolsheviks and the establishment of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ArSSR) on November 29, 1920, this treaty was not ratified.³²⁶ Shortly after, with the Sovietization of Georgia (Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, a.k.a. Georgian SSR), the Moscow administration completed its *de jure* sovereignty in the Caucasus. As a result, the governments-in-exile of the three republics declared that they would fight against the Soviets to restore their republics.³²⁷

Although these three republics became Sovietized, shortly thereafter they began to develop relations with Türkiye, under the administration of the Ankara Government, under Moscow's supervision. On March 16, 1921, the Soviet republics in the South Caucasus, Türkiye, and the RSFSR signed the Treaty of Moscow, and today's borders were drawn.³²⁸ Following the success of the Ankara Government against the Greek occupation in Sakarya, the Treaty of Kars was signed on October 13, 1921, between these republics, and Türkiye's eastern border was completely determined.³²⁹

As a result of these agreements, during the Turkish War of Independence, relations began to develop between the AzSSR and the Ankara Government. Türkiye's ambassador in Baku, Memduh Şevket (Esendal), requested assistance from the AzRevKom to the Ankara Government in the fields of economy and energy in April

³²⁵ İbrahim Tellioğlu, *Başlangıçtan Günümüze Türkiye-Azerbaycan İlişkileri*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2014), 715.

³²⁶ Ricardo Torres, "The normalization process between Turkey and Armenia," *Consejo Argentino para las Relaciones Internacionales* 71, (2011): 1.

³²⁷ Timothy Blauvelt, and Ketevan Akhobadze, "Perspectives on the August 1924 Uprising in Georgia," *Caucasus Survey* 12, (2024): 6, <https://doi.org/10.30965/23761202-bja10042>.

³²⁸ Jamil Hasanli, *The Sovietization of Azerbaijan: The South Caucasus in the Triangle of Russia, Turkey, and Iran, 1920–1922*, (Utah: University of Utah Press, 2017), 148. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book58355>.

³²⁹ Arzu Boy, "Türk kaynaklarına göre Gümrü ve Kars Antlaşmalarına yönelik genel bir değerlendirme," *Route Educational and Social Science Journal* 5, no. 8, (2018): 1411.

1921. Shortly thereafter, various forms of aid, primarily petroleum products, were sent to Ankara. In June 1921, Ibrahim Abilov, appointed as ambassador to Ankara, presented his credentials to Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) Pasha in October 1921, and the flag of the Azerbaijan SSR was raised on the embassy building.³³⁰

The period between April 28, 1920, and March 12, 1922, can be described as one of internal and external uncertainty and contradictions in social, economic, and political relations for Azerbaijan. With the Bolsheviks gaining the upper hand in the Russian Civil War, the spirit and enthusiasm of the “Independent Soviet Azerbaijan” separate from Moscow were gradually fading during this short period. As the flag, emblem, currency, and postage stamps of the AZSSR began to appear in public life, this new identity, determined by Moscow’s directives, was also causing it to lose its so-called independence. This “semi-independent” AzSSR had relations with some states in the Baltic,³³¹ Caucasus, and Turkestan, and a few Western countries also had representations in Baku.

However, this situation, especially with Stalin’s assertion in the important party meeting held in Baku in November 1920 that “*it is impossible to be independent from the Communist Party,*” increasingly limited the “level of independence” of the new Soviet republics. These Soviet republics began to be governed at an increasingly authoritarian level. Thus, their foreign policies were regulated by the authorities of Soviet Russia. As a result, diplomatic missions and delegations accredited to the RSFSR government began to conduct their relations with all Soviet republics not directly, but solely through the RSFSR People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs.³³²

This de facto dependency soon manifested itself de jure as well. On March 12, 1922, the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (TSFSR) was established with the unification of the three Soviet republics in the Caucasus. After the

³³⁰ Türkan Necefoğlu, “İstihbaratta diplomatik misyonların rolü: Ebilov Vakası,” *Uluslararası İdil-Ural ve Türkistan Araştırmaları Dergisi* 7, no. 1, (2025): 103, <https://doi.org/10.59305/ijyuts.1586881>.

³³¹ Musa Qasimov, *Xarici Dövlətlər və Azərbaycan: Aprel İşğalından SSRİ Yaradılana Qədərki Dövrə Diplomatik-Siyasi Münasibətlər*, (Bakı: “Qanun” nəşriyyatı, 1998), 103.

³³² Quliyev, *Azərbaycan Tarixi. Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild*, 48-49.

unification of the three Soviet republics in the Caucasus for economic reasons, a new phase began towards their complete rapprochement. In fact, beneath the political unification of the republics, groundwork was being laid for the next step towards the restriction of their independence.³³³ The main goal was to make other nations colonies of Russia once again. Stalin's words in November 1920 were an indicator of the policy to be implemented: *"I am not in favor of Azerbaijan's independence; some communists cannot be independent from others."*³³⁴

Therefore, the TSFSR was also used in accordance with this policy. For example, as the first measure, it was ordered that only Russian be used in the administration of the TSFSR instead of the languages of the three peoples, taking into account economic and political reasons. In Stalin's initial project, these three republics were to be autonomous republics within the RSFSR. However, the Georgians opposed this and complained to Lenin, leading to the first and last discussion of nationalities policies. As a result, with the idea of a union of republics, the *"Declaration and Treaty on the Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics"* (USSR) was adopted on December 30, 1922, forming the Soviet Union.³³⁵ Otherwise, instead of being a republic member of the Union, Azerbaijan would have been an autonomous republic of the RSFSR.

With the establishment of the Soviet Union, which would last for approximately 70 years, two significant developments occurred in a short period from Azerbaijan's perspective: the return of the Nakhchivan to Azerbaijan and the creation of the an autonomous oblast in Karabakh, that had been under Azerbaijan's control. As mentioned above, according to the Treaty of Moscow signed on March 16, 1921, while the eastern borders of Türkiye were being drawn, Nakhchivan would also become an inseparable part of Azerbaijan as an autonomous region. However, this situation had not yet been fully implemented in practice. With the elections held at the end of 1921, the Nakhchivan Soviet Socialist Republic (Nakhchivan SSR) was

³³³ Quliyev, *Azərbaycan Tarixi. Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild*, 143.

³³⁴ İsmayıl Musa, *Dövlətlərarası Münasibətlər və Azərbaycan (Aprel 1920 - Oktyabr 1991-ci illər)*, (Bakı: "Bakı Universiteti" nəşriyyatı, 2008), 17.

³³⁵ Altstadt, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet Azerbaijan*, 44.

established on January 25, 1922. After this development, as a result of the struggles over the next two years, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Nakhchivan ASSR) was declared on January 8, 1924, within the AzSSR.³³⁶ Again, with the same struggles, after nearly three years of preparatory work, on July 7, 1923, the Azerbaijan Central Executive Committee finally issued a decree on the establishment of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) within the AzSSR.³³⁷

Although it does not concern the AzSSR, another political issue related to Azerbaijan between 1920-1939 was Azerbaijani Political Emigration. After the invasion on April 27, 1920, the founders of the ADR, socio-political figures, and prominent intellectuals were forced to emigrate from Azerbaijan. The national forces that remained in Azerbaijan fought against the Soviet regime for 20 years, while those in exile continued their struggle uninterrupted for 70 years.

The first Azerbaijani exile was to Georgia. However, with the founders of the ADR, including Fatali Khan Khoyski, falling victim to Armenian terrorism and later the invasion of Georgia, Azerbaijani exiles began moving from Georgia to Türkiye. The presence of Azerbaijani immigrants in Türkiye, such as Ali bey Huseynzade, who had arrived earlier, made the migration to this country more favorable. In addition, it was easier to move to European countries from Türkiye.³³⁸

After the Turkish War of Independence, Azerbaijani immigrants in Türkiye were primarily receiving financial support from Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, the head of the “Turkish Hearths” (*Türk Ocakları*) and the Minister of National Education. Starting from 1927, due to Türkiye’s “forced friendship” with the USSR, not only Azerbaijani immigrants but also Turkish-Muslim immigrants from the Caucasus, Turkestan, and other regions began to gradually prioritize relations with European

³³⁶ Quliyev, *Azərbaycan Tarixi. Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild*, 160-163.

³³⁷ Cəmil Həsəni, *Sovet Dövründə Azərbaycanın Xarici Siyasəti (1920-1939)*, (Bakı, “Adiloğlu” nəşriyyatı, 2012), 221.

³³⁸ Quliyev, *Azərbaycan Tarixi. Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild*, 66.

countries. The reason for this was that Europeans, fearing the spread of communism to Europe, supported the political exiles coming from the USSR.³³⁹

At the end of the third decade of the 20th century, the world was gradually heading towards war. The signing of the Soviet-German Pact and the secret protocols in addition to this pact on August 23, 1939, was the final spark that ignited the world war. After entering cooperation with Nazi Germany, the USSR became a serious threat to Western allies, prompting the British and French to prepare various military plans against it. One of these plans was to bomb Baku by attacking the South Caucasus with the French army. Although London hesitated, the ruling circles in France were discussing first at the political level and then at the military level the disabling of the oil fields in Baku to cut off the oil flowing from the Soviet Union to Germany.³⁴⁰

On June 22, 1941, with Germany's attack on the USSR, significant changes occurred during World War II. Upon the entry of the war, that would be referred to as the "Great Patriotic War" in the Soviet Union, a large mobilization had been carried out in the AzSSR. While rallies against fascism were organized and volunteers were enlisted from the first days of the war, a total of 700,000 people from Azerbaijan were mobilized into the Soviet army between 1941 and 1945. Moreover, despite all the difficulties of the war, Azerbaijani oil workers were able to supply the country with a record level of approximately 24 million tons of oil in 1941.³⁴¹ This was the highest figure in the history of the Azerbaijani oil industry during the Soviet era. Taking this into account, Hitler had desired to capture Baku since 1941.³⁴²

With the start of the "Great Patriotic War" and Iran coming under the Allies' sphere of interest, important years in the political life of Soviet Azerbaijan were beginning.

³³⁹ Xaləddin İbrahimli, *Azərbaycan Mühacirəti Tarixi*, (Bakı: "ADPU nəşriyyatı", 2012), 98-100.

³⁴⁰ Charles O. Richardson, "French plans for allied attacks on the Caucasus oil fields January-April, 1940," *French Historical Studies* 8, no. 1, (1973): 136.

³⁴¹ Jabi Bahramov, "History of Azerbaijan's Caspian oil production (1825-1949)," *History of Science and Science of Science* 1 (2024): 37.

³⁴² Joel Hayward, "Hitler's quest for oil: The impact of economic considerations on military strategy, 1941-42," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 18, no. 4, (1995): 96.

This was primarily related to the rise of issues concerning South Azerbaijan in the Soviet Union's policy towards Iran. Iran was also on the brink of great events. In the summer of 1941, the Soviet armies, based on the rights granted to them by the Soviet-Iran Friendship Treaty signed in 1921, were already stationed along the borders of South Azerbaijan. This treaty granted the Soviet Union the right to deploy troops in northern Iran, including Tehran, if there was a threat from a third country, in line with its "self-defense interests." In accordance with this agreement, the Soviet armies stationed along the borders of South Azerbaijan began military operations on August 25.³⁴³

In 1941, the situation changed somewhat. That is, according to the signed Iran-Soviet agreement, a group of Azerbaijani intellectuals was sent to South Azerbaijan within the Soviet forces. This mission that was sent was doing very important work in South Azerbaijan. The most important of these was the publication of the *Vətən Yolunda* (On the Homeland Way) newspaper,³⁴⁴ that was designed as a military newspaper in Tabriz in October 1941. The newspaper quickly spread widely among the people of South Azerbaijan and began to disturb Iran's political circles.³⁴⁵

After it became increasingly clear that the Allies of World War II would win the war, an agreement was reached to hold a conference at Dumbarton Oaks in the summer of 1944, following the Tehran Conference (1943) and before the Yalta Conference (1945). Since the establishment of the United Nations (UN) Organization would be addressed at the upcoming Dumbarton Oaks conference,³⁴⁶ the Soviet Union was seeking various ways to be represented with greater voting rights in this organization. One of these options was to represent the union republics in the UN as

³⁴³ Jamil Gasanly, "Iranian Azerbaijan: The epicenter of a cold war," *The Caucasus & Globalization* 2, no. 1, (2008): 7.

³⁴⁴ S. A. Mahmudova, "Theme and language style in Anvar Mammadkhanli's stories," in *Proceedings of the III International Scientific and Practical Conference: The Modern Vector of the Development of Science*, March 2-3, 2023, (Philadelphia, World of Conferences, 2023), 67, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7709801>.

³⁴⁵ Elnarə Məmmədova, "«Azərbaycan məktəbi» jurnalında Cənubi Azərbaycan təhsili məsələləri," *Naxçıvan Müəllimlər İnstitutunun əsərləri*, №1, (2018): 2.

³⁴⁶ Robert C. Hilderbrand, *Dumbarton Oaks: The Origins of the United Nations and the Search for Postwar Security*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 1990), ix-x.

independent states. However, according to the universal principles of international relations and international law, states without a ministry of foreign affairs could not be considered independent states. For this purpose, a law was adopted in Moscow regarding the delegation of foreign relations authority to the member republics and the re-establishment of the People's Commissariats for Foreign Affairs (PCFA).³⁴⁷

Thus, 22 years after the dissolution of the PCFA of the AzSSR, a law was adopted on March 8, 1944, during a session of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR, establishing the PCFA of the Azerbaijan SSR, again. According to the laws approved by the Supreme Soviet of the AzSSR in its March 1944 session, the AzSSR was granted the right to establish direct relations with foreign states, enter into agreements, and exchange diplomatic and consular representations. As a result of the amendments and additions made to the Constitution, the AzSSR gained the authority to establish connections with foreign countries, send and recall diplomatic missions. However, the article added to Article 46 of the Republic Constitution stated that the AzSSR's relations with foreign countries should be within the framework of the general rules set by the USSR for foreign relations.³⁴⁸ The first commissioner of the PCFA of the AzSSR, that was established for formal purposes and continued to exist in an ineffective manner in subsequent years, had been Mahmud İsmayil oğlu Aliyev (1944-1958),³⁴⁹ followed by Tahira Akbar qızı Tahirova (1953-1983),³⁵⁰ who had held this position until the "liberalization" moves of the 1980s.

During the Soviet period, Azerbaijan was not a subject of international law. It could only conduct its international relations through Moscow. While Moscow did not allow Azerbaijan to establish direct political and commercial-economic relations with foreign states, it permitted the maintenance of primarily cultural relations in the first decades after World War II. However, these cultural relations were conducted

³⁴⁷ Cəmil Həsənlı, *İkinci Dünya Müharibəsi İllərində Azərbaycan Hərbi, Siyasi və Diplomatik Münasibətlərdə (1939-1945)*, (Bakı: "Yazıcı" nəşriyyatı, 2015), 105.

³⁴⁸ "About us," Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed May 21, 2024, <https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/category/haqqimizda>.

³⁴⁹ Musa Qasımlı, and Elmira Hüseynova, *Azərbaycan Xarici İşlər Nazirləri*, (Bakı: "Adiloğlu" nəşriyyatı, 2003), 68-70.

³⁵⁰ Qasımlı, and Hüseynova, *Azərbaycan Xarici İşlər Nazirləri*, 71-74.

under Moscow's strict control and subordination. Political relations, on the other hand, were primarily conducted with the communist and socialist parties of socialist and developing states. Moscow gradually began to permit Azerbaijan's trade and economic relations with foreign states starting from the 1960s. The Republic's geopolitical position, economic, scientific-technical potential, and resources have formed the material basis of its international economic relations. In this way, Azerbaijan became a participant in international economic relations within its own capabilities between 1946 and 1990.³⁵¹

Between 1946 and 1990, Azerbaijan, as part of the Soviet Union, largely maintained its international economic and cultural relations within this framework. As the USSR's global influence increased, Azerbaijan also played an active role in economic aid directed towards the Eastern Bloc and states choosing the "socialist" development path. Primarily in oil and machine manufacturing, industrial products from Azerbaijan were being exported to these countries. In the 1950s and 1960s, the volume and diversity of Azerbaijan's industrial exports significantly increased. For example, 62 percent of external exports consisted of oil and machinery industry products in 1964. The economic relations with Western countries, on the other hand, remained more limited under the general control of the Soviet Union.³⁵²

At the same time, Azerbaijan established extensive international relations in all major areas of cultural life. One of the main aspects of these relations has been Azerbaijan's participation in global processes with its scientific potential. Especially since the 1950s, Azerbaijan's scientific thought has begun to be recognized internationally. Azerbaijani scientists have conducted joint studies with their colleagues in foreign countries to solve many scientific problems.³⁵³

Between 1946 and 1991, two important issues concerning modern Azerbaijan's foreign policy emerged: the South Azerbaijan issue and the deportation of

³⁵¹ Musa Qasımov, and Mahir Abdullayev. *Beynəlxalq Münasibətlər Tarixi (XX Əsr. II Hissə. 1946-1999-cü illər)*, (Bakı: "Bakı Universiteti" nəşriyyatı, 1999), 5.

³⁵² Tahir Qaffarov, *Azərbaycan Tarixi. Yeddi Cildə. VII Cild (1941-2002-ci illər)*, (Bakı: "Elm" nəşriyyatı, 2008), 215.

³⁵³ Qaffarov, *Azərbaycan Tarixi*, 219.

Azerbaijanis from the West Azerbaijan that has been under the control of the ArSSR.

Regarding the South Azerbaijan issue, there has been an intense search within the framework of efforts to fill the post-Soviet ideological void and reinforce the nation-state identity. As a result, the South Azerbaijan issue held a significant place in the dysfunctional foreign policy of the AzSSR and created an oxymoronic interaction space between the Soviet Union's regional interests and local Azerbaijani nationalist aspirations. This issue was utilized as part of the Soviet Union's geopolitical strategies in the Middle East at the beginning of the Cold War and deepened with Moscow's support for the Azerbaijani separatist movement following the rejection of its oil concession demands.³⁵⁴

To summarize very briefly, on September 1945, Ja'far Pishevari announced establishment of Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP) in Tabriz.³⁵⁵ In the same month, the provincial branch of the Tudeh Party, a communist party, dissolved and joined ADP.³⁵⁶

In November 1945, large anti-government demonstrations were held in South Azerbaijan. These protests were organized by ADP with the support of the Soviet Union. The Iranian government sent troops to suppress the uprising, but Soviet military forces prevented Iranian units from entering the province.³⁵⁷ In early December 1945, ADP held general elections for an Azerbaijan Majlis, and on December 12, 1945, the newly elected Azerbaijan Majlis met in Tabriz and proclaimed the Azerbaijan People's Government (APG) in Tabriz, the capital of

³⁵⁴ Irina Morozova, "Contemporary Azerbaijani historiography on the problem of 'Southern Azerbaijan' after World War II," *Iran & the Caucasus* 9, no. 1, (2005): 85-86.

³⁵⁵ Fernande Raine, "Stalin and the creation of the Azerbaijan democratic party in Iran, 1945," *Cold War History* 2, no. 1, (2001): 9-10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/713999940>.

³⁵⁶ Jody Emami-Yeganeh, "Iran vs Azerbaijan (1945-46): Divorce, separation or reconciliation?" *Central Asian Survey* 3, no. 2, (1984): 12-13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634938408400461>.

³⁵⁷ Kenneth L. Hill, "Soviet Union: Conflict with Iran over Azerbaijan, 1945-1946," in *Encyclopedia of Conflicts since World War II*, ed. James Ciment, 881-886, (London: Routledge, 2012), 883, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203058664>.

Southern Azerbaijan.³⁵⁸ Although the Soviet Union had supported this government for a while, it dissolved after the Soviets withdrew their troops a year later.³⁵⁹

The other issue, the deportation of Azerbaijanis, also occurred in parallel with the rising local nationalist policies in the Soviet Union after World War II. The Moscow administration incited the peoples of the Caucasus against each other in accordance with its policy of creating conflict centers to maintain its sovereignty. Empowered by this, Armenian nationalists wanted the expulsion of Azerbaijanis from their historical-ethnic lands in the ArSSR and the transfer of Karabakh to the Armenians. In accordance with these demands, the next phase of expelling Azerbaijanis from their ancestral lands under the control of the ArSSR began. In December 1947, the Council of Ministers of the USSR made a decision on this matter. According to this decision, 100,000 of the 400,000 Azerbaijanis in the ArSSR were expelled from their homeland between 1948 and 1956. One third of them lost their lives under difficult conditions.³⁶⁰

Another important issue between 1946 and 1990 was the relationship with *Azerbaijanis abroad*. Before Heydar Aliyev came to power in Azerbaijan, there had been almost no connection with Azerbaijanis living abroad, and they were viewed as traitors. The view towards those who emigrated to foreign countries (especially after April 1920), and those who were captured during World War II but did not return out of fear of the ruthless Stalin repression was extremely negative.³⁶¹

At the intersection of Heydar Aliyev's political genius and Azerbaijan's national interests, the need for an organization to foster relations with Azerbaijanis living abroad had emerged as a strategic necessity. Given the privileged circumstances of the ArSSR having a State Committee for relations with Armenians abroad since 1964

³⁵⁸ Emami-Yeganeh, "Iran vs Azerbaijan," 14-15.

³⁵⁹ Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War: The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 255.

³⁶⁰ Qaffarov, *Azərbaycan Tarixi*, 109-113.

³⁶¹ Musa Qasımlı, *Heydər Əliyev - İstiqaləyə Gedən Yol (1969-1987-ci illər)*, (Bakı: "Bakı Universiteti" nəşriyyatı, 2006), 208.

and the presence of an international airport in Yerevan,³⁶² it was striking that Azerbaijan lagged behind in establishing cultural ties with its compatriots abroad. Moscow's long-term neglect of this situation was a sign of the "foster sibling" treatment towards Azerbaijan. However, from 1986 onwards, the socio-political processes in the USSR³⁶³ and the new territorial claims of the Armenians fueled the sense of national independence in Azerbaijan, causing the people to flood into the squares. During these turbulent years, the Soviet leadership decided to establish *Xaricdə Yaşayan Həmvətənlərlə Mədəni Əlaqə Cəmiyyəti* (The Association for Cultural Relations with Compatriots Living Abroad), known as "Vətən" Cəmiyyəti (the "Vatan" [Motherland] Association), with the aim of calming the growing public anger and keeping relations with expellee Azerbaijanis under surveillance.³⁶⁴

Azerbaijan started on an intense struggle for independence in the late 1980s with the weakening of the Soviet Union. During this period of accelerated national awakening, the people's demands for freedom and independence manifested through protests and resistance movements. Despite tragic events like *Black January* in 1990, the Azerbaijani people's desire for independence did not weaken. On the contrary, it strengthened. This determined struggle culminated in the re-declaration of the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan on October 18, 1991, marking the beginning of a new period in the country's history.³⁶⁵

3.5. Restoration of Independence Period: 1991-1993

The last quarter of the 1980s has gone down in Azerbaijan's history as a new period of struggle for restoration of independence. There have been various factors

³⁶² Abid Tahirli, "Vətən sevgisi - "Vətən" Cəmiyyəti," *Ədəbiyyat qazeti*, January 4, 2018, <https://edebiyatqazeti.az/news/diger/1178-veten-sevgisi-veten-cemiyeti>.

³⁶³ Victor A. Shnirelman, *The Value of the Past: Myths, Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia*, (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2001), 136, <https://doi.org/10.15021/00002797>.

³⁶⁴ Abid Tahirli, "Vətən sevgisi - "Vətən" Cəmiyyəti." *Ədəbiyyat qazeti*, January 17, 2018, <https://edebiyatqazeti.az/news/diger/1224-veten-sevgisi-veten-cemiyeti>.

³⁶⁵ Elnara Garibova, "Democracy, secularization, and parliamentarism in the Muslim East: The history of 100th anniversary of reforms," in *The Islamic World in Contemporary and Historical Perspective*, ed. Izabela Kończak, Magdalena Lewicka and Agata S. Nalborczyk, 47-60, (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2020), 58, <http://dx.doi.org/10.18778/8220-219-9.05>.

influencing this national independence struggle. Among these, there were economic, political, and social issues experienced in the Soviet Union, as well as developments in the Karabakh region, and the most profound historical legacy of the national struggle dating back to the 1918-1920 period.

Due to the reborn spirit of re-independence for these reasons, an opposition had developed against the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet. This opposition was initiated by the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA), a loose coalition of nationalist and Islamist opposition groups formed in July 1989. Their various agendas ranged from replacing the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet and gaining independence from the USSR to uniting with Iran. Initially, the PFA demanded Azerbaijan's economic independence, political pluralism, and the removal of old-style leaders. However, many of the nearly 30,000 West Azerbaijanis in Baku, who had been expelled from the ArSSR the previous year, supported the PFA, that would call on the AzSSR authorities to either re-establish sovereignty over Karabakh or resign.³⁶⁶

The protests that took place in Azerbaijan in the late 1980s were considered one of the first movements among the other Soviet republics, and this deeply concerned Moscow. This situation was proof that the administration in Moscow's violence against the movement in Azerbaijan was not coincidental. These strong protests in Azerbaijan were rooted in two main reasons. First, it was the growing social problems and injustices that brought to light the people's desire for independence. Second, it was the Karabakh crisis that emerged from the ArSSR's claims on Azerbaijani territories and the inability of the Moscow administration to play a fair role in resolving this conflict. After the dismissal of Heydar Aliyev from the membership of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the highest governing body in the Union, and as First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, in October 1987, the Karabakh issue came back to the forefront with the change in the balance in Moscow.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ Edgar O'Ballance, *Wars in the Caucasus, 1990–1995*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1997), 22, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-14227-9_2.

³⁶⁷ Eldar Abbasov, "The removal of Heydar Aliyev from the Politburo and the beginning of the separatist movement of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh," in *Heydar Aliyev and the Foundations of*

February 1988 saw the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast's (NKAO) Armenian population push for unification with the ArSSR. The Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (SSUSSR) responded to this by placing the area under its special administration in January 1989.³⁶⁸

Nevertheless, by November 1989, the NKAO was back under the control of the AzSSR. In defiance, in December 1989, the Armenian parliament and semi-parliament in NKAO voted to link NKAO to Armenia. These events, that aimed to violate Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and occupy part of its territory, strengthened the Azerbaijani people's sense of protecting their land while increasing their distrust of Soviet rule. The movement that began on November 17, 1988, in Baku's Lenin Square (later Azadlıq [Freedom] Square) in response to illegal actions in Karabakh³⁶⁹ and lasted for 18 days,³⁷⁰ resulted in the establishment of the PFA on July 17, 1989.³⁷¹

These developments were evidence that the national liberation movement in Azerbaijan had become an unstoppable process. This process culminated for the first time among the Soviet republics with the adoption of the Constitutional Law "On sovereignty of the Azerbaijan SSR" by the Supreme Soviet of the AzSSR on September 23, 1989. According to this law, the priority of Azerbaijan's own laws over the Union's was accepted.³⁷²

Modern Azerbaijan, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz, Michael M. Gunter, and Shamkhal Abilov, 57-97, (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 72-73, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58265-3_4.

³⁶⁸ Svante E. Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Department of East European Studies, (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1999), 21.

³⁶⁹ Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 200.

³⁷⁰ Sergiu Musteață, "1989-Annus Mirabilis for the Moldavian SSR," *Plural: History, Culture, Society* 1 (2023): 109, <https://doi.org/10.37710/plural.v1i1.5>.

³⁷¹ Sevil Huseynova, Jafar Akhundov, and Sergey Rumyantsev, "Historians and the State: The Institution of Presidential Power in Azerbaijan," in *Presidential Elections in the South Caucasus: Political Transformations, Imagined Unity, And Memory Discourses*, ed. Ruslan Baramidze and Sergey Rumyantsev, 96-170, (Tbilisi: Favorite, 2024), 115.

³⁷² Rovshan Ibrahimov, "Energy strategy development of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan: A comparative analysis," *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 21, no. 2, (2018): 67, <https://doi.org/10.5782/2223-2621.2018.21.2.66>.

In December 1989, thousands of ethnic Azerbaijanis on both sides of the USSR-Iran border began protesting the tight border restrictions. They were demanding that families and friends should have allowed to reunite after 160 years of formal division and 70 years of near total separation.³⁷³ In fact, it was the desire to reunite South Azerbaijan with North Azerbaijan (AzSSR). This desire was a goal deeply embedded in the identity of all the Azerbaijani people, especially the Soviet Azerbaijani intellectuals.³⁷⁴

On December 31, 1989, after approximately one month of relatively passive protest, a significant number of demonstrators attacked border stations and the fence that separated the two states.³⁷⁵ On January 4, 1990, hundred thousand people protested the border restrictions with Iran. Furthermore, thousands of Azerbaijanis began illegally crossing the frontier. Because of that, this date is accepted as International Solidarity Day of Azerbaijanis, an annual public holiday in Azerbaijan.³⁷⁶

Meanwhile, with the new year, as the ongoing conflicts between Azerbaijanis and Armenians in ArSSR and Karabakh continued, there was an increase in the number of Azerbaijani refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Baku. Thousands of Azerbaijanis, violently expelled from ArSSR and Karabakh, who had lost their loved ones and been deprived of their homes and properties, were living under difficult conditions in Baku. This situation was one of the main reasons for the social conflict that occurred in Baku from January 12 to 19, 1990.³⁷⁷

To prevent these incidents, additional Soviet military units were sent to Azerbaijan starting from January 17, 1990. The number of Soviet soldiers in Azerbaijan had

³⁷³ Cameron S. Brown, "Wanting to have their cake and their neighbor's too: Azerbaijani attitudes towards Karabakh and Iranian Azerbaijan," *The Middle East Journal* 58, no. 4, (2004): 577, <https://doi.org/10.3751/58.4.13>.

³⁷⁴ Ronald Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 137.

³⁷⁵ Nasib Nassibli, "Azerbaijan-Iranian relations: Past and present," *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1, (1999): 11.

³⁷⁶ Brown, "Wanting to have their cake," 577.

³⁷⁷ Rubaba Yasin Azizova, "New moments in the tragedy of January 20, 1990," *Літопис Волині: Всеукраїнський Науковий Часопис* 25, (2021): 82, <https://doi.org/10.32782/2305-9389/2021.25.13>.

reached 24,000 by January 19, 1990. On the night of January 19-20, 1990, the first attack targeted Azerbaijani television. The aim was to prevent direct announcement to the public via television after the military units entered the city. As a result, the public received no information about the events that occurred. On the same night, Mikhail Gorbachev signed a decree declaring a state of emergency in Baku. Then, army units composed of soldiers and officers brought from the North Caucasus, predominantly Armenian, were ordered to use weapons against the civilian population in Baku to suppress the protests. As a result of the unprecedented brutality exhibited by the army in Baku and other regions of Azerbaijan, more than 130 Azerbaijani civilians were killed, 700 were injured, and 12 went missing.³⁷⁸

As a result of the January 20 incident (a.k.a. *Black January*), the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (CPA) at that time, Abdurrahman Vazirov, left the country. On January 25, Mikhail Gorbachev appointed Ayaz Mutalibov, a Communist apparatchik and former factory director, as the First Secretary of the CPA.³⁷⁹ The presidency position in Azerbaijan was officially established in May 1990. On May 19, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the AzSSR convened and decided to create this new position, while in the same meeting, the deputies elected Ayaz Mutalibov to the presidency.³⁸⁰ This step, aimed at demonstrating the decline of the CPA's power, actually had a "symbolic" nature in practice.³⁸¹

Undoubtedly, Mutalibov was a pro-Russian leader. After the restoration of independence, the most significant foreign policy issue for the country was in the Karabakh region, and the pro-Russian Mutalibov saw the solution to the problem in Russia. For this reason, his first action in foreign policy was to join the CIS, that was established as a continuation of the USSR after its dissolution, thereby declaring his

³⁷⁸ Musa Qasımlı, *Azərbaycan Respublikasının Tarixi (1991-2021): 2 Cildə. I Cild (1991-2003)*, (Bakı: Bakı Dövlət Universiteti, 2021), 67.

³⁷⁹ Jody LaPorte, "Semi-presidentialism in Azerbaijan," in *Semi-Presidentialism in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, ed. Robert Elgie and Sophia Moestrup, 91-117, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 94, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-38781-3_4.

³⁸⁰ Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 222.

³⁸¹ LaPorte, "Semi-presidentialism in Azerbaijan," 96.

intention to continue pro-Russian policies. Mutalibov had also the aim of establishing relations with Türkiye and Iran in addition to Russia. During his presidency, he hosted the then-President of Türkiye, Turgut Özal, on March 11, 1991,³⁸² and subsequently visited Türkiye on January 23-24, 1992. During this visit, an 11-article Friendship and Cooperation Agreement was signed between the two states regarding the development of bilateral relations outside the military field. Moreover, Iran was the first country to receive Mutalibov on an official visit. During this visit, Iran's concern about the unification of South and North Azerbaijan was also addressed.³⁸³

In the elections for the Supreme Soviet of the AzSSR held on September 30, 1990, for the first time in AzSSR history, 43 deputies nominated by the opposition became members of the 340-seat parliament.³⁸⁴ Among them, Heydar Aliyev was elected as the People's Deputy of both the AzSSR and the Nakhchivan ASSR.³⁸⁵ The election of Heydar Aliyev as a deputy in both parliaments was a turning point not only for Nakhchivan but for all of Azerbaijan. The first official outcome of the restoration of Azerbaijan's independence began in Nakhchivan under the leadership of Heydar Aliyev.³⁸⁶

On November 17, 1990, a series of important decisions were made during a session of the Supreme Soviet of the Nakhchivan ASSR convened under his chairmanship. One of the most important decisions among these was the removal of the phrase "Soviet Socialist" from the name of the autonomous republic.³⁸⁷ Thus, from then on, it would be referred to as the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (NAR).

³⁸² Hikmet Özdemir, "Turgut Özal ve Avrasya," *Avrasya Dünyası* 2 (2018): 6.

³⁸³ Seçil Öraz Beşikçi, "Bağımsızlık sonrası dönemde Azerbaycan dış politikasındaki stratejik değişimler ve yönelimler," *Türk Dünyası İncelemeleri Dergisi* 16, no. 2, (2016):238-239.

³⁸⁴ Qasımlı, *Azərbaycan Respublikasının Tarixi*, 71.

³⁸⁵ A. G. Seyidov, "The unforgettable leader of the people of Azerbaijan," *ANAS Reports* 78, no. 1-2, (2023): 77.

³⁸⁶ Abdulla Mustafayev, Gadir Akbarov, and Alakbar Jabbarov, "Heydar Aliyev and the democratic changes that started from Nakhchivan," *Pakistan Journal of Life & Social Sciences* 22, no. 2, (2024): 13739-13744, <https://doi.org/10.57239/PJLSS-2024-22.2.00987>.

³⁸⁷ Qasımlı, *Azərbaycan Respublikasının Tarixi*, 72.

Additionally, the name of the Supreme Soviet was changed to the Supreme Assembly. However, undoubtedly the most critical decision was the acceptance of the three-colored flag (blue-red-green) from the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) period as the state flag. A petition was submitted to the Supreme Soviet of the AzSSR for the approval of these decisions at the state level. A few months after a series of important decisions, Mutalibov signed similar laws in February 1991, removing the “Soviet Socialist” designation from the AzSSR and adopting the tricolor flag as Azerbaijan’s flag.³⁸⁸ However, the name Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan would only be changed to National Assembly (Milli Mejlis) in 1995, again during Heydar Aliyev’s period.³⁸⁹

The process of restoring Azerbaijan’s independence began its final legal and political phase, shortly after the coup attempt in Moscow, with the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan declaring its intention to restoration of state independence on August 30, 1991.³⁹⁰ This declaration, “*On the Restoration of the State Independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan*,” can be considered the first official expression of the state’s will to separate from the Soviet Union and to self-determination. On 8 September 1991, presidential election was held in Azerbaijan³⁹¹ and Ayaz Mutalibov returned to the office as the first president of independent Azerbaijan.³⁹²

Subsequently, “*On the State Independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan*”, the constitutional act adopted on October 18, 1991, was a critical step that established the legal framework of the new state. The democratic legitimacy of the process was ensured by the referendum held on December 29, shortly after the dissolution of the

³⁸⁸ Sevil Huseynova, Jafar Akhundov, and Sergey Rumyantsev, “Historians and the State: The Institution of Presidential Power in Azerbaijan,” in *Presidential Elections in the South Caucasus: Political Transformations, Imagined Unity, And Memory Discourses*, ed. Ruslan Baramidze and Sergey Rumyantsev, 96-170, (Tbilisi: Favorite, 2024), 127.

³⁸⁹ “Heydar Aliyev and the Parliament of Azerbaijan,” The Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan, accessed August 26, 2024, <https://www.meclis.gov.az/news-az.php?id=16&lang=en>.

³⁹⁰ Sergey Miroslavovich Markedonov, “August 1991: The Caucasian dimension,” *Russian Politics & Law* 55, no. 1 (2017): 38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10611940.2017.1349389>.

³⁹¹ Qasımlı, *Azərbaycan Respublikasının Tarixi*, 86-87.

³⁹² Shamkhal Abilov, and Ismayıl Isayev, “Azerbaijan-Russian relations: Azerbaijan’s pursuit of successful balanced foreign policy,” *Orta Asya ve Kafkasya Arastirmalari* 9, no. 19, (2015): 118-119.

Soviet Union on Christmas 1991. The fact that over 95% of voters in this referendum voted in favor of independence has been recorded as a strong affirmation of the Azerbaijani people's desire for sovereignty.³⁹³

By 1992, on the night of February 26, 1992, the town of Khojaly in Karabakh became the scene of a tragedy that violated the fundamental principles of international law and led to civilian casualties. Armenian military units under the command of Major Oganyan Seyran Mushegovich and Yevgeniy Nabokhin launched an attack on Khojaly with the support of the 366th Motorized Rifle Brigade³⁹⁴ of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs. This attack cost the lives of most of the approximately 2,500 civilians living in the town. With the start of the attack, the civilians trapped in Khojaly tried to escape the town to reach the surrounding areas under Azerbaijani control. However, during this escape attempt, they were either killed or captured by Armenian forces near the villages of Nakhchivanly and Pircama.³⁹⁵

The majority, consisting especially of women and children, were exposed to severe cold while trying to escape through the mountainous terrain and died of freezing. The discovery of severed body parts during autopsies on the captured bodies confirmed the claim that widespread atrocities were committed.³⁹⁶ According to Azerbaijani sources, 613 Azerbaijani civilians, including 106 women and 83 children, were massacred during the occupation of Khojaly by Armenian and Russian military forces.³⁹⁷

The massacre of Azerbaijani civilians, mostly women and children, in Khojaly had a seismic impact on the politics of Azerbaijan, that had just restored its independence

³⁹³ Svante E. Cornell, *Azerbaijan Since Independence*, (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2011), 58-59.

³⁹⁴ Cavid Veliyev, "Bütün yönleriyle Hocalı soykırımı," *Fırat Üniversitesi Orta Doğu Araştırmaları Dergisi* 9, no. 2, (2013): 59.

³⁹⁵ Shamkhal Abilov, Natig Abdullayev, and Eldar Hamzali, "Sumgait vs. Khojaly," *Insight Turkey* 26, no. 4, (2024): 281, <https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2024264.13>.

³⁹⁶ Thomas Goltz, *Azerbaijan Diary: A Rogue Reporter's Adventures in an Oil-Rich, War-Torn, Post-Soviet Republic*, (London: Routledge, 2015), 130.

³⁹⁷ Abilov, Abdullayev, and Hamzali, "Sumgait vs. Khojaly," 281.

and led to the ousting of the then-President Ayaz Mutalibov from power. Mutalibov was accused of failing to establish a national army. Because he argued that the forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), that is the post-Soviet Russian forces stationed in Azerbaijan, should be relied upon in line with Azerbaijan's interests.³⁹⁸ So much so that Khojaly was signing an agreement to join the CIS on February 27, 1992, when it was still under Armenian occupation.³⁹⁹

Due to the direct impact of the Khojaly Massacre, Mutalibov was forced to resign on March 6, 1992. However, he temporarily handed over the presidency to his equally corrupt ally, Yagub Mammadov.⁴⁰⁰ Mammadov, on the other hand, pursued a cautious policy during his presidency, that lasted for three months until the new elections, unlike Mutalibov. Especially the bilateral relations with Russia deviated from the trajectory during Mutalibov's period, and a more distant political stance was adopted.⁴⁰¹

However, two months later, another major battle loss in Karabakh would mark another turning point in the country's fate. The city of Shusha, an important center of Azerbaijani culture, fell into the hands of Armenian forces without a fight on May 8, 1992,⁴⁰² paving the way for Mutalibov's return to power. The fall of Shusha without a fight also opened the door to conspiracy theories. Many people were rumored to have sold the town to the Russians to facilitate Mutalibov's return to power.⁴⁰³

Meanwhile, the loss of the strategic Lachin corridor, that connected the former NKAO to Armenia, further aggravated the situation by effectively uniting Karabakh

³⁹⁸ Audrey Altstadt, *Frustrated Democracy in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 19-20.

³⁹⁹ Turgut Demirtepe, and Sedat Laciner, "The role of the Karabakh issue in restoration of Azerbaijani nationalism," *Yönetim Bilimleri Dergisi* 2, no. 1, (2004): 205.

⁴⁰⁰ Altstadt, *Frustrated Democracy*, 20.

⁴⁰¹ Beşikçi, "Bağımsızlık sonrası," 239.

⁴⁰² Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War*, (New York: NYU press, 2003), 190-191.

⁴⁰³ Suha Bolukbasi, *Azerbaijan: A Political History*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 190.

with Armenia. The responsibility for these heavy losses was placed on acting President Yagub Mammadov. On May 14, 1992, during a session organized by the Supreme Soviet despite the lack of a sufficient majority, Mutalibov returned to the presidency while also declaring a state of emergency and canceling the presidential elections scheduled for June 7, 1992. However, these developments were unacceptable to the PFA. Abulfaz Elchibey and his advisors argued that the Mamedov-Mutalibov game was unconstitutional.⁴⁰⁴

As a result, Police Colonel Iskender Hamidov from the PFA marched with his armed troops to the parliament building. Unable to withstand this pressure, Mutalibov left the country and sought refuge in Moscow. With the intense pressure from the public, the parliament, that obtained the necessary majority, elected Isa Gambar from the PFA as the Speaker of the Parliament and thus the acting President.⁴⁰⁵

On June 7, 1992, Azerbaijan, as a newly re-independent nation, went to an important election that would determine its fate. In this election, the main rivals for the presidency were Abulfaz Elchibey, the candidate of the PFA, and Nizami Suleymanov, supported by Heydar Aliyev. The reason that Heydar Aliyev was not a candidate was the 65-year age limit in the constitution. One of Suleymanov's indirect promises was that, if elected, he would invite Heydar Aliyev to Baku "to put things in order." The election results revealed Elchibey's clear superiority. He was elected president by receiving approximately 60 percent of the more than 3.3 million votes cast. Suleymanov came in second with a surprising 33 percent of the vote.⁴⁰⁶

With the election of the candidate supported by Heydar Aliyev, the Elchibey period, which would last exactly one year, would also begin. For a year that was worth a century, he fought against territorial losses in Karabakh, political instability, and economic problems. Meanwhile, the New Azerbaijan Party (NAP), *Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası*, was founded by Heydar Aliyev on December 18, 1992.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁴ Altstadt, *Frustrated Democracy*, 20.

⁴⁰⁵ Cornell, *Azerbaijan Since Independence*, 65.

⁴⁰⁶ Bolukbasi, *Azerbaijan*, 194.

⁴⁰⁷ Qasımlı, *Azərbaycan Respublikasının Tarixi*, 127.

Under the leadership of Elchibey, the PFA government experienced a strategic transformation in the country's foreign policy following Mutellibov's alienation from the people. This change was formalized with the program adopted at the PFA congress held on January 25-27, 1992. In fact, even before the adoption of the program, there were significant differences in foreign policy approaches. The first draft emphasized a liberal understanding, arguing that the fundamental foreign policy doctrine of the Republic of Azerbaijan should be armed neutrality. However, the other draft, that had a conservative and nationalist approach, adopted a more active foreign policy. As a result of the discussions, the foreign policy understanding of this second draft included exactly in the adopted program. This situation signaled that during the Elchibey period, Azerbaijan would adopt a more proactive and nationalist stance in its foreign relations.⁴⁰⁸

It is known that during the PFA's rule, a strategic change occurred in Azerbaijan's foreign policy, and Türkiye was given an exclusive role. Elchibey, who desired to bring the Turkish model to Azerbaijan and expressed admiration for Atatürk, ideologically embraced the Turkism view. Therefore, as soon as Elchibey took office, he made his first foreign trip to Türkiye from June 24-27, 1992.⁴⁰⁹

Another important issue in the foreign policy of the PFA government has developed around its relations with Iran. Indeed, with Elchibey becoming president, relations with Iran entered a tense period. Elchibey's Turkism and Whole Azerbaijan (*Bütöv Azərbaycan*) views, as well as his interest in Türkiye and the West, seriously disturbed Iran.⁴¹⁰

Moreover, during the Elchibey period, relations with Russia also deteriorated. During this period, Azerbaijan refused to join the CIS and ensured the withdrawal of

⁴⁰⁸ Nazım Cafersoy, *Elçibey Dönemi Azərbaycan Dış Politikası (Haziran 1992-Haziran 1993): Bir Bağımsızlık Mücadelesinin Diplomatik Öyküsü*, (Ankara: ASAM, Avrasya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi Yayınları, 2001), 69.

⁴⁰⁹ İrfan Sancak, "Bağımsızlık sürecinde Azerbaycan ve Haziran darbesinin dış politikaya etkileri." *Balkan Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 7, no. 13, (2018): 62.

⁴¹⁰ Yegana Aziz Hajiyeva, "The struggle of socio-political organizations created by South Azerbaijanis for their first language (1979-2005)," *Pearson Journal* 5, no. 9, (2020): 193-194, <http://dx.doi.org/10.46872/pj.202>.

all Russian troops from the country. As the state turned its face to the West, all dealings with Russia were rejected.⁴¹¹

In the fall of 1992, the U.S. Senate passed a law stopping aid to Azerbaijan by adopting Amendment 907 to the Freedom Support Act, citing the Republic of Azerbaijan's blockade of Armenia. The handling of this issue was completely biased. Because Armenia, that launched a military attack against Azerbaijan, was blockading Nakhchivan as the occupying state. From the beginning of 1993, the situation on the front line, especially in the Agdam region, worsened further. Despite the Azerbaijani President signing a decree on March 6, 1993, declaring a regional state of emergency, Armenia occupied the Kalbajar district on April 2, 1993.⁴¹²

Following this occupation, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 822 on April 30, 1993, during its 3205th meeting, demanding the immediate withdrawal of all occupying forces from the Kalbajar district and other occupied Azerbaijani territories by Armenia. Moreover, Türkiye decided to close its border with Armenia. The border, that has remained closed to this day, has been one of the main points of contention in the relations between the two states.⁴¹³

The occupation of Kalbajar had caused great anger among the people. This situation led to the Ganja uprising, where the tension between civilian and military authorities came to the forefront. At the beginning of 1993, a group of officers had formed an illegal military unit in Ganja and had started to refuse to recognize the existing government. The PFA government decided to use the army to suppress the military uprising to put an end to this illegality. However, on June 4, 1993, the attack on the 709th unit in Ganja, commanded by pro-Russian Colonel Suret Huseynov, failed.

⁴¹¹ Kamer Kasim, "The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Caspian oil and regional powers," in *The Politics of Caspian Oil*, ed. Bülent Gökay, 185-198, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2001), 187, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780333977637_6.

⁴¹² Qasımlı, *Azərbaycan Respublikasının Tarixi*, 127-129.

⁴¹³ Shamkhal Abilov, "The discourse 'one nation two state': The position of Turkey in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict," *Journal of Caspian Affairs* 1, no. 2, (2015): 41.

During this time, while 35 people from both sides lost their lives, Huseynov took some state and government representatives hostage who came to arrest him.⁴¹⁴

Further, during these months of upheaval, two new ethnic tensions had reached a level that could disrupt Azerbaijan's internal peace. Amid the chaos of 1993 and the power shift in Baku, Talysh ethnic nationalist leaders in the south declared the establishment of the so-called "Talysh-Mughan Autonomous Republic," bringing the issue of Talysh separatism onto Azerbaijan's political agenda. Local leader Alikram Hummatov seized power in the regional center of Lenkeran in the south of the country, but he could not hold on for more than three months. In the north, neither did Lezgian nationalists shy away from forming an organized group, despite a lack of popular support. The main aim of Sadval, founded in 1989, was to unite the Lezgins in Russia's Dagestan region and Azerbaijan. However, it did not have a significant number of supporters for this separatism.^{415 416}

In May and June 1993, at a time when the state was on the brink of collapse, Azerbaijan faced the danger of civil war. After the inability to suppress the uprising in Ganja on June 4, 1993, the march of Suret Huseynov's troops towards Baku to stage a coup opened the door to a civil war in Azerbaijan.⁴¹⁷ During this challenging period, Heydar Aliyev was called upon to return to power, believing that he was the key to overcoming the difficulties. Because the PFA-Musavat alliance had not been able to overcome the difficulties it faced. Considering the urgency of the situation, President Abulfaz Elchibey, fearing public backlash and to escape this desperate situation, was forced to invite Heydar Aliyev, Chairman of the Supreme Assembly of the NAR, to Baku.⁴¹⁸ Seeing that the situation in Baku was quite tense and learning

⁴¹⁴ Khayal Iskandarov, and Piotr Gawliczek. "Early identification of threats as the means of fighting against hybrid warfare (with a focus on the south Caucasus)," *Social Development and Security* 10, no. 4, (2020): 104-105, <https://doi.org/10.33445/sds.2020.10.4.9>.

⁴¹⁵ Fareed Shafee, "Inspired from abroad: The external sources of separatism in Azerbaijan," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 2, no. 4, (2008): 204-206.

⁴¹⁶ Thomas Goltz, "Letter from Eurasia: The hidden Russian hand." *Foreign Policy* 92 (1993): 115-116.

⁴¹⁷ Arif Yunusov, "Azerbaijan: The burden of history—waiting for change," *The Caucasus: Armed and Divided* (2003): 14.

⁴¹⁸ Goltz, "Letter from Eurasia," 115.

that the troops under Surat Huseynov's control were approaching Baku by about 100 kilometers, Heydar Aliyev arrived in Baku on June 9, 1993, on Elchibey's plane.⁴¹⁹

Arriving in Baku and holding discussions in parliament, Heydar Aliyev moved to Ganja on June 13, 1993, and negotiated with Surat Huseynov. After intense negotiations, Huseynov agreed to lay down his arms and pledge allegiance to the current government. This situation led to the widespread belief that Aliyev had the political experience to bring stability to the young republic. On June 15, 1993, Aliyev was elected as the chairman of the parliament. That date when Aliyev became the *de facto* leader of the state, is officially commemorated as National Salvation Day in Azerbaijan. On June 24, 1993, the parliament granted him presidential powers under emergency provisions to resolve the power lack and ensure the continuation of the state's constitutional processes. Elchibey, who stepped down from power, settled in his birthplace village Kalaki in Nakhchivan.⁴²⁰

3.6. Heydar Aliyev Period: 1993-2003

Heydar Aliyev's rise to power coincided with a period when Azerbaijan was experiencing internal instability and had problems with neighboring countries. On one hand, Armenian occupation was spreading across Azerbaijani territory, while on the other hand, other ethnic tensions and the threat of a coup attempt were developing. On June 24, 1993, Aliyev, who held the presidency, approved Azerbaijan's membership in the CIS while resisting pressures for Russian troops to return to the country's territory.⁴²¹ During the summer of 1993, while the regions of Aghdam, Fuzuli, and Jabrayil in Karabakh were under Armenian occupation, to

⁴¹⁹ Nigar Geybaliyeva, "The fight for political stability and preservation of national statehood in Azerbaijan, 1993-1995," *Journal of Modern Turkish History Studies/Çagdas Türkiye Tarihi Arastirmalari Dergisi* 19, no. 38, (2019): 332.

⁴²⁰ M. Hakan Yavuz, "Heydar Aliyev: The architect of state and nation-builder," in *Heydar Aliyev and the Foundations of Modern Azerbaijan*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz, Michael M. Gunter, and Shamkhal Abilov, 11-37, (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 20-21, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58265-3_2.

⁴²¹ Roy Allison, *Peacekeeping in the Soviet Successor States* 18, (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, Western European Union, 1994), 9.

settle down the internal tensions in the country, Heydar Aliyev first appointed the coup plotter Surat Huseynov as Prime Minister on June 30, 1993.⁴²²

Following that, focusing on the utilizing of hydrocarbons in the Caspian Sea, Aliyev accelerated negotiations with Western companies, primarily American ones. However, with the occupation of the last district in Karabakh, Zangilan, in October 1993, continuing this war, that had been ongoing for six years, began to become exhausting for Azerbaijan. Although the town of Horadiz on the front line was liberated by Azerbaijan's offensive in January 1994,⁴²³ the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia was frozen with the Bishkek Protocol that was signed in May 1994.⁴²⁴

After the freezing of this exhausting war, Heydar Aliyev signed an important contract regarding the export of Caspian oil to the West. This agreement, called the "Contract of the Century," was a production sharing agreement for the joint development of the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli deep-sea fields. This agreement brought together 13 leading oil companies (AMOCO, BP, McDermott, UNOCAL, SOCAR, LUKOIL, Statoil, Exxon, Turkish Petrol, Pensoil, Itochu, Remco, Delta) from 8 different countries (Azerbaijan, the USA, Great Britain, Russia, Türkiye, Norway, Japan, and Saudi Arabia). Thus, the new oil strategy and doctrine were successfully launched.⁴²⁵

This agreement had deeply disturbed Russia because it opposed the consumption of Caspian oil resources by Western countries without its control. Not surprisingly, Prime Minister Surat Huseynov, who was pro-Russian, attempted a coup for the second time on October 5, 1994, shortly after this agreement, to remove Heydar

⁴²² Svante E. Cornell, *Georgia after the Rose Revolution: Geopolitical Predicament and Implications for US Policy*, (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2007), 21.

⁴²³ Gulshen Babayeva, "Armenian occupation action against Azerbaijan and attempts to deceive the world (1990s)," *Науковий Журнал «Політикус»* 4, (2024): 216, <https://doi.org/10.24195/2414-9616.2024-4.31>.

⁴²⁴ Agha Bayramov, "Silencing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and challenges of the four-day war," *Security and Human Rights* 27, no. 1-2, (2016): 117, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02701009>.

⁴²⁵ "Oil sector." President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, accessed April 22, 2024, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/52115>.

Aliyev from the presidency. With the support of the people, Aliyev stopped this coup attempt, causing Huseynov to flee to Russia. Thus, while Aliyev was freezing the war with Armenia on one hand, he was neutralizing a pro-Russian structure that was causing problems domestically on the other.⁴²⁶ A similar pro-Russian coup attempt was carried out in 1995 by Rovshan Javadov, who was the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs in the previous coup attempt and was later pardoned by Aliyev. While the coup attempt in March 1995 failed, Javadov was killed in the clash.⁴²⁷

While Aliyev was solving and postponing two of the three major issues, he had to face upon taking office, he also made an agreement with the West for the export of Azerbaijan's natural resources. He quickly addressed the other issue he faced upon taking office, that was another ethnic separatism. As mentioned above, Talysh ethnic nationalist leader Alikram Hummatov declared the founding of the so-called "Talysh-Mughan Autonomous Republic" in the summer of 1993. Humbatov, who was arrested on charges of separatism and recaptured in 1995 after escaping from a high-security prison, was sentenced to death in 1996.⁴²⁸ However, despite the pressure from the Council of Europe, the new trial in 2002 found Humbatov guilty again, but his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in 2003. However, in 2004, he was released under a presidential pardon, stripped of his Azerbaijani citizenship, and allowed to go to the Netherlands to join his family.⁴²⁹

Heydar Aliyev, since the day he came to power, has frozen one war, prevented one ethnic separatism, prevented two coups, and made an important natural resource agreement that would economically strengthen Azerbaijan. After this contract, called the "Contract of the Century," successive agreements were signed regarding the use

⁴²⁶ Cornell, *Georgia after the Rose Revolution*, 22.

⁴²⁷ Suha Bolukbasi, "Ankara's Baku-centered Transcaucasia policy: Has it failed?" *The Middle East Journal* 51, no. 1, (1997): 93.

⁴²⁸ Karli-Jo Storm, "Discursive-technical landscaping and policing the body (politic) in Azerbaijan: a case study of Talysh activists," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 107, no. 2, (2025): 161, <https://doi.org/10.1080/04353684.2023.2284428>.

⁴²⁹ Karli Storm, "'Diffuse support' and authoritarian regime resilience: Azerbaijanism vis-à-vis Azerbaijan's Talysh minority," *Caucasus Survey* 13, no. 1, (2024): 67, <https://doi.org/10.30965/23761202-bja10034>.

of other oil fields. During the years 1994-2003, under the leadership of Heydar Aliyev, a total of 22 agreements were signed, covering 15 natural resource fields in Azerbaijan's territorial waters and 7 on land. Among these agreements, the "Shah Deniz" field agreement has great significance. With the discovery of approximately 100 million tons of oil and around 400 billion m³ of natural gas in the two major wells of the "Shahdeniz" field, Azerbaijan has become a competitor to Russia and Iran in terms of natural resources.⁴³⁰

With these agreements, the main export pipeline for the oil planned to be transported, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline,⁴³¹ was constructed, and the early production oil was transported to international markets through two pipelines: the Baku-Novorossiysk northern pipeline, established on October 9, 1995, and the Baku-Supsa western pipeline, established on January 18, 1996.⁴³²

In conclusion, during the Heydar Aliyev period, that laid the foundations of foreign policy in the İlham Aliyev period, Azerbaijan's foreign policy exhibited a comprehensive approach with the goals of strengthening the country's newly acquired independence, solidifying its position in the regional and international arena, and regaining the country's territorial integrity. In this process, a balance policy was primarily followed, a rational approach based on mutual interests was adopted in relations with neighbors, and efforts for cooperation and rapprochement with Western countries gained momentum. Especially the secure and diverse transportation of energy resources from the Caspian Sea to international markets has formed the main axis of foreign policy.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter systematically examines the historical trajectory of Azerbaijan, starting from its ancient roots as the "Land of Fire" of strategic importance to the formation

⁴³⁰ Araz Aslanlı, and İlham Hesenov, *Haydar Aliyev Dönemi Azərbaycan Dış Politikası*, (Ankara: Platin Yayınları, 2005), 95.

⁴³¹ Qasımlı, *Azərbaycan Respublikasının Tarixi*, 309.

⁴³² Aslanlı, and Hesenov, *Haydar Aliyev Dönemi*, 100-102.

of the modern nation-state. From the influences of the Persians and Romans to the struggles between the Ottoman, Safavid, and Russian Empires, the sequential imperial dominions have deeply shaped Azerbaijan's geopolitical identity and approach to foreign relations. The analysis particularly focuses on the 20th century, examining the short but effective foreign policy experience of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) between 1918-1920, noting that this period laid critical foundations for future state and diplomatic goals. The following Soviet period (1920-1991) revealed how Moscow's central control significantly limited Azerbaijan's direct international engagements. However, during this period, unique internal political dynamics such as the South Azerbaijan issue and the forced deportation of Azerbaijanis from the ArSSR emerged, that continued to influence national consciousness and future foreign policy goals.

The main conclusion drawn from this historical research is that Azerbaijan's contemporary foreign policy is a direct product of its complex past, filled with ongoing struggles for sovereignty and territorial integrity. The restoration of independence in 1991, during the chaotic dissolution of the Soviet Union and the escalating Karabakh conflict, plunged the newly formed republic into a period of sudden internal instability and external fragility. This chapter has demonstrated how critical events such as the Khojaly massacre, and the fall of Shusha necessitated a rapid reassessment of national priorities and a strategic shift towards seeking strong international partnerships. The leadership of Heydar Aliyev, who took office in 1993, played a key role in stabilizing the country by freezing the ongoing conflict, neutralizing internal threats, and most importantly, initiating a visionary energy strategy with agreements like the "Contract of the Century." This strategy not only secured vital economic lifelines but also positioned Azerbaijan as a significant player in international energy markets, becoming the cornerstone of its independent foreign policy.

Essentially, this chapter reveals that Azerbaijan's journey towards forming a consistent and effective foreign policy is a resilient adaptation process to its historical experiences and geopolitical realities. A detailed examination of these formative years shows that independence, territorial integrity, and strategic economic

partnerships has been pursued continuously and often required a delicate balance between regional and global powers. Lessons learned from the ADR period, the challenges faced during Soviet rule and the post-Soviet transition, and the legacy of these early struggles continue to inform Azerbaijan's current pragmatic and multilateral approach to international relations. This fundamental analysis provides a crucial context for understanding the country's ongoing diplomatic engagements and its evolving role in the South Caucasus and beyond.



CHAPTER 4

FOREIGN ASPECTS OF ILHAM ALIYEV PERIOD

4.1. Introduction

Azerbaijan has not only positioned itself at the intersection of different integration platforms but has also become a meeting point for various external interests. Due to being a focal point for different actors, it has both gained advantages and faced various challenges. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan has made great efforts to prevent its own territory from becoming a battleground for conflicting geopolitical interests. This stance, confirmed by President Ilham Aliyev, is a clear indication that Azerbaijan will not become an arena of conflict for geopolitical disputes.⁴³³

There have been several issues that have occupied Azerbaijan foreign policy after restoration of its independence. These are important components that shaped foreign policy during the Ilham Aliyev period, a dozen years after independence. Although it is possible to categorize these under different main and subheadings, as other experts have done,^{434 435} it would be beneficial to summarize Azerbaijan's foreign policy during this period under four subheadings to help us understand it within a general framework: the Karabakh conflict, energy diplomacy, relations with international and regional organizations, and security and defense cooperation.

⁴³³ Farhad Mammadov, "Foreign policy postures and priorities of Azerbaijan," in *The South Caucasus-Security, Energy and Europeanization*, ed. Meliha B. Altunışık and Oktay F. Tanrısever, 85-99, (London: Routledge, 2017), 86, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315717821>.

⁴³⁴ Mehrban Baylarov, "Analysis of challenges and opportunities for Azerbaijan in the international arena," *Electronic Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 5, no 2, (2023): 11-23.

⁴³⁵ Novruz Mammadov, "About the main directions in the foreign policy of Azerbaijan," *Azerbaijan Focus: Journal of International Affairs* 2, no. 2, (2010): 17-49.

This chapter aims to deeply examine the fundamental components of the proactive and balanced foreign policy approach exhibited by Azerbaijan under the leadership of Ilham Aliyev on the international stage. First and foremost, the Karabakh conflict, that has long constituted the main agenda of Azerbaijan's foreign policy, will be addressed. The historical roots of this issue, its development during the Soviet period, and the conflicts and diplomatic processes experienced in the post-re-independence period will be comprehensively analyzed. Second, the energy diplomacy that Azerbaijan has used as a tool to contribute to regional and global energy security and to increase its political influence by utilizing its rich hydrocarbon reserves will be detailed. Third, the multilateral relations Azerbaijan has developed with various international and regional organizations since restoring its independence, aimed at strengthening security, economic development, and diplomatic influence, will be examined. Finally, the state's complex geopolitical position and the security and defense cooperation strategies it has developed in response to ongoing regional threats will be addressed. This detailed examination aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the foreign policy during the Ilham Aliyev period.



4.2. Karabakh Conflict

The Karabakh conflict has been the main issue that has occupied the Azerbaijan's foreign policy for many years. This regional conflict has played a central role in determining Azerbaijan's position in international relations since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Even energy diplomacy has become one of the effective tools to solve this issue.⁴³⁶ Understanding the significance of the Karabakh conflict in Azerbaijan's foreign policy requires providing a historical background. The current history of the Karabakh conflict is generally addressed with events that began in 1987, but to fully understand this issue, it is necessary to go back to earlier dates, even before the foundation of the Soviet Union. As a result of the political turmoil created by the Russian Civil War that took place between 1917 and 1922,⁴³⁷ the

⁴³⁶ Elizabeth Fuller, "Azerbaijan's foreign policy and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict," *IAI Working Papers 13*, Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2013.

⁴³⁷ David Bullock, *The Russian Civil War 1918–22*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008), 77.

peoples in the Caucasus attempted to unite under fragile federal states,^{438 439} and later pursued the establishment of their own independent republics.⁴⁴⁰ However, the territorial claims among the peoples and the border disputes in the region have formed the basis of the current instability and security issues in the Caucasus.⁴⁴¹

The Karabakh conflict is one of the problems that was emerged at that time between the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR), and the First Republic of Armenia (FRA), both founded in 1918.⁴⁴² Both republics expressed their territorial claims on the international stage at the Paris Peace Conference held after World War I,⁴⁴³ seeking to gain political legitimacy by obtaining the support of the great powers.⁴⁴⁴

However, the well-known formation of the Karabakh conflict were laid with the Bolshevik invasion of the region in 1920-1921. The uncertain status of Karabakh was officially created in 1921 when the Bolsheviks' Caucasian Bureau decided that Karabakh would remain within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (AzSSR).

⁴³⁸ Georges Mamoulia, "Azerbaijan and the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic: Historical reality and possibility," *Caucasus Survey* 8, no. 1, (2020): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761199.2020.1712901>.

⁴³⁹ During that period, the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus emerged as a structure bringing together various North Caucasian peoples. This republic existed as a union characterized by ethnic diversity, encompassing Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, and other North Caucasian territories. In the South Caucasus, the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic represented a broader federal structure that included Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. This federation offered an experience of joint governance for the three South Caucasian peoples, whose national consciousness was relatively strong and less influenced by Moscow. However, it quickly disintegrated, paving the way for the establishment of the independent national states that continue to exist today. Both structures, as products of regional aspirations for independence and freedom, played a significant role in shaping national identities in the Caucasus.

⁴⁴⁰ Svetlana Akkueva, "The Caucasus: One or many? A view from the region," *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 2, (2008): 261, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990801934348>.

⁴⁴¹ Alex Marshall, *The Caucasus Under Soviet Rule*, (London: Routledge, 2010), 88, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203847008>.

⁴⁴² Arsène Saparov, *From conflict to autonomy in the Caucasus: The Soviet Union and the making of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh*, (London: Routledge, 2015), 90, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315758992>.

⁴⁴³ Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, 158.

⁴⁴⁴ Kamala Imranli-Lowe, "The Paris Peace Conference and the Armenian arguments on Garabagh," *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 2, (2015): 219, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2014.978628>.

Then, in 1923, it created the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) in the mountainous part of Karabakh within AzSSR.⁴⁴⁵

During the Soviet Union period, the Armenian population, that constituted the demographic majority in the NKAO, lived an autonomous life as citizens of the AzSSR for 68 years. In the population census conducted across the Soviet Union in 1989, the population of the NKAO was recorded as 187,000; with Armenians constituting 77 percent of this population.⁴⁴⁶

However, because of the political tension in Karabakh, the insufficient participation of Azerbaijani Turks registered in the NKAO in this census have called these numbers into question. Furthermore, after the declarations of independence in 1991 and the intensity of the First Karabakh War, the number of displaced Azerbaijani Turks from the occupied regions of Mountainous Karabakh and the surrounding seven districts has been estimated to exceed 600,000. These data reveal that ethnic Turks constitute the demographic majority in the Karabakh region.⁴⁴⁷

Before the displacement of the Turkic population in Karabakh and its surroundings, starting from 1987, the Azerbaijani Turks population living in the regions of Goycha and Dilijan, primarily in Western Zangezur, which were under the control of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ArSSR), faced intense ethnic pressures. These pressures have particularly triggered the mass migration of many Azerbaijani Turks in these regions to major cities of the AzSSR, such as Baku, Sumgait, and Ganja.⁴⁴⁸ This migration movement has led to an escalation of tension between the two Soviet

⁴⁴⁵ Jamil Hasanli, "How the Caucasian Bureau of the CCRC p.(B.) discussed the Karabakh issue in 1920-1923," *The Caucasus & Globalization* 5, no. 1-2, (2011): 120.

⁴⁴⁶ Katherine Hirschfeld, et al., "The Karabakh conflict, 1988–1994," in *New Wars and Old Plagues: Armed Conflict, Environmental Change and Resurgent Malaria in the Southern Caucasus*, edited by Hirschfeld, Katherine, et al., 31-46, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 32, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31143-7>.

⁴⁴⁷ Alovzat Aliyev, "Migration to and from Azerbaijan," in *Migration Perspectives, Planning and Managing Labour*, ed. Roger Rodríguez Rios, 27-36, (Vienna: International Organization for Migration), 2006, 27.

⁴⁴⁸ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 19.

republics and intensified mutual ethnic conflicts, thus becoming a deepening breaking point between the two peoples.⁴⁴⁹

Starting from 1985, encouraged by the glasnost and perestroika reforms initiated in the Soviet Union, the Armenians in the NKAO took action in February 1988 to join the ArSSR. In response, the Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (SSUSSR) first placed the region under its special administration in January 1989. After SSUSSR's involvement, in November 1989, it reattached the NKAO to the AzSSR. In December 1989, the ArSSR and the NKAO passed a decision in their parliaments to connect Nagorno-Karabakh to the ArSSR. This decision, deemed contrary to international law, has escalated into a full-scale war that following the AzSSR's removal of the autonomy status of this entity in Karabakh in November 1991.⁴⁵⁰

In 1991, Armenian separatists, who had gained control over the mountainous regions where they were in the majority, captured the strategically important city of Khojaly on February 26, 1992, and committed an ethnic cleansing crime against Turkic civilians.⁴⁵¹ In April 1993, following the occupation of Kalbajar, Türkiye decided to close all border gates with Armenia. The political instability, risk of civil war, and change of government that emerged in Azerbaijan in the coming months have created a basis for Armenian occupations in a broader geographical area.⁴⁵²

As a result, the war that began in 1987-1988 came to a temporary halt with a dysfunctional ceasefire following the signing of the Bishkek Protocol on May 5,

⁴⁴⁹ Taleh Ziyadov, "The Galtung triangle and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 1, no. 1, (2006): 38-40.

⁴⁵⁰ Ali Asker, and Zeynep Gizem Özpınar, "Azerbaycan'ı zafere götüren büyük taarruz: 44 günlük savaşın anatomisi," *Avrasya İncelemeleri Dergisi* 10, no. 1, (2021): 86, <https://doi.org/10.26650/jes.2021.004>.

⁴⁵¹ Shamkhal Abilov, and Ismayil Isayev, "The consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh War for Azerbaijan and the undeniable reality of Khojaly massacre: A view from Azerbaijan," *Polish Pol. Sci. YB* 45, (2016): 291, <https://doi.org/10.15804/ppsy2016022>.

⁴⁵² "Chronology of the Aggression," Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/category/chronology-of-the-aggression>.

1994.⁴⁵³ So much so that, until the war in 2020, there have been mutual opening fire and human casualties along the front line. During this period of conflict, approximately twenty percent of the Azerbaijan's territory had remained under occupation.⁴⁵⁴

Azerbaijan has made efforts for many years to resolve the issue through diplomatic means, and together with Armenia, joined in the Minsk Group (MG) established by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 1992.⁴⁵⁵ This group has operated as a platform co-chaired by the United States of America, the Russian Federation, and French Republic, including states such as the Federal Republic of Germany, the Italian Republic, the Kingdom of Sweden, the Republic of Finland and the Republic of Türkiye.⁴⁵⁶

During this process, despite the MG having developed numerous peace plans in its search for a solution, with the support of the international community, these plans have not been implemented. As a result, when these diplomatic efforts did not yield sufficient outcomes, the tension in the region escalated into military conflict. The April Clashes (a.k.a. *Aprel Döyüşləri*) of 2016 have moved both the regional power dynamics and international diplomatic efforts to a new level.⁴⁵⁷

By 2018, the efforts of Armenian President Serj Sargsyan from the Karabakh clan, that had been in power for many years in Armenia, to remain in office led to widespread protests. These demonstrations had continued until Nikol Pashinyan was elected Prime Minister by Parliament on May 8.⁴⁵⁸ In the result of the repeat

⁴⁵³ Nazim Jafarov, and Araz Aslanli, "Russia's policy during the 44-Day Karabakh War," *Insight Turkey* 23, no. 4, (2021): 218, <http://dx.doi.org/10.25253/99.2021234.12>.

⁴⁵⁴ Alec Rasizade, "Azerbaijan's prospects in Nagorno-Karabakh," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 13, no. 2, (2011): 222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2011.578865>.

⁴⁵⁵ Shamkhal Abilov, "OSCE Minsk Group: Proposals and failure, the view from Azerbaijan," *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 1, (2018): 143, <http://dx.doi.org/10.25253/99.2018201.09>.

⁴⁵⁶ Abilov, "OSCE Minsk Group," 146.

⁴⁵⁷ Rovshan Ibrahimov, and Mehmet Fatih Oztarsu, "Causes of the Second Karabakh War: Analysis of the positions and the strength and weakness of Armenia and Azerbaijan," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 24, no. 4, (2022): 604. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2022.2037862>.

⁴⁵⁸ Kate Samuelson, "Armenia's peaceful protester takes power in a bloodless revolution," *Time Magazine*, May 10, 2018, <https://time.com/5272357/nikol-pashinyan-armenia-prime-minister>.

elections held in December 2018, Nikol Pashinyan, who seized the majority in the Armenian Parliament, adopted a more aggressive political rhetoric and policy starting in 2019.⁴⁵⁹

In July 2020, as a result of the attacks by Armenian forces on Azerbaijan's Tovuz region, one general, one colonel, and two majors from the Azerbaijani army were killed. This incident increased calls within Azerbaijan for a military intervention in Karabakh. This attack served as a critical turning point, leading to the escalation that resulted in the 44-Day War after a couple of months.⁴⁶⁰

4.3. Energy Diplomacy

Azerbaijan's energy diplomacy is a strategic component that plays a pivotal role in the state's foreign policy from the perspectives of both regional and global energy security. Possessing rich hydrocarbon reserves, Azerbaijan has emerged as a significant actor in the export and transit of energy resources over the past three decades. In this context, the state's energy diplomacy has long served as an effective tool to support economic development and enhance political influence on the international stage. This diplomacy holds critical importance in ensuring energy supply security and shaping geopolitical balances through pipeline projects extending from the Caspian Sea to Europe and through multilateral energy partnerships. Notably, Azerbaijan has pursued its energy policy not through competition with relevant actors but by establishing partnerships with regional and international stakeholders.⁴⁶¹

After restoration of its independence, Azerbaijan has shaped its energy strategy primarily towards closer ties with the West. The signing of the "Contract of the

⁴⁵⁹ Joshua Kucera, "Pashinyan calls for unification between Armenia and Karabakh," *Eurasianet*, August 6, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/pashinyan-calls-for-unification-between-armenia-and-karabakh>.

⁴⁶⁰ Ruslan Rehimov, and Jeyhun Aliyev, "Azerbaijanis call for mobilization against Armenia," *Anadolu Agency*, July 15, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/azerbaijanis-call-for-mobilization-against-armenia/1910806>.

⁴⁶¹ Kamran Abbasov, *Role of Energy in Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy during İlham Aliyev Era* (PhD thesis, Middle East Technical University [Türkiye], 2015), 6.

Century” in 1994, involving 11 companies from 7 countries, has marked the initial step for Azerbaijan’s hydrocarbon resources in the Caspian Sea to reach international energy markets.⁴⁶²

Within this contract, discussions about new pipelines has began in the early years of the contract. In these discussions, the idea of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline coming to the forefront. The BTC Crude Oil Pipeline Project was finally signed in 2001, a decade after independence. Similarly, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) Pipeline Project was designed to transport natural gas extracted from the “Shah Deniz” field to Türkiye via Georgia. “The Joint Declaration on the Southern Gas Corridor” signed with the European Commission in 2011 marked the beginning of an entirely new era in Azerbaijan’s cooperation with European states. The components of the Southern Gas Corridor include Shah Deniz-2, the South Caucasus Pipeline Expansion, the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP), and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP).⁴⁶³

Since the early 2000s, Azerbaijan has risen as a significant energy exporter, shaping its foreign policy with the confidence derived from economic development. Unlike its neighbors, Georgia and Armenia, Azerbaijan has maintained a balanced approach in the West-Russia equation, strengthening its military alongside its economy driven by natural resource exports.⁴⁶⁴

In this respect, energy stands out as a key instrument in Azerbaijan’s foreign policy. Being an energy exporter has improved its strategic position on the international stage. Azerbaijan’s energy strategy not only supports economic development but also enables the country to conduct multidimensional diplomacy within the framework of its principle of non-alignment. This approach has allowed Azerbaijan to gain greater autonomy in the international system, while energy policies have played a critical

⁴⁶² Gulmira Rzayeva, “The outlook for Azerbaijani gas supplies to Europe: Challenges and perspectives,” *OIES Paper: NG 97*, (2015): 9, <https://doi.org/10.26889/9781784670283>.

⁴⁶³ Tahmina Masimova, “Energy security policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan,” *Научовий журнал «Politicus»*, УДК 327, (2021): 114-115, <https://doi.org/10.24195/2414-9616.2021-5.19>.

⁴⁶⁴ Ranjitabh Singh Yadav, “Energy diplomacy in Azerbaijan’s foreign policy,” *Think India Journal* 22, no. 3, (2019): 577, <http://dx.doi.org/10.26643/think-india.v22i3.8340>.

role in safeguarding national interests and deepening cooperation with other countries.⁴⁶⁵

Towards the late 2000s, Azerbaijan has experienced a significant shift in its foreign policy strategy due to the failure of energy diplomacy to provide the expected contribution to its foreign policy objectives. The West's indifference to Azerbaijan's security concerns, despite being a key energy supplier, has undermined official Baku's trust in the West. The Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008 particularly has highlighted the West's disregard for instability in the region.⁴⁶⁶

Consequently, Azerbaijan has diversified its foreign policy relationships, developing a more balanced approach instead of relying solely on the West. At the same time, alternative foreign policy tools, such as public diplomacy and effective use of the diaspora, has been developed in the 2010s as alternatives to energy diplomacy.⁴⁶⁷

However, during the 2020s, worldwide developments had increased the impact of energy on foreign policy. Following Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, sanctions has imposed by the European Union (EU) to reduce its dependence on Russia. It has meant that Russia was no longer the EU's main energy supplier. In this new perspective, although Azerbaijan could not fully replace Russia as the EU's main energy supplier, it has emerged as a significant alternative with the potential to serve as a key energy provider. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan has faces disadvantages, including its undemocratic governance in the eyes of the EU, lack of access to open seas, regional instability, and limited energy production capacity. As a result, while Azerbaijan has been expected to remain an important supplier for the EU, it is not anticipated to become the primary energy supplier.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁵ Robert M. Cutler, "Non-alignment and Azerbaijan's energy export policy," *Caucasus Strategic Perspectives* 1, no. 1, (2020): 42-43.

⁴⁶⁶ Murad Ismayilov, "Power, knowledge, and pipelines: Understanding the politics of Azerbaijan's foreign policy," *Caucasus Survey* 2, no. 1-2, (2014): 89-90.

⁴⁶⁷ Ismayilov, "Power, knowledge, and pipelines, 91-94.

⁴⁶⁸ Melih Dinçer, "The role of Azerbaijan as the EU's energy supplier: A secondary alternative partner in natural gas," *European Politics and Society* 25, no. 4, (2023): 638, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2023.2288867>.

Nevertheless, its energy diplomacy, as a foreign policy component, has remained the most significant factor shaping Azerbaijan's foreign policy. This element has also played a primary role in the state's bilateral relations. While the role of energy in foreign policy has been briefly explained above, additional remarks are necessary to highlight its impact on bilateral relations, particularly with the West, including the EU. Azerbaijan possesses the capability to use its energy advantage as a soft bargaining tool rather than a hard one in its foreign policy. One of the best examples of this ability is evident in Azerbaijan's bilateral relations with the EU.⁴⁶⁹

However, there are views suggesting that energy diplomacy has not sufficiently advanced bilateral relations. Some scholars argue that, despite Azerbaijan's economic progress due to its natural resources, it has regressed in areas such as law and democracy. This situation indicates a lack of willingness on the part of Brussels and Baku to advance their political relations.⁴⁷⁰ Even if political relations cannot be advanced, Azerbaijan's critical energy infrastructure remains of great importance to the EU and its member states, many of which are also NATO members.⁴⁷¹

Similarly, from the mid-2000s onward, energy security became a key topic in Azerbaijan's bilateral relations with Türkiye and Israel, thanks to Caspian hydrocarbons being transported to the Mediterranean Sea.⁴⁷² For Türkiye, that aims to transition from being a transit country to an energy hub, relations with Azerbaijan have been significantly shaped by energy cooperation.⁴⁷³ This collaboration holds particular importance in the economic and political ties between the two states,

⁴⁶⁹ Çiğdem Şahin, "An evolving energy partnership: The European Union and Azerbaijan," *Eurasian Research Journal* 6, no. 1, (2024): 25-49, <https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2024.1-02>.

⁴⁷⁰ Sabina Strimbovschi, "The influence of energy resources in developing "pragmatic" relations between Azerbaijan and the West," *CES Working Papers* 8, no. 3, (2016): 518.

⁴⁷¹ Hasan Korkut, and Hamza Preljevic, "NATO's New energy security role in Azerbaijan: Balancing the interest between West and Russia," *Marmara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilimler Dergisi* 5, no. 2, (2017): 169, <https://doi.org/10.14782/sbd.2017.71>.

⁴⁷² Alexander Murinson, "Azerbaijan-Turkey-Israel relations: The energy factor," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 12, no. 3, (2008): 47.

⁴⁷³ Bülent Aras, "Turkish-Azerbaijani energy relations," *Global Turkey in Europe*. Policy Brief 15, (2014): 2.

exemplified by major energy projects such as TANAP and the investments of the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) in the Türkiye.⁴⁷⁴

In Azerbaijani-Russian relations, however, energy has not contributed significantly to the development of ties. The primary reason for this is Azerbaijan's perception of Moscow as pro-Armenian in the Karabakh conflict. With projects like BTC and BTE bypassing Russia and its allies in energy transit, another challenge Azerbaijan has faced in bilateral relations has been the potential Trans-Caspian Pipeline (TCP) project.⁴⁷⁵

4.4. Multilateral Relations

Since restoration of its independence, Azerbaijan has aimed to strengthen its security, economic development, and diplomatic influence by playing an active role on regional and international platforms. Pursuing to protect its national interests and contribute to regional stability, it has sought to assume significant positions on the worldwide arena and to establish itself as a strong actor in world affairs. With this strategic approach, Azerbaijan has pursued multilateral cooperation both in its immediate neighborhood and worldwide, engaging with various organizations and alliances. Thus, collaboration with these organizations has become one of the key components of Azerbaijan's foreign policy.⁴⁷⁶

Following the restoration of its independence, the first international organization Azerbaijan naturally has established relations with was the United Nations (UN). On October 29, 1991, Azerbaijan issued an appeal to the United Nations and the world states, declaring its state independence and emphasizing its commitment to progress

⁴⁷⁴ Elçin Suleymanov, Cihan Bulut, and Farhad Rahmanov, "Economic and political analysis of Azerbaijan-Turkey energy relations," *Journal of Management, Economics, and Industrial Organization* 1, no. 2, (2017): 3, <https://doi.org/10.31039/jomeino.2017.1.2.3>.

⁴⁷⁵ Heidi Kjaernet, "The energy dimension of Azerbaijani-Russian relations: Maneuvering for Nagorno-Karabakh," *Russian Analytical Digest* 56, no. 9 (2009): 2-4.

⁴⁷⁶ Arzuman Amirov, "The cooperation of Azerbaijan with international and foreign organizations on the path of global integration," *Studia Orientalne* 11, no. 1, (2017): 7, <https://doi.org/10.15804/so2017101>.

on the path of democracy, freedom, and equality. It also expressed its aspiration to secure a respected place within the international community and to contribute to the strengthening of international security and cooperation. Azerbaijan affirmed its adherence to the UN Charter and its readiness to fulfill the obligations arising from it, requesting the UN members to consider its application for membership in this esteemed international organization.⁴⁷⁷

On February 14, 1992, the United Nations Security Council (UN SC) reviewed Azerbaijan's application and recommended its admission to the organization. Consequently, on March 2, 1992, during the 46th session of the UN General Assembly (UN GA), a resolution was adopted approving Azerbaijan's membership in the UN.⁴⁷⁸ In addition, Azerbaijan was elected as a non-permanent member of the UN SC on one occasion. At the end of 2011, Azerbaijan, Hungary, and Slovenia had been candidates for the vacant Eastern European Group seat left by Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the 17th round of the election held on October 24, 2011, Azerbaijan secured 155 votes from UN GA members, finishing ahead of Slovenia. As a result, Azerbaijan served as a non-permanent member of the UN SC during the 2012-2013 term.⁴⁷⁹

Another significant international organization Azerbaijan established relations with after restoration of its independence was the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). As is known, the OSCE, formerly known as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), was established with the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 to ensure security and stability in Europe and to enhance cooperation between the Eastern and Western blocs.⁴⁸⁰ Although it was renamed the OSCE at the 1994 Budapest Summit, the organization's

⁴⁷⁷ Əli Həsənov, *Müasir Beynəlxalq Münasibətlər və Azərbaycanın Xarici Siyasəti*, (Bakı: "Azərbaycan" nəşriyyatı, 2005), 366.

⁴⁷⁸ Nəzakət Ələddinqızı, "Azərbaycanın BMT-yə üzv olmasından 30 il ötdü," *Səs qazeti*, March 2, 2022.

⁴⁷⁹ "Azerbaijan wins final vacancy on Security Council," United Nations, accessed March 8, 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/10/392772>.

⁴⁸⁰ Karel Tesař, "Can the OSCE provide for collective security in Europe?" *Perspectives* 8 (1997): 81.

structure was not granted special rights or privileges. Consequently, OSCE states have continued to be recognized as “participating” states rather than “member” states.⁴⁸¹

For Azerbaijan, participation in the OSCE took place during the early years of its re-independence. On January 30, 1992, Azerbaijan joined the organization, then known as the CSCE,⁴⁸² and later signed its documents at the Helsinki Summit in July of the same year. The importance of the OSCE for Azerbaijan began with its membership in the Minsk Group (MG), which was created within the organization to resolve the Karabakh conflict. Although intensive negotiations between 2006 and 2009 led to the development of a document known as the Madrid Principles, a peace agreement was not reached. In this regard, the MG’s function was more about preventing a large-scale war for many years rather than achieving concrete results.⁴⁸³

The lack of progress in negotiations, the deterioration of relations with the co-chair countries, and OSCE’s increasing criticism regarding democratization and human rights led to demands for the reform of the MG in Azerbaijan starting from 2013. Azerbaijan has voiced three main requests for changes. The first was the inclusion of Türkiye as a co-chair, the second was the establishment of a secondary group of six countries under the co-chairmanship, and the third, though less frequently mentioned, was the transfer of mediation to the UN.⁴⁸⁴

After the April Clashes (*Apriel Döyüşləri*) of 2016, Azerbaijan has lost hope in the MG. And following the 44-Day War in 2020, it has begun questioning the group’s

⁴⁸¹ Rolf Ekéus, “From CSCE to OSCE: A Pan-European organization for conflict prevention and its relations to the United Nations,” in *Regional Organizations and Peacemaking*, ed. Peter Wallensteen, and Anders Björner, 118-133, (London: Routledge, 2014), 126, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315778518>.

⁴⁸² “Relations between Azerbaijan and OSCE,” Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed May 18, 2024, <https://mfa.gov.az/en/category/regional-organisations/relations-between-azerbaijan-and-osce>.

⁴⁸³ Zaur Shiryev, “Azerbaijan’s perspectives on the OSCE Minsk Group,” *Security and Human Rights* 27, no. 3-4, (2016): 442, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02703016>.

⁴⁸⁴ Shiryev, “Azerbaijan’s perspectives”, 453.

existence.⁴⁸⁵ After the full liberation of Karabakh in September 2023, Azerbaijan's stance shifted toward asserting that the OSCE MG should be dissolved.⁴⁸⁶

Apart from these two significant international organizations, Azerbaijan has been a member of the Council of Europe (CoE) since January 25, 2001.⁴⁸⁷ Prior to this membership, Azerbaijan implemented several reforms aimed at advancing human rights within the country. These included the humanization of criminal policy in 1995, reforming the electoral system in 1997, and abolishing the death penalty in 1998.⁴⁸⁸ However, in recent years, relations between Azerbaijan and the CoE have deteriorated. In January 2024, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) refused to ratify the credentials of the Azerbaijani delegation. A few hours before the voting results, Azerbaijan's delegation preemptively withdrew from PACE.⁴⁸⁹

Moreover, another organization Azerbaijan has maintained relations within Europe is the European Union (EU). The EU has established multilateral relations with numerous countries worldwide, primarily through special programs. Relations between the EU and Azerbaijan have also developed through such programs. Among these, perhaps the least known yet most significant is the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) program, created in 1993 to establish the "East-West" transport corridor. The TRACECA transport corridor was one of the first programs aimed at ensuring and enhancing the functionality of the "East-West" corridor. Azerbaijan's active participation in similar transit projects in the region has

⁴⁸⁵ Ruslan Rehimov, "Azerbaijan criticizes OSCE Minsk group on Karabakh," *Anadolu Agency*, December 13, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/azerbaijan-front-line/azerbaijan-criticizes-osce-minsk-group-on-karabakh/2074973>.

⁴⁸⁶ Elena Teslova, "Azerbaijani president urges official dissolution of OSCE Minsk Group," *Anadolu Agency*, May 14, 2024. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/azerbaijani-president-urges-official-dissolution-of-osce-minsk-group/3218954>.

⁴⁸⁷ Şikar Qasimov, and Flora Qasimova, "Heydər Əliyev siyasəti - müstəqil Azərbaycanda insan və vətəndaş hüquqları məsələləri," *Akademik Tarih və Düşünce Dergisi* 10, no. 1, (2023): 68, <https://doi.org/10.46868/atdd.2023>.

⁴⁸⁸ Əli Həsənov, *Müasir beynəlxalq*, 386-387.

⁴⁸⁹ "Facing expulsion, Azerbaijan quits European parliamentary body," *Eurasianet*, January 25, 2024, <https://eurasianet.org/facing-expulsion-azerbaijan-quits-european-parliamentary-body>.

strengthened its position as a regional leader. The primary reason for this is that both the “North-South” and “East-West” transit routes pass through Azerbaijani territory.⁴⁹⁰

Apart from this program, relations between the EU and Azerbaijan have continued through the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which came into force in 1999. With Azerbaijan’s inclusion in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) framework in 2009, the groundwork for developing relations between the two sides was laid. In 2010, while the EU outlined a new legal framework for the EaP, it proposed an agreement known as the Association Agreement (AA) to Eastern European countries like Azerbaijan. Although Azerbaijan showed interest in this agreement until 2013, it later sought a policy that was more related with its own interests. In this aspect, an alternative program called the Strategic Modernisation Partnership (SMP) was proposed in 2013, and negotiations began in 2016, continuing to the present day.⁴⁹¹

Another significant ‘Western’ international organization that has developed relations with Azerbaijan is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Relations between NATO and Azerbaijan began in 1992 with Azerbaijan’s participation in the Consultative Forum of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC),⁴⁹² later replaced by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). Later that same year, in August, a Military-Political Agreement was signed between a NATO member Türkiye and Azerbaijan. In January 1994, NATO approved the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, inviting Azerbaijan to join. In May 1994, during a visit to Brussels by then-President Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijan’s membership in the PfP program was officially accepted.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹⁰ Kamran N. Abdullayev, “Development of transport connection of Azerbaijan Republic with European Union’s countries on the base of international transit transport projects ‘East-West’ (TRACECA), ‘North-South’ and ‘South-West’,” *Вестник Ростовского государственного экономического университета (ПИХХ)* 3, no. 63, (2018): 13.

⁴⁹¹ Eske Van Gils, “From ‘unilateral’ to ‘dialogical’: Determinants of EU–Azerbaijan negotiations,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 10, (2018): 1573-1574, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1546828>.

⁴⁹² Azizaga Tofiq oglu, Gani-zade, “Azerbaijan-NATO relations 1991–2003.” *Науковий Журнал «Політикус»* 94, no. 479.24, (2020): 7, <https://doi.org/10.24195/2414-9616.2020-4.1>.

⁴⁹³ Gani-zade, “Azerbaijan-NATO”, 9.

In the following years, various developments took place between NATO and Azerbaijan under this program, including the establishment of a diplomatic mission, participation in exercises and peacekeeping operations, and the adoption of different action plans. To summarize briefly, cooperation between NATO and Azerbaijan has developed across eight plans and directions: Partnership for Peace (PfP), Individual Partnership Program (IPP), Planning and Review Process (PARP), Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC), Partnership Action Plan on Defence Institution Building (PAP-DIB), Partnership for Peace Staff Element (PSE), and the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism (PAP-T).⁴⁹⁴

Azerbaijan's relations with "Eastern" international organizations also constitute a component of its foreign policy. However, its engagement with these organizations has remained minimal and largely symbolic. The first organization worth mentioning is the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Although the CIS was established through the Minsk Agreement (Belovezha Accords) signed by Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine on December 8, 1991, it had taken its full form with the Alma-Ata Protocols signed on December 21 of the same year.⁴⁹⁵

The establishment of the CIS from Russian perspective was not primarily aimed at regaining control over the former Soviet states but rather at exerting influence over these republics at the time.⁴⁹⁶ However, Azerbaijan had resisted joining the CIS until 1993. Despite opposing the reintegration of former Soviet states, it eventually became a CIS member under pressure from Russia, during the first months of Heydar Aliyev period.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁴ Elçin Əhmədov, *Azərbaycanın Xarici Siyasəti: Beynəlxalq Təhlükəsizlik və Əməkdaşlıq İnstitutları ilə Münasibətlər*, (Bakı: "Letterpress" nəşriyyatı, 2013), 130-131.

⁴⁹⁵ Europa Europa Publications, *The Europa Directory of International Organizations 2022*, (Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 508.

⁴⁹⁶ Edward Marks, "The CIS and the Caucasus," National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, *Strategic Forum* 90, (1996): 1.

⁴⁹⁷ Marks, "The CIS and the Caucasus", 4-5.

Nonetheless, CIS member states have formed separate alliances among themselves in various combinations, potentially weakening the unity and cohesion of the community. For instance, in January 2000, a treaty was signed between the Russia and Belarus to establish a Union State. In October 2001, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan founded the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), which later evolved into the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Meanwhile, Azerbaijan, along with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, established the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development in the late 1990s, named after the initials of its member states.⁴⁹⁸

After the liberation of Karabakh, there has been pressure from the Russia on Azerbaijan to join the EEU. However, Azerbaijan has avoided becoming a member of Moscow-led international organizations.⁴⁹⁹ Similarly, despite being invited to join the Moscow-based Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), established in 2002 as an alternative to NATO, Azerbaijan has chosen not to become a member of this military international organization.⁵⁰⁰

Instead of these organizations, Azerbaijan joined the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), an economic intergovernmental organization established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan, and Türkiye, along with other Turkic republics in 1992.⁵⁰¹ Similarly, since gaining independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has been a member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). As a Muslim-majority and oil-exporting country, Azerbaijan has maintained strong relations with the OIC. Following its membership, the OIC became the first international organization to recognize and condemn Armenia as an aggressor.^{502 503}

⁴⁹⁸ Europa Publications, *The Europa Directory*, 509.

⁴⁹⁹ Fuad Shahbazov, "Azerbaijan feels pressure to join Moscow-dominated Eurasian Economic Union," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 18, no. 68, (2021), <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-feels-pressure-to-join-moscow-dominated-eurasian-economic-union>.

⁵⁰⁰ Ramiz Mikayilov, "Russia invites Azerbaijan to closer co-op with CSTO," *Apa.az*, October 7, 2016, https://apa.az/en/foreign-policy/xeber_russia_invites_azerbaijan_to_closer_co-o_-250257.

⁵⁰¹ Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, "Economic Cooperation Organization: A historical perspective," *Journal of Political Studies* 24, no. 2, (2017): 579.

Along with these two significant international organizations, Azerbaijan has also played an active role as a member of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). Established in 2009 in Nakhchivan, the organization, then known as the Turkic Council (*Türk Kənaşı*), has since brought together numerous Turkic and Turkic-friendly countries under its umbrella. Following the 44-Day War in 2020, the signing of the Shusha Declaration between Türkiye and Azerbaijan has not only strengthened bilateral relations but also has served as a roadmap for deeper cooperation among Turkic states.⁵⁰⁴

In conclusion, whether through ECO, OIC, or OTS, Azerbaijan has enhanced its reputation and image on international platforms by joining these three international organizations. As a small country, Azerbaijan has achieved significant diplomatic successes through the events it has hosted, the projects it has developed, and its initiatives on the international stage.⁵⁰⁵

It should also be noted that Azerbaijan's efforts to integrate into the international economic system in the post-re-independence period have been supported by its relations with international organizations. These organizations have had a significant impact on accelerating Azerbaijan's economic development, ensuring financial stability, and strengthening its connection to global trade. Through collaborations with institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Azerbaijan has implemented economic reforms and observed improvements in its foreign trade policies. In addition, Azerbaijan's membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) has been critical for its economic independence and alignment with the international trade system. In this respect, cooperation with international organizations has made crucial

⁵⁰² Baylarov, "Analysis of challenges", 17.

⁵⁰³ "OIC supports Azerbaijan's fair stance on settlement of Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki," *AZƏRTAC*, June 21, 2006, <https://azertag.az/en/print/561491>.

⁵⁰⁴ Farid Shafiyev, "Azerbaijan and the rise of Turkic unity," *Insight Turkey* 25, no. 4, (2023): 14, <http://dx.doi.org/10.25253/99.2023254.1>.

⁵⁰⁵ Jovhar Museyibzada, "International organizations as a means of building image and reputation: The case of Azerbaijan," *Eurasian Research Journal* 6, no. 3, (2024): 85, <https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2024.3-05>.

contributions to regulating Azerbaijan's economic relations and reaching its sustainable development goals.⁵⁰⁶ However, it is argued that Azerbaijan's membership in or relations with major Western-centric international organizations have not led to sufficient improvement in the protection of human rights or the provision of fundamental political freedoms within the state. While the incentives provided by the state's leadership to Western policymakers are seen as a factor, the primary reasons are rooted in significant issues such as being bordered by two major authoritarian states, lacking direct connections with Western countries, and the ongoing state of war with its western neighbor.⁵⁰⁷

4.5. Defense Cooperations

Azerbaijan's security and defense cooperation constitutes an indispensable component of its foreign policy, considering the state's complex geopolitical position and the deepening regional threat perception, especially regarding the Karabakh issue. In the First Karabakh War, the U.S. prevented arms sales through Section 907 of United States Freedom Support Act.⁵⁰⁸ In addition, European states, especially pro-Armenian France, did not provide sufficient support to Azerbaijan in this regard, making it difficult to procure weapons from abroad. Even "brother" Türkiye, a NATO member, could not supply Azerbaijan with weapons that it did not produce itself. In the face of all these restrictions, Azerbaijan has remained dependent on Russia, that Azerbaijan perceives as great threat, and this situation has compelled the country to seek new alternatives in security and defense cooperation. It has tried to do this in two ways: by producing them itself or by looking for new purchasing alternatives.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁶ Ummuhabiba Galandarova, "The role of international organizations and associations in the growth of international economic relations in Azerbaijan," *Colloquium-journal* 21, no. 144, (2022): 43-46, <https://doi.org/10.24412/2520-6990-2022-21144-43-46>.

⁵⁰⁷ Radovan Ognjenovic, "The effects of membership in international organizations on the state of human rights and media freedom: The case of Azerbaijan," *Medijski Dijalozi* 9, no. 25, (2020): 331-331.

⁵⁰⁸ Thomas Goltz, "Catch-907 in the Caucasus," *The National Interest* 48 (1997): 41-42.

⁵⁰⁹ Ilgar Gurbanov, "Military procurements on Armenia's and Azerbaijan's defense agendas," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, March 27, 2019, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13564-military-procurements-on-armenias-and-azerbajjans-defense-agendas.html>.

In Azerbaijan, a significant milestone was reached in 2003 with the aim of strengthening the military-technical infrastructure and reducing dependence in this field. The “State Program on the Development of Defence Industry Enterprises of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2003-2005,” that came into force with the approval of Heydar Aliyev, marked the beginning of a new era in the restructuring of the defense industry. The security policies and military construction efforts initiated by Heydar Aliyev has been successfully continued by Ilham Aliyev, who became President in October 2003, in line with the state’s expanding economic capabilities.⁵¹⁰

As a result of this strategic approach, the Ministry of Defense Industry (MoDI) of the Republic of Azerbaijan was established on December 16, 2005,⁵¹¹ by a decree of the President Aliyev. The main mission of this Ministry is to accelerate the diversification of the country’s economy, support the development of the non-oil sector, further enhance the country’s defense capacity, and minimize the dependence on imports for the Armed Forces’ material and technical needs.⁵¹² This step, taken with the understanding that creating an independent defense capacity is a long-term necessity for Azerbaijan, is a demonstration of the state’s determination to meet its own military needs and reduce dependence on external sources.

The main objective of Azerbaijan’s MoDI was to equip the country’s army with military industrial products that meet modern requirements. In this context, new production facilities were established in the enterprises affiliated with the Ministry to ensure the production of equipment and spare parts used in various sectors. One of these is the “Peyk” (Satellite) factory, which is part of MoDI’s Defense, Reconnaissance, Navigation, and Communication Systems Production Union, and was inaugurated by President Ilham Aliyev on December 21, 2007. This facility, that

⁵¹⁰ “Modern and Powerful Azerbaijan is a celebration of Heydar Aliyev’s deeds,” Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Defence Industry, May 10, 2023, accessed May 19, 2024, <https://mdi.gov.az/en/year-of-heydar-aliyev-99/modern-and-powerful-azerbaijan-is-a-celebration-of-heydar-aliyev-s-deeds-1121>.

⁵¹¹ Shazia Mehmood Khan, “Azerbaijan International Defence Industry Exhibition (ADEX) 2016,” *Defence Journal* 20, no. 1, (2016): 30.

⁵¹² “Modern and Powerful Azerbaijan.”

has an annual production capacity of 80,000 m² of printed circuits and produces military and civilian products, has all its production processes automated.⁵¹³

During Ilham Aliyev's tenure, a significant transformation occurred in Azerbaijan's military product manufacturing industrial enterprises. During this period, technological equipment capable of performing complex operations, as well as various types of machines, devices, vehicles, and setups, were established. Twenty-one facilities belonging to the military industry were put into operation. Fundamental repairs were carried out in the scientific and production enterprises named "Iglim" and "Dalga", in the electronic computing machine factories named "Peyk", "Telemechanika", and "Alov", and in the jammer enterprises named "Radiogarashdırma" and "Araz". As a result of these comprehensive investments, the volume of defense products produced in Azerbaijan increased 12.5 times, and the variety of products increased 7 times between 2006 and 2009.⁵¹⁴

Since 2011, Azerbaijan, which has been producing AK-74M (Kalashnikov) assault rifles under the name "Khazri" under a license from the Russian armaments manufacturer Izhmash,⁵¹⁵ displayed the prototype of an Austrian-designed four-seater known as the Diamond DA-42 military passenger plane.⁵¹⁶

Azerbaijan's defense industry has continuously developed to meet the needs of the country's armed forces and other security units. According to the country's 2015 government report, all the various defense products ordered domestically were produced. According to the same report, the value of defense products delivered to

⁵¹³ "President Ilham Aliyev visited Research Production Enterprise," Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Defence Industry, December 21, 2007, accessed May 19, 2024, <https://mdi.gov.az/en/news-30/president-ilham-aliyev-visited-research-production-enterprise-a-%C5%93iglima-%C5%93-827>.

⁵¹⁴ Ayten Jafarli, "Development of the Azerbaijani Republic defense industry in the first decades of the 20th century," *Humanities Science Current Issues* 79, no. 2, (2024): 28, <https://doi.org/10.24919/2308-4863/79-2-4>.

⁵¹⁵ "Azerbaijan begins AK-74M production," *Azbarez*, July 12, 2011, <https://asbarez.com/azerbaijan-begins-ak-74m-production>.

⁵¹⁶ Shahin Abbasov, "Azerbaijan: Baku aims to become regional arms dealer," *Eurasianet*, March 29, 2011, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-baku-aims-to-become-regional-arms-dealer>.

customers was approximately \$115 million, which represents an increase of 26.7 times compared to 2007 and 2.3 times compared to 2010.⁵¹⁷

By 2019, the production volume of defense products in Azerbaijan had increased by 5.5 percent annually, reaching approximately \$155 million. As of 2019, Azerbaijan exports its domestically produced ammunition, modern light weapons, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and armored vehicles to more than 10 countries. Currently, the country's defense enterprises produce over 700 product items and their components.⁵¹⁸

Despite its efforts to increase its own production capacity, Azerbaijan has continued to import weapon systems with more advanced technology. The aim is to rapidly modernize the state's defense capabilities and strengthen its position in the regional security balance. By focusing on external acquisitions, particularly in areas such as air defense systems, precision-guided munitions, and advanced intelligence equipment, Azerbaijan has aimed to compensate for the technological levels that its own industrial infrastructure has not yet reached. This dual strategy has aimed to reduce dependency by promoting domestic production while also increasing deterrence capacity by gaining access to the most up-to-date military technologies. Consequently, Azerbaijan strategically used modern technologies that Armenia was unable to respond to.⁵¹⁹

In this regard, relations with Israel have become an important part of Azerbaijan's defense industry strategy. Although military cooperation with Israel dates to the early 1990s, it was primarily under an agreement made in 2005 that Israeli defense companies began selling military equipment to Azerbaijan.⁵²⁰ Israeli manufacturers

⁵¹⁷ "Azerbaijan sees increase in defense manufacturing in 2015," *Azvision*, March 4, 2016, <https://en.azvision.az/news/31875/azerbaijan-sees-increase-in-defense-manufacturing-in-2015.html>.

⁵¹⁸ Akbar Mammadov, "Azerbaijan's defence production grows by 5.5 pct in 2019," *Azernews*, April 14, 2020, <https://www.azernews.az/business/164077.html>.

⁵¹⁹ Javadbay Khalilzada, "Does the Offence–Defence Theory explain war onset between small states? Causes and consequences of the 2020–2023 Armenia–Azerbaijan war," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 11, no. 2, (2024): 204.

⁵²⁰ Harut Sassounian, "Israel's massive supply of sophisticated weapons to Azerbaijan," *Armenian Weekly*, March 8, 2023, <https://armenianweekly.com/2023/03/08/israels-massive-supply-of-sophisticated-weapons-to-azerbaijan>.

such as Elbit Systems and Elta Systems have collaborated with Azerbaijan. In 2009, because of negotiations, the two parties agreed on Azerbaijan producing Israeli-made Namer armored personnel carriers within its own territory.⁵²¹

In February 2012, an agreement was officially approved between the two states, in which Israel committed to supplying various weapons to Azerbaijan. This \$1.6 billion arms deal is the largest in Azerbaijan's history. As a result of this agreement, Azerbaijan received various types of missiles, drones, and a radar system.⁵²² In 2013, the reason behind Azerbaijan's Navy strengthening its capabilities with Israeli-made Gabriel anti-ship missiles, which would not be used against landlocked, war-torn Armenia, became a subject of curiosity. The view that this was against the increasing Iranian warships in the Caspian Sea became widespread.⁵²³

Israel's contributions in the fields of weapons and technology in Azerbaijan's military strength first became apparent during the Four-Day War in April 2016. In this short skirmish between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Israeli weapons played a significant role for the first time in a war zone in the Caucasus. Among these weapons were Harop "kamikaze" drones.⁵²⁴

These weapons, supplied from Israel and supported by domestic production, especially drones, played a critical role in Azerbaijan's military success in the 44-Day War in 2020. In an interview with the Israel Hayom newspaper, Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov stated that Israel's high-tech and precision weapons played a significant role in Azerbaijan's military victory.⁵²⁵

⁵²¹ Lakkana Nanayakkara, "A history: Israel-Azerbaijan relations," *Algemeiner*, March 30, 2012, <https://www.algemeiner.com/2012/03/30/a-history-israel-azerbaijan-relations>.

⁵²² Elnur Ismayilov, "Israel and Azerbaijan: The evolution of a strategic partnership," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 7, no. 1, (2013): 72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23739770.2013.11446535>.

⁵²³ "Azerbaijan building warship -- but with whose help?" *Eurasianet*, November 15, 2013, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-building-warship-but-with-whose-help>.

⁵²⁴ Avinoam Idan, and Brenda Shaffer, "Israel's role in the Second Armenia-Azerbaijan War," in *The Karabakh Gambit: Responsibility for the Future*, ed. Turan Gafarli and Michael Arnold, 190-208, (Ankara: TRT World Research Center, 2021), 199.

⁵²⁵ Avi Scharf, and Oded Yaron, "92 flights from Israeli base reveal arms exports to Azerbaijan," *Haaretz*, March 6, 2023, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/security-aviation/2023-03-06/ty->

Since Azerbaijan's military cooperation with Türkiye will be discussed in a later chapter, it will not be addressed here. However, it is worth mentioning Azerbaijan's military cooperation with Pakistan, Israel's eternal enemy and one that does not recognize it. As is known, Pakistan does not recognize the State of Israel, and due to its close ties and historical connections with Azerbaijan, it has not recognized Armenia since its independence, too. Because of this, Azerbaijan has established strong collaborations with Pakistan. Those in the military sense are also one of these groups.⁵²⁶

Pakistan and Azerbaijan are brotherly countries and maintain sincere relations. In 2003, a defense agreement was signed, and defense cooperation has been steadily increasing. Azerbaijan participated in the Pakistan-led multinational AMAN-2013 exercise in March 2013.⁵²⁷ The two states signed the Bilateral Military Cooperation Agreement in February 2014. This agreement was signed during the fifth meeting of the Azerbaijan-Pakistan Military Cooperation Working Group held in Islamabad. An updated version of this agreement was also signed at the Working Group meeting in Baku on April 1, 2015.⁵²⁸

In 2015, Azerbaijan was showing great interest in the JF-17 Thunder multirole fighter jet, jointly developed by Pakistan and China. These aircraft, that Pakistan now produces entirely with its own capabilities, would play a significant role in Azerbaijan's efforts to modernize its air force.⁵²⁹ After nearly a decade, in 2025, Pakistan has decided to take a step that will significantly alter the military balance in the South Caucasus by selling 40 fourth-generation JF-17 Thunder fighter jets to Azerbaijan. The Pakistani government announced that Azerbaijan has officially

[article-magazine/.premium/92-flights-from-israeli-base-reveal-arms-exports-to-azerbaijan/00000185-fd3d-d96e-adeff3dc38e0000](https://www.azerbaijan.gov.az/en/article-magazine/premium/92-flights-from-israeli-base-reveal-arms-exports-to-azerbaijan/00000185-fd3d-d96e-adeff3dc38e0000).

⁵²⁶ Imran Khan, and Kadim Haider Syed. "Pakistan relations with Azerbaijan in 21st century," *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 5, no. 1, (2021): 668.

⁵²⁷ Muhammad Ali Baig, "The defence needs of Azerbaijani armed forces for peace, security, and stability," *Open Military Studies* 1, no. 1, (2020): 83, <https://doi.org/10.1515/openms-2020-0106>.

⁵²⁸ Kamal Makili-Aliyev, and Khurram Abbas, "Pakistan-Azerbaijan economic and defence cooperation," *IPRI Journal* 16, no. 1, (2016): 53.

⁵²⁹ Baig, "The defence needs," 83.

increased its order of JF-17s from 16 to 40 aircraft, confirming that this is part of a \$4.6 billion defense deal. This is Pakistan's largest defense export contract to date, and it represents significant support for the aircraft developed by Pakistan in collaboration with China.⁵³⁰

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has carefully examined the various dimensions of Azerbaijan's foreign policy during the Ilham Aliyev period, demonstrating that the state's current trajectory is a direct and resilient adaptation process to its complex historical experiences and ongoing geopolitical realities. The unique geopolitical position at the intersection of various integration platforms and different international interests has continuously shaped the state's approach to foreign relations. President Ilham Aliyev's firm stand that Azerbaijani territories will not become a battleground for geopolitical disputes clearly reflects the state's commitment to strategic autonomy and stability. The section systematically addresses the fundamental pillars of this policy, namely the ongoing Karabakh conflict, high-level strategic energy diplomacy, complex multilateral engagements, and evolving security and defense cooperation.

The Karabakh conflict had been the central and most major issue of Azerbaijan's foreign policy for decades. Its historical roots, extending back to the early 20th century, have profoundly influenced the instability and border disputes in the region. The establishment of the autonomous oblast within the AzSSR by a Bolshevik decision in 1921 laid the groundwork for future conflicts, resulting in the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijani Turks and significant territorial losses during the First Karabakh War. Despite long-standing diplomatic efforts through the OSCE Minsk Group, the failure to reach a peaceful resolution has led to the escalation of tensions during the April 2016 clashes and the decisive 44-Day War in 2020. This situation has led to Azerbaijan reclaiming its territories and

⁵³⁰ Paul Iddon, "How Armenia might respond to Azerbaijan's JF-17 fighter acquisition," *Forbes*, June 12, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pauliddon/2025/06/08/how-armenia-might-respond-to-azerbajians-jf-17-fighter-acquisition>.

subsequently reevaluating the ongoing relevance of the Minsk Group, resulting in calls for the group's dissolution.

Energy diplomacy has emerged as a critical strategic tool for Azerbaijan, utilizing the country's rich hydrocarbon reserves to promote economic development and enhance its global political influence. The "Contract of the Century" in 1994 and the subsequent large-scale pipeline projects such as BTC, BTE, TANAP, and TAP have reinforced Azerbaijan's role as a vital energy exporter and transit hub, particularly for European energy security. Although energy has provided Azerbaijan with significant leverage to conduct multidimensional diplomacy and maintain a balanced stance between the West and Russia, a strategic shift occurred in the late 2000s. Especially after the 2008 invasion of Georgia, the perceived indifference of the West to security concerns has pushed Azerbaijan to diversify its foreign policy relations and abandon its dependence solely on the West, developing a more balanced approach. Recent geopolitical changes, particularly Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have further highlighted Azerbaijan's increasing importance as a significant, albeit not primary, alternative energy supplier for the EU. The astute use of energy as a "soft bargaining chip" has been particularly decisive in bilateral relations with the EU, Türkiye, and Israel, but its impact on improving political relations in some contexts continues to be debated.

Multilateral relations have become an integral part of Azerbaijan's post-independence foreign policy, serving as a platform to strengthen its security, economic development, and diplomatic position. Azerbaijan's early membership in the United Nations and its temporary membership in the UN Security Council have provided critical pathways for international recognition and conflict resolution efforts. However, the growing frustration with the effectiveness of the OSCE Minsk Group on the Karabakh issue reflects a broader challenge in utilizing multilateral platforms for core national interests. Relations with European organizations such as the Council of Europe and the European Union have developed through transport corridors like TRACECA and partnership agreements, but have recently experienced tensions due to human rights concerns. Simultaneously, Azerbaijan has established strategic ties with NATO through the Partnership for Peace program while

consciously avoiding full membership in Moscow-led “Eastern” blocs such as the CIS and CSTO. Instead, its active role within the Economic Cooperation Organization, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and especially the Turkic States Organization reflects a multidimensional approach aimed at diversifying its international partnerships and enhancing its worldwide reputation.

Finally, security and defense cooperation has become an indispensable pillar of foreign components due to the acute perceptions of threat resulting from the Karabakh conflict and regional instability. Early restrictions in arms purchasing, such as the U.S. Section 907 and the reluctance of European states, combined with the perception of dependency on Russia, have pushed Azerbaijan to seek new alternatives. During Ilham Aliyev’s period, this situation resulted in a significant move towards the development of a domestic defense industry, marked by the establishment of the Ministry of Defense Industry in 2005 and a substantial increase in local production. Simultaneously, Azerbaijan actively sought new options to procure more advanced weapon systems, particularly establishing solid military cooperation with Israel. Israel’s high-tech and precision weapons, including “kamikaze” drones, significantly contributed to its military success during the 44-Day War in 2020. Furthermore, the evolving defense ties with Pakistan, highlighted by the upcoming acquisition of JF-17 Thunder fighter jets, reinforce Azerbaijan’s strategy of enhancing its military capacity beyond traditional suppliers and ensuring its national security in a delicate geopolitical environment.

In summary, Azerbaijan’s foreign policy during Ilham Aliyev’s period can be described as a highly pragmatic and adaptable strategy that skillfully navigates the complex geopolitical environment. Based on the historical struggles for sovereignty and territorial integrity, this policy has prioritized the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, utilized energy resources as an important diplomatic tool, maintained diversified multilateral engagements in both “Western” and “Eastern” blocs, and systematically strengthened defense capacity through self-sufficiency and strategic partnerships. This holistic approach reflects Azerbaijan’s determination to protect its national interests, reinforce its regional position, and position itself as a stable and independent actor on the global stage.

CHAPTER 5

AZERBAIJAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the comprehensive relations between Azerbaijan and Russia. The ties between the two countries encompass many areas, from regional security to energy policies, from socio-cultural interactions to economic cooperation. The depth and complexity of these relations are nourished not only by their historical background but also by current geopolitical dynamics. In this context, the section analyzes the evolution of diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Russia, the cornerstones of security cooperation, the dimensions of economic integration, and the diversity of socio-cultural interactions. By examining how the relations have developed over time and how they have affected regional balance, a comprehensive view is provided on how both countries manage their mutual interests.

5.2. Short Background

The relationship between Azerbaijan and Russia has a historical background spanning over two centuries. As explained in a previous chapter, the bilateral relations, dating back to the Treaty of Gulistan (1813) and the Treaty of Turkmenchay (1828), continued for many years according to Russia's dominance over Azerbaijan. After the restoration of independence in 1991, Ayaz Mutalibov, who was then in charge of Azerbaijan, also pursued a Russia-centric policy.⁵³¹

In accordance with this policy, despite the strong criticism from the opposition, the Mutalibov government signed the Alma-Ata Protocol, the founding agreement of the

⁵³¹ Elbay Aliyev, *Azerbaijan-Turkish Relations (1992-2012): A Foreign Policy Account*, (MA thesis. Middle East Technical University [Türkiye], 2012), 27.

CIS, which is considered a continuation of the Soviet Union, on December 21, 1991.⁵³² Under pressure from the opposition, Mutalibov declared Azerbaijan's independence, prioritized relations with Russia, and relied on Russia to solve the problems Azerbaijan faced with independence, particularly in Karabakh. However, Mutalibov's policy of aligning with Russia ended on February 26, 1992, with the massacre caused by the Russia's 366th motorized rifle regiment in Karabakh.⁵³³ After this process, the deteriorating Azerbaijan-Russia relations led Azerbaijan to transition to a new administration internally and adopt a policy of rapprochement with the West externally. Until this period, Russia did not see Azerbaijan as an independent state, but on April 4, 1992, it became one of the last countries to recognize Azerbaijan.⁵³⁴

Coming to power at a time when Russia was intensifying its efforts to maintain its influence in the region, the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA) faced significant challenges in its relations with Russia. First and foremost, the popular movement led by the PFA was fundamentally a struggle to free itself from the Russian "empire." Abulfaz Elchibey, while expressing his views on the foreign policy objectives of the PFA government, had identified the main goal as freeing Azerbaijan from Russia's military and political sphere of influence. In this regard, the PFA government tried to implement a policy of liberation from Russia in military and political terms through several factors. These included the withdrawal of Russian troops from Azerbaijan, the removal of the Karabakh issue from Russia's monopoly, which Russia constantly used as a tool of pressure on Azerbaijan, the rejection of CIS membership, and the establishment of economic and political relations with Russia as an independent state with equal rights.⁵³⁵

⁵³² Kamer Kasım, "İç politika," *Azerbaycan*, in *Türk Cumhuriyetleri ve Toplulukları Yıllığı 2013*, ed. Turgut Demirtepe and Murat Yılmaz, 17-38, (Ankara: Hoca Ahmet Yesevi Uluslararası Türk-Kazak Üniversitesi, 2015), 161.

⁵³³ Sascha Nanlohy, "Geopolitics and genocide: Patron interests, client crises, and realpolitik," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 9, no. 1, (2024): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogad023>.

⁵³⁴ Araz Aslanlı, "Azerbaijan-Russia Relations: Is the foreign policy strategy of Azerbaijan changing?" *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 9, no. 3, (2009): 139.

⁵³⁵ Nazım Cafersoy, *Elçibey Dönemi Azerbaycan Dış Politikası (Haziran 1992-Haziran 1993): Bir Bağımsızlık Mücadelesinin Diplomatik Öyküsü*, (Ankara: ASAM, Avrasya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi Yayınları, 2001), 96-97.

For this reason, the PFA government led by Elchibey accelerated the withdrawal of Russian troops from Azerbaijani territory while refusing to approve the CIS membership agreement. At the same time, it tried to undermine Russia's influence by excluding it from oil developments in the Caspian Sea. Furthermore, he based all his hopes of resolving the conflict in Karabakh on relations with the West. The oil partnership with Western countries was seen to strengthen diplomatic relations with these countries.⁵³⁶

The new President Haydar Aliyev, who came to power in 1993, tried to maintain Azerbaijan's will to be independent from Russia while also establishing a more conciliatory relationship with Moscow. Until his death in 2003, Haydar Aliyev was able to reduce the tension in Russia-Azerbaijan relations while also managing to maintain Azerbaijan's independence will, just as in the previous administration.⁵³⁷

During this period, the main points of tension in Russia-Azerbaijan relations can be summarized as follows: Russia's continuous supply of weapons and political support to Armenia during the Karabakh War in 1992-1994, Azerbaijan's claim of supporting Chechens during the First Russo-Chechen War in 1994-1996, and Azerbaijan's efforts to build the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, bypassing Russia to gain access to Western energy markets.⁵³⁸

5.3. Diplomacy

During the period of Ilham Aliyev, the relations between the Azerbaijan and Russia have shown progressive development, just as in the previous period. Determined to continue the domestic and foreign policies of former President Heydar Aliyev, President Ilham Aliyev has maintained the tendency to improve relations with

⁵³⁶ Angeliki Spatharou, "The political role of oil in Azerbaijan, 1989-1994," *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 4, no. 1, (2002): 33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613190220130278>.

⁵³⁷ Vera Liubchak, "Azerbaijan's relations with Russia during the Heydar Aliyev era," in *Heydar Aliyev and the Foundations of Modern Azerbaijan*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz, Michael M. Gunter, and Shamkhal Abilov, 201-221, (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 208, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58265-3_8.

⁵³⁸ Liubchak, "Azerbaijan's relations with Russia," 209.

neighbors, primarily with Russia. From the perspective of Moscow, it can be said that two main reasons have been influential in the development of the relations.

The first is the continuation of the policy of establishing good and balanced relations with neighbors, initiated during the Heydar Aliyev period. This policy aimed to restore Azerbaijan, that was damaged by a fragile economy, a hot war situation, and political instability. The second is the strong ties Heydar Aliyev established with the Moscow administration and the deep experience he gained after he became the First Secretary of the CPA in 1969,⁵³⁹ played a decisive role in Azerbaijan's relations with Russia. Heydar Aliyev, who served as a full member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPSU, the highest governing body of the Soviet Union, from 1982 to 1987,⁵⁴⁰ had maintained constructive relations with Moscow even after becoming the President of the Azerbaijan in 1994.

The advancement of these constructive relations has been similarly continued during the Ilham Aliyev period. Before his first visit to Moscow as President, Ilham Aliyev, in an interview with the Russian Izvestia newspaper, referring to the Heydar Aliyev period, said: *"If we recall the period before the year 2000, we will see that there were numerous issues in the energy sector, ..., and other areas, many of which were considered insoluble. However, we managed to resolve all of them. Today, there are no problems between Russia and Azerbaijan."*⁵⁴¹

During the Ilham Aliyev period, the first presidential-level meeting between Azerbaijan and Russia took place shortly after President Aliyev assumed the presidency. On February 6, 2004, in the Zelyeniy Hall of the Kremlin, this meeting between President Ilham Aliyev and President Vladimir Putin was noteworthy between the two states during this period. In the press statement following the

⁵³⁹ Khatira Guliyeva, "The era of Heydar Aliyev, the great leader of the Azerbaijani people," *Philosophy* 13, no. 8 (2023): 364, <https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5313/2023.08.005>.

⁵⁴⁰ Konul Najafova, "Heydar Aliyev-100," *Scientific Collection «InterConf»* 152 (2023): 255.

⁵⁴¹ "Rusiyanın 'İzvestiya' qəzetinə müsahibə," *Nitqləri, çıxışları, bəyanatları, müsahibələri: 2004-cü il*, Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin İşlər İdarəsinin Prezident Kitabxanası (2004): 29, <https://files.preslib.az/projects/xs/fes2/2004.pdf>.

meeting, President Putin shared his belief that the relations would deepen further with Aliyev's visit. Then, Aliyev emphasized that the two states are in harmonious cooperation on regional and international issues.⁵⁴²

The most significant outcome of this first meeting was the "Moscow Declaration," which would be referenced in many discussions in the coming years. The Moscow Declaration dated February 6, 2004, has been a crucial document that forms the fundamental infrastructure of bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Russia during that period. In the declaration, the relations aimed to be developed between the two states in the fields of diplomacy, security, economic, and socio-cultural cooperation are detailed.⁵⁴³

This declaration emphasized the importance of strengthening the strategic partnerships between Azerbaijan and Russia, particularly in the field of diplomacy. It also encourages initiative activities of the intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation between parties. The importance of deepening bilateral relations through high-level political dialogue, regular consultations, and mutual visits has been emphasized. Both sides have committed to respecting sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. They have pledged not to support, directly or indirectly, any action that could undermine the sovereignty of either party.⁵⁴⁴

In this regard, this first official visit of Ilham Aliyev has served as a cornerstone for the relations between the two states in the new period. Although Aliyev visited Moscow several more times within the same year, these were for events such as the Commonwealth of Independent States' (CIS) Summit⁵⁴⁵ and the 2nd Conference of

⁵⁴² "Official visit of Azerbaijan president Ilham Aliyev to Russia in success: Meeting of the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and the President of Russia Vladimir Putin in private," *AZƏRTAC*, February 6, 2004, <https://azertag.az/en/print/550848>.

⁵⁴³ "Aliyev and Putin sign Declaration of Principles," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, February 6, 2004, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1051467.html>.

⁵⁴⁴ "Moscow Declaration of the Russian Federation and the Azerbaijan Republic," CIS Legislation, accessed June 1, 2024, <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=16144>.

⁵⁴⁵ "The leaders of the CIS countries discussed relevant issues of the international agenda," President of Russia, accessed June 1, 2024, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/31310>.

the All-Russian Azerbaijani Congress.⁵⁴⁶ Ilham Aliyev's frequent visits to the Russia shortly after becoming President have demonstrated Baku's commitment to maintain strong diplomatic relations with Moscow. Although numerous meetings were held between the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia during Ilham Aliyev period, this heading aim to disclose the issues shaping bilateral relations, not to mention all meeting between the Presidents.

Starting from the restoration of independence, there was a main issue shaping the relationship between the two states: Karabakh conflict. This issue occasionally caused challenges even during the Ilham Aliyev period. To comprehend the aspects of all issues between two states during the period covered by this work, it is essential to briefly understand Russia's role on Karabakh conflict and its background in earlier periods. Despite different foreign policy priorities for Russia, the South Caucasus and especially the Karabakh issue have maintained their strategic importance for Moscow for many years.⁵⁴⁷

Since all issues between the two states branch out around the Russia's approach to the Karabakh conflict, that main issue has been a primary obstacle to advancing intergovernmental affinity. From the restoration of independence, this conflict has brought the two states into diplomatic confrontation on numerous occasions. For instance, in the early years of the conflict, the existence of the Russia's 366th motorized rifle regiment of Russian Interior Ministry during the Khojaly massacre⁵⁴⁸ reinforced the perception within the Azerbaijani state that the RF was an aspect of the opposing side.

In addition, during the Elchibey period, the devastating consequences of the First Karabakh War and the deterioration of relations with Russia. During the short Elchibey period, Russia, seen as pro-Armenian for the war in Karabakh, was

⁵⁴⁶ "Working visit of Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev to Russian Federation," *AZƏRTAC*, October 19, 2004, <https://azertag.az/en/print/556871>.

⁵⁴⁷ Sergei Markedonov, "Russia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: A careful balancing," *Istituto di Studie Politiche Italiano (ISPI)* 12 (2018): 1.

⁵⁴⁸ Abilov, and Isayev, "The consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh War," 296.

excluded from Azerbaijan's oil agreements, while Russian troops began to be discharged from Azerbaijani territory. With the beginning of Heydar Aliyev's period, the Azerbaijan adopted a more moderate stance towards the Russia on both the Karabakh issue and other matters. As a reflection of this shift, Heydar Aliyev soon traveled to Moscow and reached an agreement on the Russian-controlled CIS membership, leading to Azerbaijan's immediate entry into the CIS.⁵⁴⁹

The moderation of relations was affected by Azerbaijan beginning to approach positively the freezing of the Karabakh conflict under a ceasefire, as in other post-Soviet conflict zones, and resolving the issue through the OSCE MG co-chaired by Russia. However, under the leadership of Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan had entered a period where diplomatic efforts regarding the Karabakh issue were insufficient. Countless rounds of negotiations conducted under Russia's mediation have been ineffective due to the failure to reach a lasting peace agreement. This situation prompted Baku to make extensive preparations against the possibility of resolving the issue through military means, in parallel with seeking solutions on international platforms and at the negotiating table. Azerbaijan increased its defense budget, modernized its army, procured modern weapon systems, and intensified its military training.⁵⁵⁰

A military solution option has always been on Azerbaijan's agenda. However, regional geopolitical conditions have caused them to postpone the implementation of this option. Especially the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the violation of the Georgia's territorial integrity had a profound impact on the Azerbaijani administration. This occupation pushed Azerbaijan to be extremely cautious regarding how a potential military operation could affect regional balances, how Russia might respond, and how the international community would position itself. Baku felt the need to carefully assess all risks and potential consequences before taking any military action.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁹ Aslanlı, "Azerbaijan-Russia Relations," 139-140.

⁵⁵⁰ "Azerbaijan increases military expenditure once again," *Trend News Agency*, April 28, 2008, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/1186624.html>.

⁵⁵¹ Gulshan Pashayeva, "The Nagorno Karabakh conflict in the aftermath of the Russia-Georgia war," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (2009): 67.

While this cautious approach continued, conflicts known as the “Four-Day War” broke out in April 2016. This short but intense military escalation was a strategic test for Azerbaijan. The war provided an opportunity to test the level of modernization of the Azerbaijani army, its operational capabilities, and the effectiveness of its new military doctrines in the field.⁵⁵² At the same time, this war provided Azerbaijan with the opportunity to gauge the pulse of Russia, the key player in the region. The war offered a chance to assess how much Moscow could intervene in the Karabakh tension and its influence over the parties involved. Azerbaijan’s partial military successes boosted the country’s morale, while on the Armenian side, they led to significant internal questioning. The war led to questioning of both military strategies and political leadership in Armenia, igniting some changes in the country’s defense and security policies.⁵⁵³

Despite the anti-Russian sentiment in Armenia, that was formed after the Four-Day War and increased to the level of government with the pro-Western revolution in 2018, the other most significant issue than the Karabakh conflict affecting Russia-Azerbaijan relations, both during Ilham Aliyev’s period and earlier, was the long-standing close relationship between Russia and Armenia. Although the Russia-Armenia relations, resembling a suzerain-vassal dynamic, can be traced back to the early 19th century,⁵⁵⁴ this heading will focus on the Ilham Aliyev period and the preceding periods briefly.

As is well known, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia prioritized establishing close relations with the former Union republics as a primary goal for its own security. Armenia, one of the smallest countries of the former Union, found itself under the influence of Russia after its direct involvement in the Karabakh

⁵⁵² Michael Kofman, “Armenia-Azerbaijan war: Military dimensions of the conflict,” *Russia Matters*, October 2, 2020, <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/armenia-azerbaijan-war-military-dimensions-conflict>.

⁵⁵³ Anahit Shirinyan, “The evolving dilemma of the status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Security and Human Rights* 27, no. 3-4, (2016): 474, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02703010>.

⁵⁵⁴ Timothy K. Blauvelt, “The Caucasus in the Russian Empire,” in *Routledge Handbook of the Caucasus*, edited by Galina M. Yemelianova and Laurence Broers, 107-120, (London: Routledge, 2020), 110, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351055628>.

conflict that deteriorated relations with its western neighbor, the Republic of Türkiye.⁵⁵⁵ With its irredentist stance during the Karabakh War, the landlocked Armenia struggled to find routes to integrate into the new global system. This situation further brought it closer to the Russia in many areas. Particularly in the military sphere, this connection was perceived by Azerbaijan as a threat, significantly impeding the development of Russia-Azerbaijan relations from the 1990s onward.⁵⁵⁶

The first outcome of Russia-Armenia military alignment was the establishment of a Russian military base in Armenia in 1995. The Russia's 102nd military base in Gyumri, Armenia, holds critical importance for its geostrategic balance in the South Caucasus. This base functions as a key component of Moscow's military and political influence over Yerevan. Housing approximately 5000 Russian military personnel, the 102nd military base plays a crucial role in the defense of Armenia's borders. Furthermore, the deployment of S-300 air defense systems and SS-26 Iskander short-range ballistic missiles at the base significantly enhances Russia's military capabilities in the region. This base both acts as a counterbalance to Türkiye's 3rd Army and has a direct impact on conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Through this base, the Russia provides military support to the region, not only to manage the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, but also to limit NATO's influence in the South Caucasus.⁵⁵⁷

Apart from the presence of the 102nd military base, the military assistance provided by the Russia to Armenia has disrupted the balance of power in the Caucasus region to the detriment of Azerbaijan. Within the framework of the Tashkent Agreement in 1992, Armenia received significant quantities of tanks, armored vehicles, artillery

⁵⁵⁵ Ahmet İçduygu, Irena Grigoryan, and Gülşen Doğan, "Armenia and Türkiye between conflict and cooperation: explaining (with) disaster diplomacy," *Disasters* 49, no. 2, (2025): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12674>.

⁵⁵⁶ Roy Allison, "Regional threat perceptions and risks of military conflict," in *Energy, Wealth and Governance in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, ed. Richard Auty and Indra de Soysa, 198-215, (London: Routledge, 2006), 200.

⁵⁵⁷ Can Kasapoglu, *Russian Forward Military Basing in Armenia and Moscow's Influence in the South Caucasus*, NATO Defense College, Research Division, 2017, 6-7.

systems, and air defense equipment throughout the 1990s. Particularly after 2000, the military assistance from Russia to Armenia diversified and increased in volume. Through protocols signed in 2010, Armenia gained the advantage of purchasing weapons at Russian domestic market prices, acquiring modern tanks, rocket systems, and radar technologies. Notably, under the Joint Military Force established in 2016, the quantity of weapons and ammunition provided by Russia increased significantly contributing to the strengthening of Armenia's regional power.⁵⁵⁸

Of course, Russia has been the main arms supplier for Azerbaijan as well as Armenia. Between 2013 and 2017, 65 percent of Azerbaijan's total foreign arms imports were sourced from Russia. This strategy enables Russia to maintain its influence in the South Caucasus. While selling arms to Azerbaijan, Russia provides Armenia with long-term credit and defense guarantees, thus allowing it to control the cycles of escalation and de-escalation in the Karabakh conflict to serve its own interests.⁵⁵⁹

With the beginning of the Ilham Aliyev period, another aspect affecting the relations between the two states was Azerbaijan's initial development of its relations with the West. In the new period, where the balance policy of the previous period was continued, Azerbaijan established and developed cooperative relations with Western institutions. Azerbaijan has been an active participant in NATO's PfP program since 1994, and it contributed to peacekeeping missions in Kosovo in 1999, Afghanistan in 2002, and Iraq in 2003.⁵⁶⁰

This situation had brought the issue of Azerbaijan's NATO membership to the forefront. When such a possibility was met with strong reactions from Russia, there had been no statement from Brussels. However, in an interview in 2007, Ilham

⁵⁵⁸ Ali Asker, "The advanced stage of Russia-Armenia military cooperation: The joint military force," *Review of Armenian Studies* 35, (2017): 72-74.

⁵⁵⁹ Nurlan Aliyev, "Russia's arms sales: A foreign policy tool in relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 15, no. 47, (2018), <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-arms-sales-foreign-policy-tool-relations-azerbaijan-armenia>.

⁵⁶⁰ Vusala Alibayli, "Azerbaijan says yes to the USA's peace gesture, but..." *Azernews*, July 16, 2015, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/85581.html>.

Aliyev stated that Azerbaijan does not set unrealistic goals and therefore is not ready for NATO membership. He also stated that the primary issue of Azerbaijan's foreign policy is the Karabakh issue and added that membership in any international organization (NATO or CSTO) would be determined based on the resolution of this issue.⁵⁶¹

Nevertheless, Azerbaijan has not turned its back on the idea of NATO membership for a while longer. In the "4.1.2. *Integration into European and Euro-Atlantic Structures*" section of Azerbaijan's National Security Concept published on May 23, 2007, it was stated that possible cooperation within the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and NATO's PfP program, as well as the state's security understanding, would be brought closer to NATO standards.⁵⁶²

However, in the Military Doctrine published on June 8, 2010,⁵⁶³ relations with NATO were interpreted little differently. In the section "*Threats to the Military Security of the Republic of Azerbaijan*," external dependence is seen as a threat to sovereignty, while Azerbaijan has not made a strategic choice like the other Caucasian states. Therefore, while cooperation with the EAPC is stated as a vision, becoming a member of NATO has ceased to be a goal for Azerbaijan.⁵⁶⁴

It is evident that Azerbaijan's approach towards NATO is influenced by the presence of strong neighbors to the north and south. Azerbaijan has avoided experiencing the same policy that Russia applied to Georgia after 2008. Decision-makers in Azerbaijan do not want to confront Moscow over NATO membership because they

⁵⁶¹ Gevorgyan, Armenuhi. "The peculiarities and prospects of NATO-South Caucasus cooperation evolvments." *Enlight*, April 9, 2016. <https://enlightngo.org/language/en/post/1636>.

⁵⁶² "Azərbaycan Respublikasının milli təhlükəsizlik konsepsiyasının təsdiq edilməsi haqqında Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin Sərəncamı," May 23, 2007, e-qanun.az, accessed September 11, 2024, <https://e-qanun.az/framework/13373>.

⁵⁶³ "Azərbaycan Respublikasının hərbi doktrinasının təsdiq edilməsi haqqında Azərbaycan Respublikası Milli Məclisinin Qərarı," June 8, 2010, e-qanun.az, accessed October 21, 2024, <https://e-qanun.az/framework/19722>.

⁵⁶⁴ Tina Kharatyan, "The Military Doctrine of Azerbaijan: Assessing the implementation process and policy implication," *Contemporary Eurasia* 7, no. 1-2 (2018): 26.

know that if they act like Georgia, the problems awaiting Azerbaijan will be even worse. Similarly, an overly “pro-Western” Azerbaijan would draw Iran’s scorn.⁵⁶⁵

As is known, Russia began to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy both domestically and internationally with Vladimir Putin’s rise to power in 2000. Seeing itself as the dominant power in the South Caucasus as well, Russia had begun to take harsh steps to protect its interests in the region. For this reason, by 2008, the Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili government’s pro-Western foreign policy and intention to join NATO prompted Russia to launch a military operation in Georgia on August 8, 2008. This operation resulted in Russia’s military victory and its recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.⁵⁶⁶

Azerbaijan, on the other hand, was seriously affected by the Russia-Georgia war. The people of Azerbaijan initially supported the state’s involvement in the war on the side of Georgia. However, because Azerbaijan’s statehood has a history of negative memories regarding Russian military interventions⁵⁶⁷, it has approached the process with caution.⁵⁶⁸

On August 17, 2008, a grenade attack on a Sunni mosque in Baku killed three people, and the Azerbaijani people saw Russia as the perpetrator of the attack. The Azerbaijani government, on the other hand, chose to intensify its relations with Russia to avoid a similar fate as Georgia.⁵⁶⁹ There were rational reasons for the Azerbaijani state to be restrained towards Russia. Just like in Georgia with the Abkhaz and Ossetes, efforts have been made to fuel separatism in the region by

⁵⁶⁵ Martin Malek, “NATO and the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia on different tracks,” *Connections* 7, no. 3, (2008): 33, <http://dx.doi.org/10.11610/Connections.07.3.03>.

⁵⁶⁶ Ali Necefoğlu, *Rusya Federasyonu’nun Güvenlik Anlayışının Neorealist Perspektiften Analizi*, (MA thesis, TOBB University of Economics and Technology [Türkiye], 2017), 94-95.

⁵⁶⁷ Black January of 1990, Russian support for the Armenian side in the First Karabakh War, pro-Russian coup and attempts in the 1990s.

⁵⁶⁸ Yoko Hirose, “The need for standard policies on state recognition: The case of the Russia-Georgia War, Georgia, and Azerbaijan from 2008 to early 2012,” *International Relations and Diplomacy* 2, no. 1, (2014): 5.

⁵⁶⁹ Anar Valiyev, “Victim of a ‘war of ideologies’: Azerbaijan after the Russia-Georgia war.” *Demokratizatsiya* 17, no. 3, (2009): 278.

giving Russian passports to the Avar and Lezgian minorities in Azerbaijan's northern regions. Furthermore, in the northern regions of Azerbaijan, specifically in the Zagatala and Balakan districts, brochures were distributed with the aim of separating the local population from Azerbaijan and establishing the Zagatala-Balakan Republic. The Azerbaijani state has identified Russia as the source of these conspiracies that incite separatism.⁵⁷⁰

When Azerbaijan's perception of threat increased with the occupation of Georgia that caused Azerbaijan's rapprochement with Russia, the developments in Türkiye in 2008-2009 also caused Azerbaijan to align with Russia once again. With the "Armenian Opening" process, that will be detailed in a future chapter, Azerbaijan's trust in Türkiye was shaken. With the influence of the "zero problems with neighbors" doctrine and pressure from the West, Türkiye began to pursue a "normalization" policy with Armenia. As a result, the reopening of the Türkiye-Armenia border, that has been closed in response to the occupation of Azerbaijan's Kalbajar district, came onto the agenda.⁵⁷¹

While Azerbaijan has shown its dissatisfaction with this situation, the tension in the energy negotiations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan has increased. During the relations between the two "brother" states continue to deteriorate, Azerbaijan has signed a gas agreement with Russia. According to this agreement, Gazprom was purchasing approximately two billion cubic meters of gas from Azerbaijan annually and planned to increase this volume over time. Thus, Russia would secure its energy supply to the North Caucasus under its control. Instead of transporting gas from its center to the Caucasus, it would save on gas transportation by buying gas from Azerbaijan at the price it sells to Europe.⁵⁷² In addition, Azerbaijan's ministerial-level participation in the Nabucco Pipeline Project ceremony held in Ankara in July

⁵⁷⁰ Hirose, "The need for standard policies on state recognition," 6.

⁵⁷¹ Sergey Minasyan, "Prospects for normalization between Armenia and Turkey: A view from Yerevan." *Insight Turkey* (2010): 21.

⁵⁷² Anar Valiyev, "Azerbaijan-Russia relations after the five-day war: Friendship, enmity, or pragmatism," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 10, no. 3, (2011): 142.

2009, that would be aborted in the following years, was also a sign of the coldness between Azerbaijan and Türkiye.⁵⁷³

Another response from Azerbaijan to Türkiye's new policy was the "Moscow Declaration"⁵⁷⁴ signed on November 2, 2008. In this declaration, where Russia took the initiative in the peace talks regarding the Karabakh issue, Azerbaijan and Armenia accepted the view of resolving the issue through peaceful methods. Lacking any specific stance and merely emphasizing the continuation of negotiations, this declaration has allowed Russia to maintain its dominance over Armenia while increasing its influence over Azerbaijan. In summary, the declaration can be seen as Moscow's attempt to regain its mediating role in the South Caucasus following the invasion of Georgia.⁵⁷⁵

These events have led to a moderate policy towards Russia in Azerbaijan and a closer alignment with Moscow's orbit. But Azerbaijan has been the state among the former Soviet republics bordering Russia that has been able to pursue the most independent and balanced policy, except for the Baltic states that are NATO members. Some scholars have likened Azerbaijan's foreign policy in this situation to Finland's neutrality during the Cold War and have referred to it as "Finlandization" in the literature.⁵⁷⁶

Despite all the pressures applied during this period, Azerbaijan has managed to avoid integration attempts led by Russia. Azerbaijan's decision-makers have emphasized independence while making contradictory statements regarding membership in the Moscow-centered CSTO because the absurdity of being in the same bloc with Armenia, that still occupies its territories.⁵⁷⁷ In statements made by Azerbaijan,

⁵⁷³ Aslanlı, "Azerbaijan-Russia Relations," 143.

⁵⁷⁴ "Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict," President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://president.az/en/pages/view/azerbaijan/karabakh>.

⁵⁷⁵ Nona Mikhelidze, "After the 2008 Russia-Georgia War: Implications for the wider Caucasus," *The International Spectator* 44, no. 3, (2009): 36-37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932720903148807>.

⁵⁷⁶ Anar Valiyev, "Finlandization or strategy of keeping the balance? Azerbaijan's foreign policy since the Russian-Georgian war," *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* 112, (2010): 1.

⁵⁷⁷ Joshua Kucera, "Despite Central Asia focus, Armenia still CSTO's most faithful ally," *Eurasianet*, April 21, 2013, <https://eurasianet.org/despite-central-asia-focus-armenia-still-cstos-most-faithful-ally>.

especially by President Aliyev, it was frequently emphasized that Armenia did not occupy Azerbaijani territory alone and received assistance from external powers. The implication here was also understood to be Russia.⁵⁷⁸

Another event affecting the relationship between Azerbaijan and Russia is the Russo-Ukrainian War, that began in 2014. For Azerbaijan, that had been pursuing a more moderate policy towards Russia for time to resolve the Karabakh issue, the situation changed with the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the supporting of separatists in Donbas. While the Azerbaijani government fully supports Ukraine and its territorial integrity,⁵⁷⁹ it has not severed its relationship with Russia due to the risk of aggression in the Caucasus. Azerbaijan did not want to leave the Ukrainian people, who share a similar fate, alone either. However, inevitably, as Europe began to seek different alternatives to obtain Caspian natural gas, Azerbaijan had no choice but to avoid upsetting Russia. In this situation, Russia's support for the separatists in Donbas has played a role in reminding Azerbaijan of Russia's support for the separatists in Karabakh.⁵⁸⁰

During Putin's third term (2012-2018), another prominent issue for Russia and Azerbaijan was the membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). As explained in previous chapters, since the restoration of independence, Azerbaijan's primary priority has been to pursue a balance policy and to avoid any integration efforts centered around Russia. For this reason, it has been skeptical of organizations in the post-Soviet geography. Azerbaijan, that has refrained from increasing Russia's influence in the South Caucasus through membership in such organizations, has avoided joining structures like the Moscow-centered Common Economic Zone (CEZ), Eurasian Customs Union (EACU), and CSTO for this reason. Wanting to draw Azerbaijan into its political orbit, Russia wants Azerbaijan to join any

⁵⁷⁸ "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the meeting with a group of Azerbaijani youth," President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, January 29, 2016, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/17701>.

⁵⁷⁹ Anar Valiyev, "The Ukrainian crisis and implications for Azerbaijan." *Caucasus Analytical Digest* 67-68 (2014): 11.

⁵⁸⁰ Anar Valiyev, "Azerbaijan's balancing act in the Ukraine crisis," *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* 352, (2014): 1.

organization under its control, especially the EAEU. However, Azerbaijan has successfully avoided such a policy that would distance it from the economic and military influence of the West throughout Putin's third term.⁵⁸¹

During the Türkiye-Russia crisis that occurred after Türkiye shot down a Russian military attack aircraft on November 24, 2015, Azerbaijan-Russia relations faced another test. During this process, Azerbaijan adopted a closer stance towards Türkiye. During the visit of then Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu to Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev stated that they were "on Türkiye's side in every matter." Similarly, during the ongoing crisis, a similar warm attitude was maintained during Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to Baku on March 15, 2016.⁵⁸² However, Azerbaijan also played an important role in resolving this aircraft crisis. Initially, on March 30, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev intervened the crises while Turkish President Erdoğan was in the U.S. for the Nuclear Security Summit, but President Putin did not respond positively.⁵⁸³

However, with the intervention of Turkish businessman Cavit Çağlar, the resolution process of the 7-month crisis period has begun. In this resolution, the role of Abbas Abbasov, the former First Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan, had been significant. Speaking in a documentary broadcast on a Russian television channel in 2017, Çağlar stated that Abbasov was very helpful to him in Mosco. Thanks to Abbasov, he followed the process with the leader of the Republic of Dagestan, Ramazan Abdulatipov. Abbasov, known to be a close friend of Abdulatipov, was one of the figures following the reconciliation process in Russia. As the person who resolved the crisis, Çağlar, during the ceremony where he was awarded the 'State Medal' by Russian President Putin at the Kremlin Palace, also mentioned Abbasov's contributions and expressed his gratitude.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸¹ Shamkhal Abilov, and Ismayil Isayev, "Azerbaijan-Russian relations: Azerbaijan's pursuit of successful balanced foreign policy," *Orta Asya ve Kafkasya Arastirmalari* 9, no. 19, (2015): 135.

⁵⁸² Ismail Safi, and Araz Aslanli, "Russia-Azerbaijan relations after August 2008," *International Journal of Russian Studies* 6 (2017): 9.

⁵⁸³ Murat Yetkin, "Türk-Rus krizini bitiren gizli diplomasinin öyküsü," *Yetkin Report*, November 21, 2021, <https://yetkinreport.com/2021/11/21/turk-rus-krizini-bitiren-gizli-diplomasinin-oykusu>.

Another significant event that tested Azerbaijan-Russia relations was the Four-Day War between Azerbaijan and Armenia in April 2016. As a result of this short war, when both sides tested each other militarily, both sides suffered significant losses. However, from Azerbaijan's perspective, this war not only tested Armenia militarily but also revealed Russia's diplomatic stance. The statements made by Russia at the end of this war and Russia's indifference to the conflict have shattered the perception of Russia as a "big brother" among Armenians. While Russia did not show any support to Armenia during or after the war, it made an effort to portray a neutral stance between the two states.⁵⁸⁵

This situation will be one of the infrastructures that encourage Azerbaijan to resolve the Karabakh issue through military means in the coming years. Similarly, the events following the 2018 Armenian Revolution have paved the way for a change in the status quo in the Caucasus and a new dimension in Azerbaijan's relations with Russia. In the revolution that took place from March 31 to May 8, 2018, Serzh Sargsyan, who had been in power since 2008, resigned on April 23, 2018, and then Nikol Pashinyan became prime minister in the elections held on May 8, 2018.⁵⁸⁶

After Pashinyan was elected Prime Minister, Baku did not see it as very likely that the new prime minister would adopt a different stance on the Karabakh issue in the short term compared to Sargsyan. Therefore, since Pashinyan's possible approach to a solution in Karabakh was unknown, Baku tried to make predictions based on Pashinyan's previous statements and political career.⁵⁸⁷

Nevertheless, Pashinyan's election presented two opportunities for Azerbaijan. The first is that the new pro-Western administration would be more open to conflict

⁵⁸⁴ Fuad Safarov, "'Uçak krizi'nin perde arkası," *Medya Günlüğü*, November 24, 2023, <https://medyagunlugu.com/ucak-krizinin-perde-arkasi>.

⁵⁸⁵ Turgut Kerem Tuncel, "A short assessment of the '4-Day War' in Karabakh." *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Commentary* 2016/21 (2016): 3.

⁵⁸⁶ Andrew Roth, "'He's not a populist, he's popular': Nikol Pashinyan becomes Armenian PM," *The Guardian*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/08/hes-not-a-populist-hes-popular-nikol-pashinyan-becomes-armenian-pm>.

⁵⁸⁷ Zaur Shiriyevev, "Perceptions in Azerbaijan of the impact of revolutionary changes in Armenia on the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process," *Caucasus Edition* 3, no. 2, (2018): 125-126.

resolution by engaging with Europe and becoming more “democratic.” Secondly, the new administration trying to engage with the West would operate with the narrative of “democratic Armenia against autocratic Azerbaijan.” This situation would worsen Armenia-Russia relations, leading to a change in Russia’s stance towards Azerbaijan and a more pro-Azerbaijan Russian policy, particularly regarding the Karabakh issue.⁵⁸⁸

Ultimately, in a speech he gave a year later in occupied Karabakh, Pashinyan stated, “Karabakh is Armenia. – period.”⁵⁸⁹ while shortly after, Azerbaijani President Aliyev responded to the narrative with “Karabakh is Azerbaijan! – exclamation point.”⁵⁹⁰

The tension that started between Azerbaijan and the new Armenian administration turned into a high-level war by the end of 2020. The war that began on September 27, 2020,⁵⁹¹ reached a new phase 44 days later, with the signing of a ceasefire agreement under the leadership of Russian President Putin, on November 10, 2020.⁵⁹² With this ceasefire agreement, Russian peacekeeping forces had settled in the Lachin corridor between the unliberated territories of Karabakh and Armenia. This peacekeeping force, that was intended to remain in Karabakh for a period of 5 years, withdrew from all Karabakh in June 2024.⁵⁹³

It should also be noted that, with the Pashinyan administration after a military defeat in Karabakh, Armenia, that fell out with Russia and did not receive Russian support

⁵⁸⁸ Shiriyeve, “Perceptions in Azerbaijan.”

⁵⁸⁹ Joshua Kucera, “Pashinyan calls for unification between Armenia and Karabakh,” *Eurasianet*, August 6, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/pashinyan-calls-for-unification-between-armenia-and-karabakh>.

⁵⁹⁰ Joshua Kucera, “Azerbaijan escalates punctuation war with Armenia,” *Eurasianet*, October 7, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-escalates-punctuation-war-with-armenia>.

⁵⁹¹ Farid Guliyev, “Azerbaijani–Russian relations: Transactional diplomacy in action,” *Russian Analytical Digest* 273, (2021): 11, <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000514342>.

⁵⁹² Alexandra Odyanova, “Russia brokers Armenia-Azerbaijan ceasefire, but only 1 side is happy,” *CBS News*, November 10, 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/azerbaijan-armenia-war-russia-ceasefire-but-only-1-side-is-happy>.

⁵⁹³ Andrew Osborn, and Nailia Bagirova, “Russian peacekeepers start withdrawing from Azerbaijan’s Karabakh region,” *Reuters*, April 17, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-peacekeepers-have-begun-withdrawing-azerbajians-karabakh-says-kremlin-2024-04-17>.

in two border clashes with Azerbaijan on May 12, 2021, and September 12-14, 2022. Applying to the CSTO of which it is a member, Armenia requested military assistance from the organization according to Article 4. According to this article, although an attack on one member state by a non-member state is considered a cause for war, other CSTO member states, including Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, have not supported Armenia.⁵⁹⁴

Azerbaijan-Russia relations became a topic of discussion again in 2022, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The first question that came to mind was whether Azerbaijan's balanced foreign policy, that it has pursued since the 1990s, had ended or not. The reason for this thought was that shortly after the invasion began, hundreds of Azerbaijanis gathered in front of the Ukrainian embassy in Baku, and at the same time, the Azerbaijani government acted quickly to send humanitarian aid to Ukraine. However, Azerbaijan did not officially condemn Russia's invasion, nor did it participate in sanctions against Russia. This was proof of the effectiveness of this balancing policy. Instead, Azerbaijan saw the Russian invasion of Ukraine as an opportunity and liberated the entirety of Karabakh in September 2023, as Russia's ability to intervene in the Karabakh issue had weakened during this process.⁵⁹⁵

The most recent event affecting the relationship between Azerbaijan and Russia was the downing of an Azerbaijan Airlines (AZAL) plane. On December 25, 2024, Russian air defense systems shot down an AZAL plane in Kazakhstan, causing the deaths of 38 people. The plane that crashed near Aktau had deviated from its course in southern Russia, where Russian air defense systems were active against Ukrainian drones. According to preliminary investigation findings in Azerbaijan, the aircraft, that had its communication incapacitated by electronic warfare systems while approaching Grozny, was shot down by the Russian Pantsir-S air defense system.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁴ Jakob Hedenskog, "The Armenian dilemma after Azerbaijan's September attack on Nagorno-Karabakh." *Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SEEUS) Report 14* (2023): 4.

⁵⁹⁵ Sofie Bedford, and Nurlan Aliyev. "The end to 'balancing' foreign policy? Why the invasion of Ukraine matters for Azerbaijan," in *A World Order in Transformation?*, ed. Ninna Mörner, 91-98, (Stockholm: CBEES, Södertörn University, 2024), 90-92.

⁵⁹⁶ Nailia Bagirova, and Gleb Stolyarov. "Russian air-defense system downed Azerbaijan plane, sources say," *Reuters*, December 26, 2024, <http://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/azerbaijan-airlines-flight-was-downed-by-russian-air-defence-system-four-sources-2024-12-26>.

This incident caused significant tension in Azerbaijan-Russia relations. Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev clearly stated that the plane was "accidentally shot down" on Russian territory and that Russia was trying to conceal the reason for the incident. Although Russian President Vladimir Putin's rare apology was interpreted as an attempt to ease tensions, the Kremlin's failure to accept direct responsibility and only stating that a criminal case was opened disappointed Baku.⁵⁹⁷

These developments indicated a tendency for the Azerbaijan-Russia relationship to deteriorate. Because, according to rumors that later spread, Aliyev's personal plane was also in Russian airspace during the incident, and similarly, its GPS was turned off and affected by the attack attempt. Moreover, the fact that Aliyev has still not traveled to Russia after this incident, and particularly his absence from the Victory Day anniversary ceremony on May 9th, to which he was invited, has been interpreted as a concrete indication of the coldness in the relations between the two states.⁵⁹⁸

5.4. Security

The role of security relations has been as significant as that of diplomatic relations in strengthening the ties between Azerbaijan and Russia. During the Ilham Aliyev period, the two states established serious new ties on issues such as the security of the South Caucasus and the war on terrorism. As a result of these ties, the two states have aimed to take joint preventive measures against emerging traditional and new security threats. As a worthy continuation of the previous Heydar Aliyev period, security has been the top priority in official discussions since the beginning of this period.

On February 6, 2004, during Ilham Aliyev's first visit to Moscow as president, Russian President Putin emphasized the significant role of security in relations with

⁵⁹⁷ Nailia Bagirova, and Anton Kolodyazhnyy, "Azerbaijan president says crashed plane was shot at from Russia," *Reuters*, December 29, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/azerbaijan-pays-tribute-pilots-passengers-who-perished-air-crash-2024-12-29>.

⁵⁹⁸ Nate Ostiller, "In last-minute cancellation, Aliyev will not attend Moscow Victory Day celebration," *OC Media*, May 8, 2025, <https://oc-media.org/in-last-minute-cancellation-aliyev-will-not-attend-moscow-victory-day-celebration>.

Azerbaijan. Moreover, he mentioned that effective cooperation has been established in matters such as counterterrorism, particularly regarding the security of the Caucasus region.⁵⁹⁹

President Aliyev, during his first official visit to Moscow, also held a meeting with Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov. After the meeting, Ivanov stated in a press conference that he and Aliyev exchanged views on the current and future situations of military-technical cooperation between the two countries.⁶⁰⁰

As a result of this visit, Presidents Putin and Aliyev signed the Moscow Declaration. This declaration was written to clarify the fundamental principles of bilateral relations. According to the document, the parties would enhance cooperation to combat international terrorism, illegal drug and arms trafficking in the face of new global challenges and threats. The declaration also stated that the parties would cooperate in border protection and take joint measures to safeguard each other's state sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. For this purpose, the parties were committed to not engaging in any activities against each other and not allowing their territories to be used for this purpose. The declaration, which envisaged strengthening military and military-technical cooperation to protect the security interests of the two states, was considered by some local observers to serve Russia's interests more than Azerbaijan's.⁶⁰¹

Another issue in bilateral relations was the Chechen factor. Azerbaijan has not pursued a consistent policy regarding the conflict in the North Caucasus since the First Russo-Chechen War in 1994-1996. While officials deny any assistance to the Chechens, some Azerbaijani citizens and NGOs have been helping the Chechen independence movement. During both two Russo-Chechen Wars, former President

⁵⁹⁹ "Official visit of Azerbaijan president Ilham Aliyev to Russia in success: Meeting of the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and the President of Russia Vladimir Putin in private," *AZƏRTAC*, February 6, 2004, <https://azertag.az/en/print/550848>.

⁶⁰⁰ "Official visit of Azerbaijan president Ilham Aliyev to Russia in success meeting with defense minister of Russia," *AZƏRTAC*, February 6, 2004, <https://azertag.az/en/print/550845>.

⁶⁰¹ Samira Gazieva, and Babek Bekir, "Azerbaijan Report: February 9, 2004," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, February 9, 2004, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1340656.html>.

Haydar Aliyev admitted that Chechens were treated in hospitals in Baku, stating that they were not involved in any crimes.⁶⁰²

Russia closing its borders to Azerbaijan shortly before the first war was another reason for the deterioration of relations between the two states.⁶⁰³ At the end of both wars, tens of thousands of Chechen refugees came to Azerbaijan. In fact, this Chechen community had requested residency permits from Azerbaijan after the two wars.⁶⁰⁴

However, Azerbaijan's policy had to change after Putin came to power and the September 11 terrorist attacks. Starting from 2001, Azerbaijani decision-makers launched operations against Salafi cells in the country. Since a sizable portion of the Salafis in the country were Chechen, the Chechens were the most affected by these operations. With the operations, many Chechens without residence permits in the country were forced to leave Azerbaijan.⁶⁰⁵

Throughout the 2000s, the Chechen resistance, caught in the grip of fundamentalism, became a problem that needed to be addressed in Azerbaijan as well. For example, on August 25, 2008, four suspected militants clashed with security forces in the Gusar district of Azerbaijan. It has been determined that these militants were affiliated with the group of Dagestani insurgent Ilgar Mollachiyev.⁶⁰⁶

However, because of security cooperation with Russia, these Salafi North Caucasian militants have strengthened the relationship between the two countries rather than

⁶⁰² Anar Valiyev, "Growing Anti-Chechen sentiment in Azerbaijan," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no. 20, (2006), <https://jamestown.org/program/growing-anti-chechen-sentiment-in-azerbaijan-2>.

⁶⁰³ Ruslan Rəhimli, *Azərbaycan-Rusiya Münasibətlərində Şimali Qafqaz Faktoru (1991-1997)*, (Bakı: "Elm" nəşriyyatı, 2009), 135.

⁶⁰⁴ "Chechens demand residency rights in Azerbaijan," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, February 18, 2009, https://www.rferl.org/a/Chechens_Demand_Residency_Rights_In_Azerbaijan/1495246.html.

⁶⁰⁵ Giorgi Omsarashvili, "Salafism in Azerbaijan," *Philosophy Study* 8, no. 1, (2018): 30, <https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5313/2018.01.005>.

⁶⁰⁶ Liz Fuller, "North Caucasus resistance spills over into Azerbaijan," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, September 2, 2008, https://www.rferl.org/a/North_Caucasus_Resistance_Spills_Over_Into_Azerbaijan/1195766.html.

damaging it through their common struggle. In the following years, the main reason why Ramzan Kadyrov, the President of the Moscow-controlled Chechen Republic, frequently visited Azerbaijan was that the official Baku deemed a Russian influence in Chechnya necessary to maintain peace in the North Caucasus.⁶⁰⁷

On another note, it is Russia's desire to increase its influence over Azerbaijan by proposing the establishment of a "collective security" system in the Caspian Sea. During Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu's visit to Baku in 2014, the proposal to establish a "collective security system" in the Caspian Sea and the establishment of a "naval commanders' council" were interpreted as plans to bring Azerbaijan under Russia's security umbrella. Additionally, the decision for the two countries to conduct joint naval exercises and Azerbaijan's interest in purchasing coastal missile systems from Russia indicate that Moscow is trying to strengthen its influence in the region by deepening military cooperation with Baku.⁶⁰⁸

In addition, it should be mentioned that Azerbaijan's resistance to Russia's gravitational pull in 2010s, unlike Ukraine and Armenia, was significant. For example, Ukraine's newly elected president, Viktor Yanukovich, approved on April 21, 2010 the extension of the lease of Russia's Black Sea Fleet base in Crimea, that was due to expire in 2017, for 25 years until 2042.⁶⁰⁹

Similarly, Armenia and Russia signed an agreement on August 20 to extend the lease of Russia's military base in Gyumri until 2044. The original deal for the base, that was extended without any financial compensation, was signed in 1995 and was valid until 2020.⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁷ Anar Valiyev, "Kadyrov's visit to Baku: What are Azerbaijan's interests in the North Caucasus?" *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 9, no. 220, (2012), <https://jamestown.org/program/kadyrovs-visit-to-baku-what-are-azerbajans-interests-in-the-north-caucasus>.

⁶⁰⁸ Joshua Kucera, "In Azerbaijan, Russian DefMin proposes "collective security" on Caspian," *Eurasianet*, October 14, 2014, <https://eurasianet.org/in-azerbaijan-russian-defmin-proposes-collective-security-on-caspian>.

⁶⁰⁹ Richard Balmforth, "Protests as Ukraine backs Russian base extension," *Reuters*, April 27, 2010, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-ukraine-russia-fleet/protests-as-ukraine-backs-russian-base-extension-idUKTRE63Q0ZX20100427>.

⁶¹⁰ Marianna Grigoryan, "Russia signs base lease extension with Armenia," *Eurasianet*, August 20, 2010, <https://eurasianet.org/russia-signs-base-lease-extension-with-armenia>.

However, unlike Armenia and Ukraine, Azerbaijan was able to continue its long-standing policy of balance in the 2010s and resist Russia's policy of pulling post-Soviet states towards its side aggressively. The most obvious example of this is the non-renewal of the lease for the Gabala radar station, that was located on Azerbaijani territory and had its lease expire in 2012. The radar station built by the Soviet Union in 1984 in Azerbaijan's Gabala district to monitor missile launches 6000 km away was the last remnant of the Russian military presence in Azerbaijan, that had left the country years ago. Although it was militarily outdated, Moscow and Baku had negotiated over this radar station, that was politically considered valuable for Russia to maintain a foothold in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's demand for \$300 million⁶¹¹ a year for a facility that previously had an annual rent of \$7 million⁶¹² meant that it did not want to keep this radar station on its territory.

As a result, the last rental agreement signed in 2002 expired on December 24, 2012. Thus, Russia was forced to set up a new generation Voronezh-DM class anti-missile radar in early 2013 near the town of Armavir in the southern Krasnodar region.⁶¹³

In the following years, developments in Karabakh deeply affected the security relationship between the two states, but since this has been mentioned in other chapters, revisiting it in this heading would be redundant. However, it should be mentioned that the political balance in the South Caucasus has changed after Azerbaijan's liberation of Karabakh. In this process, although there are those who claim that Azerbaijan has turned its back on the West and pursued a more Russia-oriented policy,⁶¹⁴ as a continuation of its long-standing balance policy, Azerbaijan has neither severed its ties with the West nor strengthened its ties with Russia. This

⁶¹¹ Richard Rousseau, "Azerbaijan using Gabala negotiations to change Russia's policy," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 9, no. 133, (2012), <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-using-gabala-negotiations-to-change-russias-policy>.

⁶¹² Mina Muradova, and Khazri Bakinsky, "Azerbaijan: Radar station latest chip in strategy game with Russia," *Eurasianet*, February 15, 2007, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-radar-station-latest-chip-in-strategy-game-with-russia>.

⁶¹³ "New radar in Russia to go on combat duty early in 2013," *Azernews*, December 29, 2012, <https://www.azernews.az/region/48122.html>.

⁶¹⁴ Murad Ismayilov, "Azerbaijan and Russia: Towards a renewed alliance, for a new era," *Caucasus Analytical Digest* 109 (2019): 5, <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000334381>.

balance policy has not only yielded gains in foreign policy but has also strengthened the legitimacy of the government in domestic politics. However, the worldwide rift created by the Russian invasion of Ukraine has made it difficult for Azerbaijan to maintain its balanced stance in foreign policy.⁶¹⁵

In this perspective, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has brought new security issues to the countries in the Black Sea region, including Azerbaijan. As is known, since regaining independence, Azerbaijan has valued the Black Sea region as the only transportation link to the West, considering it valuable for accessing the global market for energy products.⁶¹⁶

For this reason, to prevent the dangers arising from the war, a way of rapprochement with Russia was applied. In this, the fact that the occupation of Karabakh had not yet been resolved and the continued presence of the Russian peacekeeping force also played a role. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine not only brought Azerbaijan closer to Russia but also caused Russia to seek new cooperation platforms with Azerbaijan. This was due to Azerbaijan strengthening its position in the South Caucasus after the 44-Day War.⁶¹⁷ Therefore, in the early days of this invasion, the Declaration on Allied Interaction signed between Azerbaijan and Russia on February 22, 2022, elevated the relationship between the two states to a new level of alliance.⁶¹⁸

This declaration, while written based on mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, primarily encompassed security cooperation. In the declaration, strengthening global and regional peace and stability was identified as a common goal, with particular emphasis on ensuring security in the Caucasus and Caspian

⁶¹⁵ Rail Safiyev, "Russia and Azerbaijan: Navigating geopolitical shifts," *Russian Analytical Digest* 310 (2024): 2, <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000661339>.

⁶¹⁶ Kornely Kakachia, et al, "The Black Sea security after Russian invasion of Ukraine: Views from Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan," *Policy Paper 31*, (Georgian Institute of Politics, 2022), 10.

⁶¹⁷ Gadimova-Akbulut, Nazrin. "The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the shadow of the Russian invasion of Ukraine." (2024): 15-16.

⁶¹⁸ Vasif Huseynov, "Azerbaijan and Russia sign declaration on allied cooperation," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19, no. 25, (2022), <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-and-russia-sign-declaration-on-allied-cooperation>.

regions. While a commitment was made to hold urgent consultations in the event of a possible threat, it was also stated that the possibility of providing military assistance in accordance with Article 16 could be considered. At the same time, the declaration emphasized that military-political cooperation between the two states would be developed in accordance with national interests and without being against third countries.⁶¹⁹

5.5. Economics

On February 6, 2004, during the first presidential visit of Ilham Aliyev, both leaders noted that the economic relations between the two states have significantly developed in recent years, stating that there has been a noticeable expansion in the total trade volume.⁶²⁰ The first Russia-Azerbaijan Economic Forum, held in Baku in the same year, was an important step towards enhancing economic cooperation between the two states.⁶²¹

Speaking at the opening of the forum, President Aliyev stated that relations with Russia are a priority for the state and expressed his commitment to making efforts to develop these relations in every field, including the economic sector. He also stated that the two state leaders have established a target of increasing Russia-Azerbaijan trade volume to \$1 billion, that he expects will be realized shortly. In the forum, Russian Minister of Industry and Energy Viktor Khristenko emphasized the importance of efficient cooperation in energy, transportation, and communication sectors.⁶²²

⁶¹⁹ “Declaration on allied interaction between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation,” *President.az*, February 22, 2022, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55498>.

⁶²⁰ “Official visit of Azerbaijan president Ilham Aliyev to Russia in success: Meeting of the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and the President of Russia Vladimir Putin in private,” *AZƏRTAC*, February 6, 2004, <https://azertag.az/en/print/550848>.

⁶²¹ “First Azerbaijan-Russia economic forum ‘Azerbaijani-Russian Trade-Economic Relations: The Tendencies and Prospects of Development’ started in Baku,” *AZƏRTAC*, April 6, 2004, <https://azertag.az/en/print/552231>.

⁶²² “1st Russian-Azerbaijani Forum opens in Baku,” *Sputnic International*, April 6, 2004, <https://sputnikglobe.com/20040406/39913194.html>.

Compared to the other two South Caucasian states, Azerbaijan has been less dependent on Russian energy supply due to its oil and natural gas reserves. Nevertheless, from 2000 until December 2006, due to severe weather conditions in Baku and other regions of the country and electricity shortages, the Azerbaijani government regularly purchased natural gas and electricity from Gazprom.⁶²³

This situation continued until 2007, when it announced that it would raise gas prices for Azerbaijan from \$110 to \$230 per 1000 m³. Gazprom would also reduce the volume of supplies it exported to Azerbaijan from 4.5 billion m³ to 1.5 billion m³. Azerbaijani decision-makers believed that this price increase was intended to force the state to stop supplying gas to Georgia.⁶²⁴ Therefore, they made it clear that they would not import gas from Russia at the price proposed after 2007. Despite the disagreement over gas prices, Russia did not lose interest in Azerbaijan.⁶²⁵

With the beginning of the new century, the economic relations between Azerbaijan and Russia underwent a significant transformation. Azerbaijan and Russia could contribute to the stabilization of the situation in the region by enhancing their economic cooperation. This, in turn, generates opportunities for the long-term evolution of their international cooperation.⁶²⁶

Like Russia, Azerbaijan has adopted the use of energy resources as a tool of foreign policy. Thanks to the substantial natural resource revenues it obtained after 2005, Azerbaijan has reduced its dependence on Russia for oil exports. With the economic-oriented foreign policy, Azerbaijan has been able to manage the process without direct intervention from Russia, but this foreign policy has increased the conflict

⁶²³ Matthew Collin, "Azeris warn Russia on gas prices," *BBC*, December 24, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6207257.stm>.

⁶²⁴ Vladimir Socor, "Azerbaijan keeps solidarity with Georgia despite Russian energy supply cuts," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 3, no. 227, (2006), <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-keeps-solidarity-with-georgia-despite-russian-energy-supply-cuts>.

⁶²⁵ Fatma Aslı Kelkitli, "Russian foreign policy in South Caucasus under Putin," *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 13, no. 3, (2008): 84-85.

⁶²⁶ Igor A. Filkevich, et al. "Priorities of economic cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan in the conditions of the global turbulence," *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations* 24, no. 2, (2024): 194, <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2024-24-2-192-203>.

between the state's two main foreign policy objectives. These two goals have been to ensure regional stability to protect foreign investments in the oil sector on one hand, and to pressure for a negotiated solution to the Karabakh issue on the other. In the early 2010s, Azerbaijan prioritized regional stability due to the impact of the Georgian occupation in 2008, which reduced its motivation for negotiations with Armenia⁶²⁷

By 2013, Russia had maintained its position as Azerbaijan's number one trading partner in the South Caucasus. After the restoration of independence, Russia's direct investment in Azerbaijan has increased nearly seventeen times. This makes Azerbaijan Russia's top trade partner. Similarly, Russia is also Azerbaijan's number one trade partner in the non-oil sector.⁶²⁸

As a hallmark of this partnership, interregional forums are regularly held between the two states. One of these, the 7th Joint Interregional Forum held in Baku on November 1, 2016, brought together representatives of central and regional authorities from Azerbaijan and Russia. The forum was considered an important platform for the two states' relations, with many participants from the fields of economy, industry, tourism, agriculture, construction, trade, consultancy, logistics, pharmaceuticals, and finance. Regarding interregional cooperation, officials stated that 40 Russian regions have cooperation agreements with Azerbaijan in various fields, and at the end of the forum, 12 documents were signed between Azerbaijan and Russia, envisaging cooperation in humanitarian and economic fields.⁶²⁹

Official Baku has been pursuing a delicate neutrality policy throughout the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, aiming to maintain its ties with both Moscow and Kyiv. On one hand, it sends humanitarian aid and fuel to Ukraine, while on the other hand,

⁶²⁷ Heidi Kjaernet, "Azerbaijani-Russian relations and the economization of foreign policy," in *Caspian Energy Politics: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan*, ed. Indra Overland, Heidi Kjaernet, and Andrea Kendall-Taylor, 150-161, (London: Routledge, 2010), 158-159, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203865231>.

⁶²⁸ Kamal Makili-Aliyev, *Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy: Between East and West....* IAI Working Papers 1305, (Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), 2013).

⁶²⁹ Amina Nazarli, "Baku hosts Azerbaijani-Russian Interregional Forum," *Azernews*, November 1, 2016, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/104500.html>.

it avoids directly condemning Russia's actions, maintaining a diplomatic balance. Moreover, Azerbaijan has viewed Europe's efforts to become independent from Russian energy as an opportunity. Thus, it has tried to benefit from this geopolitical shift through strategies such as increasing gas exports and strengthening its energy potential with infrastructure projects like the Nakhchivan corridor.⁶³⁰

This situation demonstrates that Azerbaijan has skillfully managed the complex balance between addressing security concerns and protecting its economic interests.⁶³¹ Nevertheless, the effects of this invasion are manifesting in three main areas of the Azerbaijani economy: financial sanctions, fluctuations in commodity prices, and disruptions in the supply chain. In summary, while the war's global increase in energy and agricultural commodity prices creates a favorable environment for Azerbaijan's foreign exchange reserves based on hydrocarbon exports in the short term, the importance of long-term economic diversification strategies should be emphasized.⁶³²

As of today, the economic relations between Azerbaijan and Russia have gained significant depth through joint ventures and strategic infrastructure projects. The 900 joint ventures operating in the Azerbaijani market reveal the extent of this cooperation. About one-third of these ventures are fully owned by Russian capital companies. This intense economic interaction has been further reinforced by the strengthening of ties between business associations and especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in recent years. In the energy sector, successful investments by major Russian energy companies such as Gazprom, Transneft, and Lukoil in Azerbaijan constitute the main body of the strategic economic partnership between the two states. Outside of economic integration, logistical projects such as

⁶³⁰ Anri R.Chedia, "Zangezur corridor: Economic potential and political constraints," *Russia in Global Affairs* 22, no. 1, (2024): 200, <https://doi.org/10.31278/1810-6374-2024-22-1-194-216>.

⁶³¹ Nikola Mikovic, "Azerbaijan watches closely the Russian invasion of Ukraine," *The Interpreter*, March 11, 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/azerbaijan-watches-closely-russian-invasion-ukraine>.

⁶³² Emin Mammadov, "The economic consequences of Russia-Ukraine war for Azerbaijan." *Center for Economic and Social Development (CESD) Paper*, (2022): 1, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4058963>.

the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) also form the main axis of mutual economic relations. For this reason alone, Azerbaijan has focused on modernizing infrastructure, particularly railways, to enhance the potential of this corridor.⁶³³

5.6. Socio-culture

During the Ilham Aliyev period, significant development in the socio-cultural relations between Azerbaijan and Russia has also been observed. During this period, it was aimed to increase the interaction between the cultural and social structures of both peoples. Especially the ties established in the education and diaspora areas have contributed to the strengthening of socio-cultural relations.

The first dimension of the socio-cultural aspect of bilateral relations has been shaped around education. In this, the existence of Russian-language schools in Azerbaijan is the main reason. As described in a previous chapter specifically about Azerbaijan, the Russification activities that began with the establishment of the Soviet Union made the Russian language a key distinguishing feature between the elites and the lower social classes in the member states.⁶³⁴

During the Soviet period, in Azerbaijan, as in other Soviet Republics, the promotion of Russian has somewhat restricted the functions of the native language in key areas. The tendency to shift from Azerbaijani Turkic to Russian has become particularly pronounced in the districts, especially in the capital Baku. Villages had resisted the spread of Russian due to the absence of the Russian population and the lack of other political and sociocultural activities that would lead to Russification.⁶³⁵

⁶³³ Nurad Mammadov, "Economic, trade, and transport cooperation between Azerbaijan and Russia." *Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center)*, March 18, 2024. <https://aircenter.az/en/single/ekonomiceskoe-torgovoe-i-transportnoe-sotrudnicestvo-azerbaydžana-i-rossii-1413>.

⁶³⁴ Arto Mustajoki, "The democratization of Russian," in *The Soft Power of the Russian Language: Pluricentricity, Politics and Policies*, ed. Arto Mustajoki, Ekaterina Protassova and Maria Yelenevskaya, 21-34, (London: Routledge, 2019), 26, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429061110>.

⁶³⁵ Jala Garibova, "Russian in Azerbaijan: Changing practices and emerging paradigms," in *The Soft Power of the Russian Language: Pluricentricity, Politics and Policies*, ed. Arto Mustajoki, Ekaterina

It should also be noted that Azerbaijan had gained more immunity against the cultural and linguistic dominance of Russian compared to other Turkic republics. There were reasons for this: the formation of Azerbaijan's medieval literary heritage; the creation of a rich source by Azerbaijani intellectuals in the 20th century; and perhaps most importantly, the elevation of the status of the Azerbaijani language to an official level and its constitutional recognition by the leaders of the AzSSR [especially Heydar Aliyev from the 1970s onwards]. Thus, during the Soviet period, although Russian was necessary for promotion to high-level positions, Azerbaijani Turkic was widely used in the main fields. Thus, the spread of Azerbaijani Turkic after independence occurred with less turmoil.⁶³⁶

After the restoration of independence, during the PFA-Musavat alliance period in 1992, when national ideas became widespread, interest in schools with Russian-based programs decreased. However, in the following years, schools with Russian-based programs saw a resurgence.⁶³⁷ Until the 2010s, foreign films dubbed in Russian were shown on television, but by 2012, Azerbaijan banned all foreign TV shows.⁶³⁸

Nevertheless, there were various reasons for the continuation of Russian-language education in Azerbaijan. First, the improvement of relations with Russia, along with the balanced foreign policy of Heydar Aliyev and later Ilham Aliyev, allowed Russian-language education to continue in Azerbaijan. Second, in this regard, there were also special efforts from the Russian state. For example, following Russian President Vladimir Putin's official visit to Azerbaijan in 2001, textbooks and encyclopedias were provided annually to Russian-language schools in Azerbaijan.⁶³⁹

Protassova and Maria Yelenevskaya, 55-70, (London: Routledge, 2019), 55, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429061110>.

⁶³⁶ Garibova, "Russian in Azerbaijan," 56.

⁶³⁷ Jamila Aliyeva, *Russian Language Usage in Azerbaijan*, (MA thesis. Istanbul Bilgi University [Türkiye], 2017), 63.

⁶³⁸ "Azerbaijan bans all foreign TV shows," *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 30, 2012, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/azerbaijan-bans-all-foreign-tv-shows-19589>.

⁶³⁹ "Russia made a present to Azerbaijani schools," *AZƏRTAC*, November 14, 2005, <https://azertag.az/en/print/558107>.

By 2008, the number of primary and secondary schools with Russian-based programs in Azerbaijan had stabilized, with 155 out of the 324 schools in the capital consisting of these schools. However, while schools with classes where Russian is the medium of instruction make up about half of the capital's schools, only 15 percent of those who graduated from secondary schools in Baku received an education in Russian. This rate is roughly the same as the indicators from the 1990s.⁶⁴⁰

By 2013, the number of schools providing education solely in Russian in Azerbaijan was 15, while the total number of schools with Russian-based programs was 314, and the total number of students here was 82,535.⁶⁴¹ Although there is a division in the Azerbaijani public opinion on this matter,⁶⁴² the number of students in the Russian sector was changed from 90,000 in 2018, to 120,000 in 2019, and to 160,000 in 2023.⁶⁴³

Thanks to these policies that developed the relations between the two countries, unlike other post-Soviet republics, especially the Caucasian republics, Russian-language schools in Azerbaijan have been able to maintain their presence. For example, while there are not many schools providing Russian-language education in Georgia and especially in Armenia, which has had close relations with Russia in every field for many years, about 10 percent of the schools in Azerbaijan can offer education in Russian.⁶⁴⁴

The most up-to-date comments on this issue have been made by the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia, Aliyev and Putin. For them, Russian is not a colonial

⁶⁴⁰ “Azərbaycanda rusdillilər artır, yoxsa azalır?” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, August 29, 2009, <https://www.azadliq.org/a/1810273.html>.

⁶⁴¹ “Azərbaycanda fəaliyyət göstərən rus məktəblərinin sayı açıqlandı,” *Oxu.az*, August 23, 2013, <https://oxu.az/cemiyyet/azerbaycanda-fealiyyet-gosteren-rus-mekteblerinin-sayi-aciqlandi>.

⁶⁴² Volodymyr Soboliev, “A nation divided by language: Azerbaijan's Russian legacy,” *OC Media*, February 8, 2018, <https://oc-media.org/a-nation-divided-by-language-azerbajians-russian-legacy>.

⁶⁴³ Fatima Movlamli, “The number of Russian-language students in Azerbaijan has increased by 50,000 in 5 years,” *JAM News*, November 23, 2023, <https://jam-news.net/russian-students-in-azerbaijan>.

⁶⁴⁴ Joe Luc Barnes, “The Russian language in the former USSR,” *Riddle*, January 14, 2025, <https://ridl.io/the-russian-language-in-the-former-ussr>.

language. When they met in Moscow on February 22, 2022, on the eve of the Ukraine invasion, President Putin thanked his counterpart for the “support in promoting the Russian language” in Azerbaijan. Aliyev also noted that there are 340 Russian-language schools in Azerbaijan with 140,000 students, which he said is very important for the future ties between the two countries.⁶⁴⁵

Another socio-cultural issue affecting the relationship between Azerbaijan and Russia is the Azerbaijani population in Russia. The number of Azerbaijanis in Russia is subject to debate. According to the 2010 census, 603,070 Azerbaijanis live and work in Russia.⁶⁴⁶ However, some estimates put the number at around 1.5 million, with 750,000 of this population, most of whom live in the major cities, residing in Moscow. Some of them were Azerbaijanis who settled during the Soviet period, incentivized by decision-makers to achieve integration within the Union. The others were some of the Azerbaijanis who left the country due to economic and political issues and conflicts such as the First Karabakh War during the process of restoring independence.⁶⁴⁷

Although the conditions that caused them to leave Azerbaijan are different, most Azerbaijani immigrants in Russia are involved in the trade sector. Although they are thought to make up about 20 percent of the retail business, it is possible to see a high concentration of Azerbaijanis in any open market in Moscow. As a reason for this, networks resulting from post-Soviet migration make it possible to explain the presence of certain immigrant groups in specific economic sectors.⁶⁴⁸

Baku established the State Committee on Affairs of Azerbaijanis Living Abroad in 2002 to support ties with Azerbaijanis living in other countries, including Russia.

⁶⁴⁵ Heydar Isayev, “War in Ukraine puts spotlight on Russian language in Azerbaijan,” *Eurasianet*, April 13, 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/war-in-ukraine-puts-spotlight-on-russian-language-in-azerbaijan>.

⁶⁴⁶ Maxim A. Suchkov, “Assessing Russian soft power in the South Caucasus: Ten reasons why Moscow looks lame,” *Middle Eastern Analysis/Ortadoğu Analiz* 5, no. 54, (2013): 86.

⁶⁴⁷ Paul Goble, “Between Moscow and Baku: The Azerbaijani diaspora in Russia,” *Azerbaijan in the World: ADA Biweekly Newsletter* 3, no. 10, (2010): 7-8.

⁶⁴⁸ Adeline Braux, “Azerbaijani migrants in Russia,” *Caucasus Analytical Digest* 57, no. 3, (2013): 5-7.

Azerbaijani policymakers used such a broad term when naming the committee to avoid contradicting the complex origins of Azerbaijanis living in different countries. For example, Azerbaijanis in Russia could be considered a true diaspora, while the massive Azerbaijani population in Iran was more of an autochthon community than a diaspora. This organization, aimed at improving relations with Azerbaijani communities and host countries, was established in 2008 as the State Committee on Work with Diaspora based on the previous organization.⁶⁴⁹

A significant portion of Azerbaijanis living in Russia hold Russian citizenship. There is a fundamental reason for this because the conditions for obtaining Russian citizenship are relatively easier for people coming from the former Soviet countries compared to those who do not.

This situation is increasing the number of people acquiring Russian citizenship. However, this raises another issue. Since Azerbaijan does not recognize dual citizenship, many Azerbaijanis have had to renounce their Azerbaijani citizenship. In practice, however, many Azerbaijanis carry two passports because they have not informed their home state.⁶⁵⁰

In Moscow, there are three main organizations belonging to Azerbaijanis: the Odjak (Hearth) Cultural Association, the Federal Azerbaijanis National Cultural Autonomy (FNCA, shortly Autonomy), and the All-Russian Azerbaijani Congress (VAK). In addition to these three, there are also various organizations, a significant portion of which are passive and small. The establishment of Odjak, whose activities are limited to cultural fields, was carried out by Azerbaijani intellectuals in Moscow during the Perestroika period in 1988. VAK and Autonomy, on the other hand, have broader and mostly similar areas of activity. Both organizations provide legal advice to their members and also collaborate with Russian authorities on issues related to

⁶⁴⁹ “History and purpose of establishment of the Committee,” Republic of Azerbaijan State Committee on Work with Diaspora, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://diaspor.gov.az/en/page/yaranma-tarixi-ve-meqsedi-14>.

⁶⁵⁰ Adeline Braux, “The Azerbaijani community in Russia: A look at the second generation,” in *“Azerbaijani” and Beyond: Perspectives on the Construction of National Identity*, edited by Aliaga Mammadli, Adeline Braux and Ceyhun Mahmudlu, 152-174, (Berlin: Verlag-Koester, 2017), 169.

migration and the diaspora. Therefore, the idea of having a single umbrella organization instead of two separate entities is being voiced.⁶⁵¹

Here, VAK stands out. VAK was created in March 2001 by 50 Azerbaijani public organizations. The main goal of the congress is to protect and realize civil rights of the Azerbaijani diaspora in Russia.⁶⁵² Azerbaijani President Aliyev also emphasized at a congress of VAK that VAK is an indispensable part of Russian civil society.⁶⁵³ However, by 2017, Russia had shut down VAK.⁶⁵⁴

The significance of the Azerbaijanism strategy, which was initiated by Heydar Aliyev and further developed by the current President Ilham Aliyev, is evident in the analysis of the dynamics of the Azerbaijani diaspora. This approach is a strong principle that improves the spiritual bond between Azerbaijanis residing abroad and their homeland. In the present day, the Azerbaijani diaspora is not merely a collection of Azerbaijanis who reside abroad. It is also a potent force that has the capacity to influence the social and political landscapes of the countries in which they reside. Shortly, they contribute to the country's global prestige and authority.⁶⁵⁵

5.7. Conclusion

The relations between Azerbaijan and Russia have a complex and multilayered structure that has been ongoing for over two centuries. Since Azerbaijan regained its independence in 1991, Azerbaijan's foreign policy has been shaped by the effort to

⁶⁵¹ Adeline Braux, "Azerbaijanis in Russia: An imagined Diaspora," in *Migration and Social Upheaval as the Face of Globalization in Central Asia*, ed. Marlene Laruelle, 167-185, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 182-183, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004249509_012.

⁶⁵² "All-Russian Azerbaijani Congress," President of Russia, January 19, 2004, accessed October 4, 2024, <http://en.special.kremlin.ru/supplement/2058>.

⁶⁵³ "To the participants of the Third All-Russian Azerbaijani Congress," President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, November 26, 2011, accessed November 14, 2024, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/3676>.

⁶⁵⁴ Bradley Jardine, "Russia closes Azerbaijani diaspora organization," *Eurasianet*, September 22, 2017, <https://eurasianet.org/russia-closes-azerbaijani-diaspora-organization>.

⁶⁵⁵ Laman Garayeva, "The role of the diaspora in strengthening the Azerbaijani-Russian relations," *"Metafizika" Journal* 5, no. 3, (2022): 150-151.

maintain independence while balancing relations with Moscow. Unlike the Ayaz Mütəllibov government, that pursued a policy dependent on Russia in the early periods, the PFA government aimed to distance itself from Russia both militarily and politically.

With Heydar Aliyev coming to power in 1993, Azerbaijan managed to maintain its independence and established a more conciliatory relationship with Russia. During this period, issues such as the Karabakh problem, allegations of support for Chechnya, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project have been points of tension in bilateral relations. During the İlham Aliyev period, Azerbaijan-Russia relations have shown progressive development. The good neighborly relations and experience inherited from the Heydar Aliyev period have played an important role in this development. The “Moscow Declaration” signed in 2004 has formed the basis for cooperation in the diplomatic, security, economic, and socio-cultural fields.

In the field of diplomacy, the Karabakh issue has been the main determinant of relations. Russia’s role in Karabakh and its support for Armenia have continuously posed an obstacle for Azerbaijan. However, Azerbaijan has always kept the option of resolving the Karabakh issue through military means on its agenda and has adopted a more cautious approach, especially after the Russo-Georgian War in 2008.

The “Four-Day War” in 2016 provided Azerbaijan with an opportunity to test its military capabilities and gauge Russia’s stance. After the 2018 revolution in Armenia, the possibility of Russia distancing itself from Armenia opened a new window of opportunity for Azerbaijan, ultimately leading to the liberation of a significant part of Karabakh in the 44-Day War in 2020.

The deployment of Russian peacekeepers to the region after this war and their withdrawal in 2024 marked the beginning of a new era. The Russo-Ukraine Wars (2014 and 2022) has also influenced Azerbaijan’s foreign policy, and although Azerbaijan supports territorial integrity, it has avoided severing ties with Russia. Finally, the incident involving the downing of the AZAL plane in 2024 caused tension in bilateral relations.

Security relations have also been as important as diplomatic ties. Especially in the areas of counterterrorism and the security of the South Caucasus, cooperation has been developed. The “Moscow Declaration” in 2004 envisaged joint measures to combat international terrorism and drug trafficking. The Chechen factor has also occasionally created tension in the relations, but after the September 11 attacks, Azerbaijan’s operations against Salafi cells have increased security cooperation with Russia.

Russia’s proposals to establish a “collective security system” in the Caspian Sea and to create a “council of naval commanders” have been interpreted as efforts to increase its influence in the region. The refusal to extend the lease of the Gabala radar station in 2012 demonstrated Azerbaijan’s determination to limit Russia’s military presence. The “Declaration on Allied Interaction” signed in 2022 has elevated the relationship between the two countries to a new level of alliance, aiming to strengthen mutual security cooperation and regional stability.

Crucial developments have also occurred in economic relations. The first economic forum in 2004 set the goal of increasing trade volume. Azerbaijan’s rich energy resources have reduced its energy dependence on Russia and even enabled it to use energy resources as a tool of foreign policy. Russia has continued to be Azerbaijan’s number one trading partner in the non-oil sector. Interregional forums and joint ventures have deepened economic cooperation. After the Russo-Ukraine War in 2022, Azerbaijan saw Europe’s efforts to reduce its dependence on Russian energy as an opportunity and pursued strategies to increase gas exports. Logistics projects such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) form the main axis of bilateral economic relations.

Sociocultural relations have developed, especially in the fields of education and diaspora. The presence of schools teaching in Russian in Azerbaijan has maintained the cultural interaction between the two peoples. Thanks to the balance policy of Heydar Aliyev and Ilham Aliyev, Russian-language education has maintained its presence in Azerbaijan compared to other post-Soviet republics. As of 2023, the

number of students receiving education in Russian in Azerbaijan has reached 160,000.

The Azerbaijani diaspora in Russia constitutes another important dimension of bilateral relations. According to the 2010 census, 603,070 Azerbaijanis lived in Russia, while some estimates indicate that this number has reached 1.5 million. Azerbaijani officials have established various structures to strengthen ties with the diaspora, but the closure of the All-Russian Azerbaijan Congress (VAK) by Russia in 2017 has been interpreted as a setback in this area.

In conclusion, Azerbaijan's relations with Russia have been built on a pragmatic balance policy. Baku has carefully managed its relations with both Russia and the West to maximize its national interests and maintain its independence. The Karabakh issue, energy policies, and security concerns continue to be the fundamental elements of this dynamic relationship. Azerbaijan's balance policy demonstrates its flexibility and adaptability in the face of regional geopolitical developments.

CHAPTER 6

AZERBAIJAN-GEORGIA RELATIONS

6.1. Introduction

Azerbaijan and Georgia are two key countries of geopolitical importance in the South Caucasus. Centuries-old shared historical and cultural ties have tightly bound these two countries together. Especially after regaining their independence in the late 20th century, they developed a strategic cooperation in line with regional stability and development goals. This cooperation goes beyond bilateral relations, encompassing projects that affect the overall geopolitical balance of the Caucasus and contribute to international energy security. In this thesis chapter, the complex and strategic structure of the relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia will be addressed. Firstly, the internal and external dynamics of the early post-independence period of the two countries will be examined, followed by a detailed analysis of the diplomatic, economic, and security collaborations that began with Heydar Aliyev's rise to power and reached their peak during Ilham Aliyev's period.

Specifically, the central role of energy corridors, transportation projects, and regional security mechanisms in these relations will be focused on. Also, issues such as socio-cultural ties and the situation of the Azerbaijani Turkic minority in Georgia will also be comprehensively analyzed. This chapter aims to deeply examine the contributions of the two countries to regional stability and international energy security.

6.2. Short Background

Although the history of the peoples of Azerbaijan and Georgia extends hundreds of years, their first modern relations occurred during the first period of independence

from 1918 to 1920.⁶⁵⁶ After the restoration of independence in 1991, it took some time for the relations between the two states to be reestablished. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, both states entered a chaotic period and faced serious internal instability. Azerbaijan was in intense conflict over the Karabakh issue, which caused the country to direct all its resources and attention to internal matters. The borders, army, and political structure of the newly established state had not yet fully settled. Similarly, Georgia was also fighting against separatist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and even experiencing hot conflicts in these regions. There was also political turmoil and power struggles within the country. Nevertheless, the first pillar theme was established with the agreement titled “friendship, cooperation, and mutual security” made on February 3, 1993.⁶⁵⁷

In these early years of restored independence (1991-1993), while Zviad Gamsakhurdia was in power in Georgia, shortly after he left office, Abulfaz Elchibey came to power in Azerbaijan. Like Gamsakhurdia, Elchibey’s greatest assets were his personal charisma, popular support, and nationalism. However, neither of them could transform these assets into building a stronger state.⁶⁵⁸

These individuals were not experienced politicians and had no experience in state governance. Therefore, their rule was short-lived in both states. Inexperienced politicians have quickly had to hand over to former party leaders who were more experienced and knew politics better. In Georgia, Gamsakhurdia, a philologist, was forced to swap places with Eduard Shevardnadze, a former Politburo member and the former Soviet Foreign Minister, while in Azerbaijan, the philologist President Elchibey relinquished power in 1993 to Heydar Aliyev, a former Politburo member and the former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan. With the rise

⁶⁵⁶ Samira Habibbayli Ilham, “Azerbaijan–Georgian Relations in the Early 20th Century,” *International Journal of Social Sciences* 4, no. 1, (2024): 103, <https://doi.org/10.55367/LDES3649>.

⁶⁵⁷ Yaqub Mahmudov, *Azərbaycan–Gürcüstan Münasibətləri Tarixi (XVIII əsr – XXI əsrin əvvəlləri)*, (Bakı: “Şərq-Qərb” nəşriyyatı, 2013), 289.

⁶⁵⁸ Leila Alieva, *Reshaping Eurasia: Foreign Policy Strategies and Leadership Assets in Post-Soviet South Caucasus*, Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Series, (Berkeley: University of California, 2000), 22.

of Shevardnadze and Aliyev to power, a new dynamism emerged in the development of very close and reciprocal relations between the countries.⁶⁵⁹

The foundation for a new phase in the bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia was laid after Heydar Aliyev returned to power. For Azerbaijan, which was in a difficult economic and political situation in the early 1990s, Georgia was an important strategic direction in Heydar Aliyev's foreign policy and global energy strategy. The foreign policy strategy implemented under Heydar Aliyev's leadership laid the foundation for a future regional economic, political, and security system that would meet the pragmatic and bilateral interests in the region, thereby establishing the basis for integration processes that would ensure the welfare of the region's peoples.⁶⁶⁰

After internal political stability was achieved in Azerbaijan and the necessary steps were taken internationally regarding energy projects, Heydar Aliyev made his first comprehensive foreign visit to Georgia on March 8, 1996. The historical significance of this visit was that it was the first official state visit by the head of state of independent Azerbaijan to independent Georgia. As part of the visit, a series of important documents were signed, including a 22-article agreement on friendship, cooperation, and mutual security, as well as a trade agreement.⁶⁶¹

The serious relations that began with this agreement were advanced in the energy sector through various agreements, primarily the "Contract of the Century." As a result, another export route for early oil exported from Azerbaijan became the Baku-Supsa Pipeline Project. This pipeline extended from the Sangachal terminal near Baku to the Supsa port in Georgia on the Black Sea. The agreement for the construction of this pipeline between Azerbaijan and Georgia was signed in March

⁶⁵⁹ Maia Paksadze, *Sovyet Sonrası Gürcistan-Azerbaycan İlişkileri: Karşılıklı Bağımlılık Kurarak Bağımsız Olmak*, (MA thesis, Necmettin Erbakan University [Türkiye], 2007), 36-37.

⁶⁶⁰ Fuad Çıraçov, "Azərbaycan–Gürcüstan münasibətləri," in *Azərbaycan Respublikasının Xarici Siyasətinin Əsas İstiqamətləri (1991-2016): Məqalələr Toplusu*, ed. Fərhad Məmmədov, Cavid Vəliyev and Aqşin Məmmədov, 253-276, (Bakı: "Poliart" MMC, 2017), 260.

⁶⁶¹ Mazahir Afandiyev, "Azerbaijan-Georgia collaboration: A pillar of regional security and prosperity." *Azernews*, January 21, 2025, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/236752.html>.

1996, and the connection was completed in 1998. The following year, the pipeline delivered its first oil to the Black Sea. The initial capacity of the Baku-Supsa pipeline was 150,000 barrels per day, but it was later increased to 250,000 barrels.⁶⁶²

Until the passing of Heydar Aliyev in 2003, these energy-centered relations continued as a strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Georgia. The signed agreements and initiated projects have not only contributed to the economic development of the two countries but have also ensured regional stability and security in the South Caucasus. Especially massive projects like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Pipeline have strengthened Azerbaijan's position on the global energy map by transporting the rich energy resources of the Caspian Sea to international markets and have made Georgia an important transit country.⁶⁶³

6.3. Diplomacy

The year 2003 was a turning point for the South Caucasian states. For example, in the South Caucasus, Türkiye, which has considerable territory, encountered a new administration that has held power alone for many years. And Azerbaijan, with the rise of İlham Aliyev to power, opened the door to a new period that has continued to this day. Georgia also experienced one of these power changes that were widespread in 2003. The protests that began on November 3, 2003, were completed as a successful revolution on November 23, 2003, when two opposition leaders, Mikheil Saakashvili and Zurab Zhvania, entered the office of the then-President Eduard Shevardnadze. Shevardnadze, who had introduced these two opposition leaders to politics and mentored them, ended his long political career by handing them his resignation letter. This political event, that would be called the Rose Revolution, represented a victory not only for the people of Georgia but also, according to some, for “democracy” worldwide.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶² Serik Orazgaliyev, “Competition for pipeline export routes in the Caspian region: The new Great Game or the new Silk Road,” *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1, (2017): 8-9, <https://doi.org/10.22261/5B75C8>.

⁶⁶³ Loid Karchava, et al., "Georgia's strategic role in Eurasian transport and digital logistics transformation," *The New Economist* 20, no. 2, (2025): 48, <http://dx.doi.org/10.36962/NEC20022025-40>.

⁶⁶⁴ Lincoln Mitchell, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution,” *Current History* 103, no. 675, (2004): 342.

With the beginning of the Ilham Aliyev period coinciding with this new Georgian administration, relations with Azerbaijan started to develop from the very first day. First, the new Georgian President Saakashvili made his first official trip to the US, and then on March 4, 2004, he made an official visit to Azerbaijan.⁶⁶⁵

The foundations of the relations during this period were laid with the visit of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to Tbilisi on June 14-15, 2004. During this visit, various agreements and protocols were signed in many fields, from energy to transportation, and from aviation to communication.⁶⁶⁶

However, the most significant development in this early period of bilateral relations, which would have an impact for decades to come, was the inauguration of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline in 2005. On May 25, 2005, the BTC, that would connect the oil fields in the Caspian Sea region to the Mediterranean and beyond to Western markets, was inaugurated with the participation of the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Türkiye.⁶⁶⁷ On the same day, a declaration was signed regarding the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway connection, which aimed to bypass Armenia with this railway project.⁶⁶⁸

The relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia during this period are based on three fundamental elements. These are the inclination of both states towards a foreign policy aligned with Western countries; the threat to the independence and territorial integrity of both states coming from Russia and Armenia; and Georgia's geopolitical importance in transporting Azerbaijan's energy resources to international markets.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁵ "Energy projects prevailed in Saakashvili's talks in Baku," *Civil Georgia*, March 7, 2004, <https://civil.ge/archives/105395>.

⁶⁶⁶ "Azərbaycan-Gürcüstan münasibətləri," *Azərbaycan – Gürcüstan əlaqələri*, Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin İşlər İdarəsinin Prezident Kitabxanası (2020): 5, <https://files.preslib.az/projects/azergeo/a1.pdf>.

⁶⁶⁷ Soner Cagaptay, "Startup of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline: Turkey's energy role," *The Washington Institute*, May 25, 2005, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/startup-baku-tbilisi-ceyhan-pipeline-turkeys-energy-role>.

⁶⁶⁸ "Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Rail Line, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey," *Railway Technology*, <https://www.railway-technology.com/projects/baku-tbilisi-kars>.

⁶⁶⁹ Nilgün Atıcı Köktaş, "Saakaşvili dönemi Gürcistan: İç ve dış politika üzerine bir değerlendirme," *Ardahan Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi* 1, no. 2, (2015): 103.

During this process, the pro-West Saakashvili government further deteriorated relations between Georgia and Russia, which in turn allowed for the further development of Georgia-Azerbaijan relations. On September 27-28, 2006, the arrest of a total of 15 people, including 4 Russian military intelligence officers, by Georgia escalated the tension in relations to the level of a diplomatic crisis.⁶⁷⁰ In response, Russia made new price increases in gas sales for 2007 during the same months. Especially for Georgia, Russia's Gazprom presented with two conditions. These consisted of either accepting the 100 percent price increase or selling the main natural gas pipeline to Gazprom.⁶⁷¹

Russia, aiming to prevent third parties from aiding Georgia, warned Azerbaijan not to support Georgia. However, at the end of December 2006, an agreement was made between Georgia and Azerbaijan to act together against Russia. Following the bilateral discussions, an agreement was reached for Azerbaijan to sell 1.3 million m³ of gas per day to Georgia at a favorable price.⁶⁷²

On February 7, 2007, a trilateral regional cooperation summit was held in the Georgian parliament building in Tbilisi, with the participation of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye. According to the agreement announced after the signing ceremony; to protect Georgia from Russian pressure, it was agreed to allocate Azerbaijan's share of 800 million m³ of gas from the "Shahdeniz" field to Georgia.⁶⁷³

However, the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 has put bilateral relations into a new development process. Although Georgia's defeat made the Russian governance

⁶⁷⁰ Zaal Anjaparidze, "Tbilisi neutralizes alleged Russian spy ring, gains political mileage," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 3, no. 181, (2006), <https://jamestown.org/program/tbilisi-neutralizes-alleged-russian-spy-ring-gains-political-mileage>.

⁶⁷¹ James P. Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Security Issues and Implications for US Interests*, (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2009), 19.

⁶⁷² Zaur Shiriyev, and Kornely Kakachia. "Azerbaijani-Georgian relations: The foundations and challenges of the strategic alliance," *SAM Review* 7-8, (Baku: Center for Strategic Studies, 2013), 50.

⁶⁷³ Rovshan Ismayilov, "Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey: Building a transportation triumvirate?" *Eurasianet*, February 7, 2007, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-georgia-and-turkey-building-a-transportation-triumvirate>.

model more attractive to the Azerbaijani people,⁶⁷⁴ Azerbaijan confronted Russia, purchased Georgian goods despite sanctions, and increased its natural gas exports to Georgia. This has earned Azerbaijan a reputation as a reliable partner in the region.⁶⁷⁵

Therefore, after Russia's invasion in 2008, Georgia's efforts to improve relations with its neighbors have positioned Azerbaijan as an important partner for Georgia. For this reason, President Mikheil Saakashvili proposed the establishment of a confederation between the two countries to Azerbaijan,⁶⁷⁶ and President Ilham Aliyev reacted to Georgia's interest positively. In fact, in a closed meeting held in previous years, President Aliyev stated that Azerbaijan would continue to be a friend to Georgia against Russian provocations. He also added, "Russia has Armenia, we have Georgia."⁶⁷⁷

There is a point of validity in this statement. Just as Russia, particularly in the fields of energy and security, keeps Armenia's infrastructure under control, the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) has acquired a significant portion of Georgia's gas infrastructure. For example, SOCAR Georgia Petroleum was selected as the largest taxpayer in 2010, having paid 570 million Georgian Lari to the Georgian state budget between 2007 and 2010.⁶⁷⁸

Another significant development in Azerbaijan-Georgia relations occurred in 2012. On June 8, 2012, the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye (Elmar Mammadyarov, Grigol Vashadze, and Ahmet Davutoglu) met in Trabzon and signed

⁶⁷⁴ Anar Valiyev, "Victim of a 'war of ideologies': Azerbaijan after the Russia-Georgia war," *Demokratizatsiya* 17, no. 3, (2009): 269.

⁶⁷⁵ Javid Valiyev, "Foreign policy of Azerbaijan in 25 years of independence: Priorities, principles and achievements," *Caucasus International* 7, no. 1, (2017): 40.

⁶⁷⁶ Ghia Nodia, "What does 'confederation' mean in the South Caucasus?" *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, September 17, 2010, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/azerbaijan-armenia-war-russia-ceasefire-but-only-1-side-is-happy>.

⁶⁷⁷ "Saakashvili wouldn't do anything stupid – Aliyev," *Tert*, September 10, 2011, <https://tert.am/en/news/2011/09/10/aliev/345325>.

⁶⁷⁸ Hirose, Yoko. "The need for standard policies on state recognition," 5.

an agreement called the “Trabzon Declaration,” committing to further strengthen cooperation among the three states.⁶⁷⁹

This declaration covers many priority areas of cooperation, ranging from mutual support in international organizations to joint energy and transportation projects. Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze emphasized that this cooperation format “is not directed against anyone,” stating that it aims to protect national interests and deepen strategic relations.⁶⁸⁰

The importance of this meeting in Trabzon is that, with the agreement made, it was decided that these trilateral foreign ministers’ meetings would be held regularly. Thus, the second of these meetings took place in Batumi on March 28, 2013. At the summit, which was attended by the ministers Elmar Mammadyarov, Maia Panjikidze and Ahmet Davutoglu, the “Trilateral Sectoral Cooperation Action Plan for 2013-2015” was signed. Moreover, the Azerbaijani foreign minister commented that “*this declaration proves to Armenia that it is better to join the club than to stay outside.*”⁶⁸¹

The third of these meetings was held in Ganja on February 19, 2014,⁶⁸² while the fourth took place in Kars, which holds significant importance for Azerbaijan, on December 10, 2014, and the document known as the “Kars Statement” was signed. With this statement, the parties reaffirmed their strong commitment to further enhancing their cooperation based on strategic partnership, good neighborliness, mutual respect, and trust among the three states.⁶⁸³

⁶⁷⁹ “Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia starts new cooperation,” *Democracy & Freedom Watch*, June 10, 2012, <https://dfwatch.net/turkey-azerbaijan-and-georgia-starts-new-cooperation-87445-9766>.

⁶⁸⁰ “Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey sign cooperation declaration,” *Civil Georgia*, June 9, 2012, <https://civil.ge/archives/122001>.

⁶⁸¹ Valiyev, “Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey triangle,” 34.

⁶⁸² Cavid Veliyev, “From alliance to integration: The Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia triangle,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 11, no. 46, (2014), <https://jamestown.org/program/from-alliance-to-integration-the-turkey-azerbaijan-georgia-triangle>.

⁶⁸³ “Kars Statement of the Fourth Trilateral Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Turkey, 10 December 2014, Kars,” Republic of

The fifth trilateral meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye was held on February 19, 2016, the sixth on September 6, 2017, and the seventh on October 29, 2018, and the eighth was held on December 23, 2019. In this last but not latest meeting, while the role of the Marmaray Project as part of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway was emphasized, a common conclusion was reached that steps should be taken in the field of transportation.⁶⁸⁴

As is known, since the day Azerbaijan and Georgia restored their independence, Armenia and its affiliated actors have made various efforts to disrupt the friendly relationship between the two states. By 2019, two significant events occurred that caused tensions in the relationship between the two states. The first of these is the erection of a bust of Mikhail Avagyan, an Armenian from Georgia who actively fought in the First Karabakh War, in his village. The second is the incident that occurred near the Keshikchidag Temple Complex, located on the border of the two states.⁶⁸⁵

The first incident, the bust event, erupted on January 20, 2019, with the ceremonial unveiling of the bust of Armenian fighter Mikhail Avagyan, who fought against Azerbaijan in the First Karabakh War, in Bugashen of the Akhalkalaki municipality in Georgia.⁶⁸⁶ The opening ceremony of the bust, financed by an Armenian businessman, was attended by Akhalkalaki Mayor Yurik Hunanyan, Armenian Ambassador to Georgia Ruben Sadoyan, and two Armenian deputies from the ruling Georgian Dream party, Enzel Mkoyan and Samvel Manukyan.⁶⁸⁷

Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed December 22, 2024, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/kars-statement-of-the-fourth-trilateral-meeting-of-the-ministers-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-azerbaijan-georgia-and-the-republic-of-turkey-10-december-2014-kars.en.mfa>.

⁶⁸⁴ Samira Habibbayli, "Azerbaijan-Turkey-Georgia trilateral cooperation as a factor of regional stability (View from Azerbaijan)," *Caucasus Studies* 2, no. 1, (2021): 41-42.

⁶⁸⁵ Samira Habibbayli, "Attempts by Armenia and related actors to disrupt Azerbaijan-Georgia relations," *Review of Armenian Studies* 42 (2020): 136-137.

⁶⁸⁶ "European Diplomats' Association: Pro-Armenian forces in Georgia erect bust to Nazi Avagyan," *Azernews*, January 26, 2019, <https://www.azernews.az/region/144621.html>.

⁶⁸⁷ "Unveiling of statue of Armenian Karabakh combattant in Georgia causes outrage," *JAM News*, January 24, 2019, <https://jam-news.net/unveiling-of-karabakh-war-monument-in-georgia-causes-outrage>.

Born in Bugashen and later moving to Razdan in Armenia, Avagyan, nicknamed “Cobra,” volunteered to fight in the Karabakh War against Azerbaijan. He fought in Horadiz, Hadrut, and Fuzuli, and in Khojaly, where hundreds of Azerbaijani civilians were massacred by Armenian forces. In 1994, he was killed by sniper fire during the battles on the Horadiz bridge.⁶⁸⁸

While this incident went largely unnoticed in Georgia, it immediately became big news in Azerbaijan, receiving negative reactions from officials and parliamentarians, and was widely discussed on social media. While Avagyan is seen as a hero by Armenians, Azerbaijanis view him as a killer of civilians and demand the removal of his statue.⁶⁸⁹ Georgia, on the other hand, faced the dilemma of finding a solution that would not anger its large ethnic Armenian community while also satisfying its larger Azerbaijani minority and Tbilisi’s key strategic regional partner, Baku.⁶⁹⁰

The second incident occurred near the Keshikchidag Temple Complex, a disputed territory between the two states, that the Georgians call Davit Gareja. The beginning of this incident in July 2019 was marked by Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili’s visit to Azerbaijan in March 2019. Addressing the border delimitation dispute between the two states, Zurbishvili brought the issue back to the agenda during her visit to the Keshikchidag Temple Complex on April 20, 2019, along with representatives of Europa Nostra.⁶⁹¹ Zurbishvili argued that the site should be demarcated quickly and called for progress in border delimitation negotiations.⁶⁹²

⁶⁸⁸ “Xocalıda vuruşmuş erməniyə Gürcüstanda abidə qoyuldu,” 24 News, January 23, 2019, <https://24news.ge/read/id/1439>.

⁶⁸⁹ Giorgi Lomsadze, “South Caucasus’ troubles set in stone,” *Eurasianet*, January 29, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/south-caucasus-troubles-set-in-stone>.

⁶⁹⁰ Azad Garibov, “‘Monument dispute’ raises tensions in South Caucasus,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 16, no. 16, (2019), <https://jamestown.org/program/monument-dispute-raises-tensions-in-south-caucasus>.

⁶⁹¹ Fuad Chiragov, “Ancient Christian site straddling Azerbaijani-Georgian border highlights problems linked to incomplete delimitation of shared frontier,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 16, no. 70, (2019), <https://jamestown.org/program/ancient-christian-site-straddling-azerbaijani-georgian-border-highlights-problems-linked-to-incomplete-delimitation-of-shared-frontier>.

⁶⁹² Miro Popkhadze, “Georgia and Azerbaijan’s David Gareja Monastery Conundrum,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI)*, June 14, 2019, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/06/georgia-and-azerbajjans-david-gareja-monastery-conundrum>.

Following these tensions at the beginning of the year, a more serious incident occurred at the temple complex on July 15, 2019.⁶⁹³ According to videos circulating on social media, a group of Georgian civilians harassed Azerbaijani soldiers around the complex and disarmed one of them. As a result of this serious incident, there was public outrage in Azerbaijan, and official Baku also issued a condemnation. However, this incident seemed like a contrived event by external forces to disrupt the relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia. The reason for this thought is, first, that neither side would want to face such an issue while part of their territories is under foreign occupation. Second, Azerbaijan, being a multicultural state, essentially embraces all beliefs and religious sites on its territory.⁶⁹⁴

A recent development between Azerbaijan and Georgia also occurred in the context of the new geopolitical fracture in the Caucasus region following the 44-Day War in 2020. In December 2020, following the end of the 44-Day War, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev led the establishment of a new cooperation platform in the region, known as 3 + 3 [(Türkiye, Russia, and Iran) + (Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia)]. The 3+3 cooperation platform aimed to ensure sustainable peace in the region as well as the implementation of economic, commercial, transportation, and infrastructure projects among the parties.⁶⁹⁵

However, Georgia became the only state to boycott this new initiative planned in the region. Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani proposed an alternative that only included the three states in the region: Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. Nevertheless, Georgia has not closed the door on the “3+3” Türkiye. The clear reason for this is that Georgia does not want to create a rift between Türkiye or

⁶⁹³ “Azerbaijan–Georgia row reignites over Davit Gareja monastery complex,” *OC Media*, July 17, 2019, <https://oc-media.org/azerbaijan-georgia-row-reignites-over-davit-gareja-monastery-complex>.

⁶⁹⁴ Rahim Rahimov, “Georgian-Azerbaijani monastery dispute and the intersection of local, national and international drivers of conflict,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 16, no. 109, (2019), <https://jamestown.org/program/georgian-azerbaijani-monastery-dispute-and-the-intersection-of-local-national-and-international-drivers-of-conflict>.

⁶⁹⁵ Eljan Imamverdiyev, “Regional cooperation platforms in the South Caucasus: Azerbaijan-Georgia-Türkiye in the context of trilateral defence cooperation,” *Journal of Defense Resources Management (JoDRM)* 15, no. 2, (2024): 29.

Azerbaijan. Furthermore, it is believed that this initiative will normalize relations with Russia by elevating them to a multilateral level.⁶⁹⁶

The latest diplomatic development in bilateral relations is that Georgian President Mikheil Kavelashvili made his first foreign visit to Azerbaijan. As is known, the first country a head of state visits carries significant meaning in determining that country's foreign policy priorities. The visit of Georgian President Kavelashvili on April 15, 2025, who ousted her pro-Western and French citizen rival Salome Zourabichvili from her seat after a controversial election, is a clear indication of how much Tbilisi values its strategic relations with Baku.⁶⁹⁷

It is clear that Azerbaijan is not only a friendly state for Georgia but also a partner that has played a significant role in its development by leading both states' stable political futures and transnational projects over the past 30 years. Baku and Tbilisi, by combining the steps taken over many years to ensure regional progress, have managed to showcase an exemplary cooperation that is important not only for the prosperity of the region but also for the world through jointly conducted projects.⁶⁹⁸

6.4. Security

The relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia have strategic complexity, especially in terms of regional security and military cooperation. The two states, through the trilateral defense cooperation mechanism they maintain with Türkiye, are demonstrating a united stance against regional threats. This cooperation encompasses areas such as joint exercises, sharing of information and expertise, aimed at combating modern challenges and threats, enhancing military capabilities, and ensuring regional stability.

⁶⁹⁶ Arkadiusz Legieć, "Prospects for the development of the "3+ 3" format on the South Caucasus," *PISM Bulletin*, (2021): 1.

⁶⁹⁷ Mariam Razmadze, "Kavelashvili makes first official visit to Azerbaijan, meets Aliyev," *Georgian Today*, April 15, 2025, <https://georgiatoday.ge/kavelashvili-makes-first-official-visit-to-azerbaijan-meets-aliyev>.

⁶⁹⁸ İradə Əliyeva, "Sülh, siyasi dialoq, iqtisadi inkişaf: Azərbaycan və Gürcüstan Cənubi Qafqazın xoşbəxt gələcəyini birlikdə qurur." *Azərbaycan*, April 20, 2025.

The first cooperation in the field of security between Azerbaijan and Georgia was realized with the “GUAM consultative forum” held on October 10, 1997, with the participation of Ukraine and Moldova. GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, named after the initial letters of those states, was established against Russia’s influence.⁶⁹⁹

However, the military and security cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia began a decade after their independence. This beginning, coinciding with the later years of the Heydar Aliyev period, was based on the anti-terrorism agreement signed in Trabzon on April 30, 2002, with Türkiye’s participation. On July 23, 2003, the protocol signed in Baku was made to ensure the security of the energy corridor to be established.⁷⁰⁰

The “Military Cooperation” agreement signed on December 16, 2002, which was the first bilateral agreement between the two states, was the initial broad agreement on military collaboration between the two nations since they became independent again.⁷⁰¹

The Azerbaijan-Georgia security relations, which had been stagnant until the war in 2008, entered a new phase after the occupation of Georgia. This development has also led to the advancement of defense industry cooperation between the two states. Another reason for this is Georgia’s ban for Armenia repairing its war tanks at a Russian munitions factory in Tbilisi after severing ties with Russia. Thus, high-level Ministry of Defense visits between Azerbaijan and Georgia have begun.⁷⁰²

Although the change of government in Georgia in 2012, namely the transition of the pro-West Saakashvili to the pro-Russian-accused Bidzina Ivanishvili’s Georgian

⁶⁹⁹ Tedo Japaridze, “The Organization for Democracy and Development-GUAM: A road map to relevance? (A view from Georgia with certain personal reflections and conclusions),” *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 3-4 (51-52) (2008): 76.

⁷⁰⁰ Yalçın Sarıkaya, “Türkiye-Gürcistan-Azerbaycan üçlü ilişkilerinin savunma işbirliği boyutu,” *Karadeniz Araştırmaları* 64 (2019): 591, <http://dx.doi.org/10.12787/KARAM1512>.

⁷⁰¹ Shiriyev, and Kornely Kakachia. “Azerbaijani-Georgian relations,” 33.

⁷⁰² Shiriyev, and Kornely Kakachia. “Azerbaijani-Georgian relations,” 38.

Dream party, created a perception that it would harm the security cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia.⁷⁰³ However, the official visit of Georgian Defense Minister Irakli Alasania to Azerbaijan on March 18, 2013, where he met with his counterpart Colonel General Safar Abiyev, has shown that the security relations between the two countries would continue unaltered.⁷⁰⁴

On August 19, 2014, the first trilateral meeting of the defense ministers of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye in Nakhchivan, where they pledged to conduct joint military exercises, was evidence of the ongoing relations.⁷⁰⁵ In 2016, the meeting of Georgian Defense Minister Levan Izoria with Azerbaijani Defense Minister Colonel General Zakir Hasanov during an official visit to Azerbaijan was a significant development. As a result of this meeting, the two states signed a cooperation plan for the year 2017.⁷⁰⁶

As a result of this plan, on June 5, 2017, joint military exercises named “Caucasus Eagle 2017” were held at Georgia’s Vaziani base with the participation of the special operations units of the three states. The exercise, which lasted for 10 days, involved the land and air forces of the three states.⁷⁰⁷

The trilateral defense ministers’ meeting, which has been held almost annually since 2012, took place for the sixth time in Giresun, on April 1, 2018. As a result of the meeting, a memorandum was signed to further strengthen the trilateral defense

⁷⁰³ Zaur Shiriyevev, Eka Tkeshelashvili, and Kornely Kakachia. “Institutionalizing a trilateral strategic partnership: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey.” *Policy Paper 31*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. 2016.

⁷⁰⁴ Sabina Idayatova, “Azerbaijan, Georgia sign paper on defense coop.” *Azernews*, March 18, 2013. <https://www.azernews.az/nation/51109.html>.

⁷⁰⁵ Joshua Kucera, “Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey agree on joint military exercises,” *Eurasianet*, August 21, 2014, <https://eurasianet.org/georgia-azerbaijan-turkey-agree-on-joint-military-exercises>.

⁷⁰⁶ “Cooperation plan for 2017 signed between Defense Ministries of Azerbaijan and Georgia,” Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Defense, December 16, 2016, accessed November 21, 2024, <https://mod.gov.az/en/news/cooperation-plan-for-2017-signed-between-defense-ministries-of-azerbaijan-and-georgia-14318.html>.

⁷⁰⁷ Dylan Malyasov, “Georgian, Turkish and Azerbaijan Armed Forces conduct joint military exercises Caucasian Eagle 2017,” *Defence Blog*, June 12, 2017, <https://defence-blog.com/georgian-turkish-and-azerbaijan-armed-forces-conduct-joint-military-exercises-caucasian-eagle-2017>.

partnership.⁷⁰⁸ The security relations between the two (plus one) states, progressing in the form of meeting-drill-meeting, have made difficult-to-reverse progress with Türkiye's cooperation. As a result, on September 23, 2019, in Baku, the "Caucasian Eagle 2019" joint military exercises took place with the active participation of the three states, while Pakistan was included as an observer. During the exercise, the troops conducted missions such as target destruction, hostage casualty evacuation, and hostage rescue.⁷⁰⁹

On September 10, 2024, an important trilateral meeting took place in Batumi, Georgia, between the defense ministers of Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Georgia. The main agenda of this 11th trilateral meeting was to further strengthen military ties and reinforce regional security.⁷¹⁰ In the meeting attended by Azerbaijani Defense Minister Zakir Hasanov, Turkish National Defense Minister Yaşar Güler, and Georgian Defense Minister Irakli Chikovani, the importance of uniting joint efforts in the face of current challenges and threats to regional security was emphasized. In addition, new cooperation opportunities in areas such as military affairs, defense technologies, military training, and military medicine were thoroughly discussed.⁷¹¹

6.5. Economics

During Ilham Aliyev's presidency in Azerbaijan, economic relations with Georgia transformed into a strategic partnership based on the two states' shared regional vision and understanding of mutual dependency. During this period, the goal of delivering Azerbaijan's rich energy resources to Western markets and serving as a

⁷⁰⁸ "Azerbaijani, Georgian, Turkish defense ministers sign cooperation memorandum," *Civil Georgia*, April 2, 2018, <https://civil.ge/archives/220077>.

⁷⁰⁹ Zehra Nur Düz, "Caucasian Eagle exercises continue in Azerbaijan," *Anadolu Agency*, September 25, 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/caucasian-eagle-exercises-continue-in-azerbaijan/1593834>.

⁷¹⁰ Vasif Huseynov, "The Azerbaijan-Georgia-Türkiye trilateral format expands across multiple domains," *Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center)*, November 8, 2024, <https://aircenter.az/en/single/the-azerbaijan-georgia-turkiye-trilateral-format-expands-across-multiple-domains-1574>.

⁷¹¹ Nigar Bayramli, "Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Georgia boost military ties and regional security," *Caspian News*, September 11, 2024, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-turkiye-georgia-boost-military-ties-and-regional-security-2024-9-11-0>.

bridge between the East and the West combined with Georgia's critical geographical location. Not only energy transit but also overall trade volume and investment flows have significantly increased. Intensive cooperation between the two states in developing new transportation and logistics corridors deepened economic integration and played a decisive role in the region's geopolitical landscape. This process also reinforced a joint commitment to regional stability and development beyond mutual economic interests. Azerbaijan's share in Georgia's exports has continuously increased since the Russian embargo began in 2006. It is understood that Georgian export firms have managed to focus on markets other than Russia. According to 2012 data, Azerbaijan, with a share of 26.3 percent, is the most important export destination for Georgia, holding an exceptional position in the state's total exports. In Georgia's total imports, Azerbaijan ranks second after Türkiye with an 8.1 percent share. Georgia has free trade agreements with CIS states, and Azerbaijan is one of these states.⁷¹²

According to 2015 data, Azerbaijan's investments in Georgia include approximately 300 companies and 8000 jobs in the construction, tourism, and transportation sectors. Moreover, Georgia has more than 150 companies in Azerbaijan. The two states aim to further develop their economic relations by making joint investments in other states. Russia's embargo on Georgia's main export items such as agricultural products and wine had been effective in increasing trilateral trade relations.⁷¹³

The import and export items between Azerbaijan and Georgia vary according to the diversity of products. According to 2017 data, the top products imported by Azerbaijan from Georgia were automobiles (\$88.2 million), cigarettes (\$24.6 million), and medicine (\$22.3 million), followed by alcoholic beverages (\$7.1 million), non-alcoholic beverages (\$6 million), ferro alloys (\$5.4 million), and potatoes (\$5 million).⁷¹⁴ A large portion of the products imported by Azerbaijan from

⁷¹² Biermann, Florian, Lasha Labadze, and Giorgi Mekerishvili. "Trade relations of Georgia. A report for the Business Association of Georgia." (2013): 10-12.

⁷¹³ Javid Valiyev, "Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey triangle: The main features of cooperation." *Caucasus International* 5, no. 3, (2015): 27-44.

⁷¹⁴ Asiman Quliyev, et al. "Statistical aspects of trade relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia." In *Book of Proceedings of 37th International Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development*

Georgia consists of energy resources, which is not surprising. The first in this list are natural gases (\$318.9 million), oil and petroleum products (\$112.5 million), electricity (\$47.3 million), and ores and concentrates (\$19.8 million), while the volume of the subsequent products has been quite small.⁷¹⁵

The relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan demonstrate strong diplomatic cooperation based on respect for state sovereignty and territorial integrity. The trade and economic relations between the two countries are showing stable growth, and thanks to Georgia's free trade agreements with the EU, EFTA, and China, it has the potential to become a regional economic center. This situation facilitates the integration of Azerbaijan and Georgia into global markets by combining local resources.⁷¹⁶

The optimism in investment cooperation is supported by Georgia's favorable geopolitical position and its strong standing in international rankings, paving the way for increased investments from Azerbaijan in the real sector. Georgia has played a successful role for many years as a transit hub transporting Caspian hydrocarbons to the West and continues to pursue the goal of becoming a land transit corridor between Europe and Asia with the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line. This strategic position not only provides Georgia with economic benefits from transit tariffs but also contributes to peace and cooperation in the region.⁷¹⁷

However, the 44-Day War that took place between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2020 has changed both the geopolitical and geoeconomic balances in the South Caucasus. Although no active change has been observed in terms of geoeconomics yet, as will be explained later, Article 9 of the 10 November Agreement, signed immediately

– “*Socio Economic Problems of Sustainable Development*”. February 14-15, 2019, Baku. Economic and Social Development, 2019.

⁷¹⁵ Quliyev, et al. “Statistical aspects,” 54-55.

⁷¹⁶ Kadagishvili, Leila, and Rusudan Maisuradze, “Impact of Regional integration on Trade and Economic Cooperation—a key study of Georgia and Azerbaijan,” *International Journal of Economic Sciences* 11, no. 2, (2022): 73, <https://doi.org/10.52950/ES.2022.11.2.005>.

⁷¹⁷ Kadagishvili, and Maisuradze, “Impact of Regional integration,” 74.

after the war, aimed to unblock all economic and transportation connections in the region.⁷¹⁸

The possibility of reopening long-unused routes due to the Karabakh conflict has created the potential for Azerbaijan to diversify its connections with the global market. Whether through the inclusion of Armenia or its bypass via the Zangezur Corridor, the possibility of Azerbaijan accessing new trade routes has sparked a debate about the potential weakening of Georgia's transit role in the region. While some experts argue that the new routes will not compete with those in Georgia, others believe that it will lose its value as a transit country in the long run.⁷¹⁹

Another recent development in bilateral relations occurred on June 9, 2025. The multimodal container terminal named "Poti TransTerminal," built in the city of Poti, Georgia, has become a significant milestone for both regional logistics and trade along the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR).⁷²⁰ The terminal, with an annual capacity of 80,000 containers (TEU), has the potential to expand to 200,000 TEU. In addition to the existing 4000 TEU storage area, there is a 3.3 km railway line capable of carrying up to 120 wagons and cranes that can load up to 50 containers per hour. The construction of the \$30 million project, financed by Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, was carried out by China.⁷²¹

Located on the Black Sea coast, this logistics terminal, which is not just an infrastructure project but also a symbol of inter-state economic cooperation, will

⁷¹⁸ Ali Askerov, and Gubad Ibadoghlu. "The causes and consequences of the Second Karabakh War," in *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Historical and Political Perspectives*, edited by M. Hakan Yavuz and Michael Gunter, 245-272, (London: Routledge, 2022), 259, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003261209>.

⁷¹⁹ Zaal Anjaparidze, "The Second Karabakh War and Georgia's threatened transit role," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 18, no. 26, (2021), <https://jamestown.org/program/the-second-karabakh-war-and-georgias-threatened-transit-role>.

⁷²⁰ "Grand opening of 'Poti TransTerminal' – Alliance Multimodal among key participants." *Allianca Multimodal*, May 23, 2025. <https://alliancemultimodal.com/grand-opening-of-poti-transterminal-alliance-multimodal-among-key-participants>.

⁷²¹ "Poti intermodal terminal opens as a focal point for the Middle Corridor freight route," *Railway Gazette International*, June 12, 2025, <https://www.railwaygazette.com/freight/poti-intermodal-terminal-opens-as-a-focal-point-for-the-middle-corridor/68961.article>.

significantly contribute to the sustainability, stability, and the rapid and timely transportation of goods along the Middle Corridor. With the use of this terminal, Azerbaijan, the main partner of the Middle Corridor projects that connect continents through China's "Belt and Road" initiative, is further solidifying its position in the international arena, and interest in Azerbaijan is also increasing.⁷²²

6.6. Socio-culture

The socio-cultural history of Azerbaijan and Georgia dates back thousands of years. From music to literature, the two great peoples of the Caucasus have always found common ground in many cultural fields. In this regard, former President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili said in a speech:

Our countries are parts of a body that moves each other. It is impossible to imagine better relations than those between Azerbaijan and Georgia. We are each other's beginning and end. Our relationships are broader than ordinary relationships. Our relationships are broader than ordinary relationships.⁷²³

Without a doubt, another point providing the most famous cultural connection between the two countries is the novel titled "Ali and Nino" written by Azerbaijani author Kurban Said. The novel was written in German and has been translated into more than 30 languages. The novel talks about the differences between Muslim and Christian cultures, the political situation in the Caucasus between 1905-1920, and essentially the love story of an Azerbaijani aristocrat and a Georgian princess. This book written by Said is a symbol of friendship between Azerbaijan and Georgia. There is a statue of Ali and Nino in Batumi. The multitude of these historical cultural ties and communication channels has positively affected the cultural relations of Azerbaijan and Georgia in the post-Soviet period.⁷²⁴

⁷²² Xuraman İsmayılqızı, "Gürcüstan Azərbaycanın strateji müttəfiqidir" *İki Sahil*, June 11, 2025, <https://ikisahil.az/post/592697-gurcustan-azerbaycanin-strateji-muttefiqidir>.

⁷²³ Arzu Recebli, and Rena Recebli. "The cultural relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan," in *Proceedings of the 6th Silk Road International Conference: Globalization and Security in Black and Caspian Seas Regions*. May 27-29, 2011, (Batumi, 2011), 204-205.

⁷²⁴ Paksadze, *Sovyet Sonrası Gürcistan-Azerbaycan İlişkileri*, 100.

The most important issue affecting the socio-cultural matters between Azerbaijan and Georgia is the Azerbaijani Turkic minorities in Georgia. Especially in Georgia, where ethnic minorities make up a larger proportion of the population, Azerbaijanis maintain their presence as the largest minority. According to the 2014 census that took ethnic minorities into account, Azerbaijanis constitute 6.3 percent of the population, with 233,000 people. This constitutes just under half of all ethnic minorities, which make up 13.2 percent of the total population.⁷²⁵

This region inhabited by Azerbaijanis is located in Western Azerbaijan, encompassing the point where the borders of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan meet, which Azerbaijani Turks refer to as Borchali.⁷²⁶ The Azerbaijani population living in the northern part of Borchali (Kvemo Kartli) remains within the borders of Georgia and predominantly resides in its Marneuli, Bolnisi, and Dmanisi districts.⁷²⁷ A significant portion of the Azerbaijani Turkish population, who had been living in those lands for centuries, over 150,000 people, faced their first major catastrophe in 1944 when they were exiled from Akhalkalaki to Turkistan by the order of Joseph Stalin. Towards the end of WWII, this population, who were deported under the pretext of being a “fifth column” for Türkiye, had already been subjected to forced “Georgianization” before the deportation.⁷²⁸

The other catastrophic event occurred in 1991 when Georgia declared independence and Zviad Gamsakhurdia became Georgian President. Gamsakhurdia’s expression of Georgian nationalism as “Georgia is for Georgians” not only failed to address Georgia’s general socio-economic problems but also seriously worsened the issues with Abkhazians and Ossetians, [especially Azerbaijanis.]⁷²⁹

⁷²⁵ “Geostat releases final results of 2014 census,” *Civil Georgia*, April 28, 2016, <https://civil.ge/archives/124561>.

⁷²⁶ Məmməd Sadıqov, *Gürcüstan Respublikasında Azərbaycanlıların Sosial-İqtisadi və İctimai-Siyasi Vəziyyəti*, (Bakı: “Təhsil” nəşriyyatı, 2010), 8.

⁷²⁷ Jonathan Wheatley, “Obstacles impeding the regional integration of the Kvemo Kartli region of Georgia.” *ECMI Working Paper* 23, (2005): 1-49.

⁷²⁸ Galina Yemelyanova, “Georgia’s European quest: The challenge of the Meskhetian Turks,” *Caucasus International* 5, no. 3, (2015): 79.

⁷²⁹ Argun Başkan, “Kafkasya’da bütünleşme ve dağılma döngüleri içinde Gürcüler, Zanlar (Megreller ve Lazlar) ve Svanlar.” *Karadeniz Araştırmaları* 30 (2011): 34.

With Gamsakhurdia's oppression of Azerbaijanis, the local population, believing they were being targeted based on their origins, began to organize. The people, who demanded autonomy, formed self-defense units against the nationalist gangs trying to expel them from Borchali. However, while state-supported Georgian gangs forced Azerbaijanis to flee, later-arriving Georgian immigrants settled in the homes of Azerbaijanis.⁷³⁰

In 1995, the Azerbaijani minority viewed Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency more positively. There was a fundamental difference between the approaches of the Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze governments. While Gamsakhurdia focused on the construction of an ethnic nation, Shevardnadze employed a strategy of civic nation-building. The strategy of civic nation-building meant approaching citizens' ethnic identities in a neutral manner. However, due to laws that made the use of Georgian mandatory, national minorities, especially Azerbaijanis, were becoming alienated from the political process.⁷³¹

After coming to power following the Rose Revolution in 2003, Mikheil Saakashvili implemented inclusive policies towards Azerbaijanis as part of a nation-building process, in contrast to Shevardnadze's "just control" policy. When he came to power, Saakashvili had three promises: to rebuild Georgia, to enrich its citizens, and to strengthen the ties between ethnic Georgians and non-Georgians.⁷³²

However, these steps did not easily ensure that the Azerbaijanis in Georgia adapted to the state. Although Saakashvili described Azerbaijanis living in Georgia as "the national treasure of his country" during his visit to Baku in 2004, trust had not been fully established in the early years of the new administration.⁷³³ Nevertheless, there

⁷³⁰ Christofer Berglund, "Accepting alien rule? State-building nationalism in Georgia's Azeri borderland," in *Post-Soviet Conflict Potentials*, edited by Cindy Wittke, 113-135, (London: Routledge, 2022), 118, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003304920>.

⁷³¹ Teona Makatsaria, *Linguistic Diversity in Georgia: A Comparative Analysis of the Language Policies in the Period 1991-2012*, (MA thesis, Central European University [Hungary], 2013), 3.

⁷³² Julie A. George, "Minority political inclusion in Mikheil Saakashvili's Georgia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 7, (2008): 1154-1155, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130802230697>.

⁷³³ Mamuka Komakhia, "Georgia's Azerbaijanis: Problems of civilian integration," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 5, no. 29, (2004): 167.

are studies that suggest Saakashvili aimed to address the issues of the Azerbaijani community. It has been claimed that the new administration openly addressed the issues and tried to resolve them through democratic means.⁷³⁴

6.7. Conclusion

This chapter has deeply examined the complex and multifaceted nature of the relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia, particularly during the era of Ilham Aliyev. Despite the internal and external challenges faced throughout the historical process, the strategic partnership established between the two countries has become one of the main pillars of stability and development in the South Caucasus. Energy and transportation projects stand out as both the driving force and tangible output of this relationship. Massive projects like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway have elevated Georgia to an important transit country while delivering the Caspian's energy resources to Western markets. These projects have not only increased economic prosperity but have also reinforced regional integration and inter-country interdependence. In the field of diplomacy, it has been continuously strengthened, especially through meetings and declarations in trilateral formats. These meetings, that took place with Türkiye's participation, have played a critical role in finding joint solutions to regional issues and providing mutual support on the international stage. In the field of security, the two state's shared perceptions of threats, particularly in response to Russia's influence in the region, have encouraged close military cooperation and joint exercises. This cooperation has made significant contributions to the efforts of both countries to protect their national sovereignty and territorial integrity. In economic relations, Azerbaijan has become one of Georgia's most important trade partners, and these ties have been further strengthened through mutual investments and free trade agreements.

⁷³⁴ Anar Valiyev, and Yusuf Valiyev. "Azerbaijan-Georgia relations put to the test," *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst* 26 (2005): 1-2.

CHAPTER 7

AZERBAIJAN-ARMENIA RELATIONS

7.1. Introduction

This chapter examines in detail the complex history of Azerbaijan-Armenia relations, the impact of the Karabakh issue on these relations, and the post-conflict normalization process. The section will primarily address the rise in tensions between the two countries following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of Karabakh as the primary point of contention in both diplomatic and military spheres. Russia's role as a mediator in this process and early ceasefire initiatives such as the Bishkek Protocol will be evaluated.

Subsequently, the various peace plans proposed for the resolution of the Karabakh issue in the 1990s and 2000s; for example, the "package deal," "step-by-step agreement," the Madrid Principles, and the Kazan Plan, will be analyzed in terms of their content and why they did not achieve a lasting solution. During this period, the approaches of the leaderships of Azerbaijan and Armenia to these proposals and how the political dynamics within the two countries affected the peace process will be examined. In addition, the emerging discussions regarding the credibility of Russia's mediation role and its impact on Azerbaijan-Armenia relations will also be addressed. In this part of the thesis, the rising military tensions following the Four-Day War in 2016 and how this conflict led to a military solution due to the deadlock in negotiations will be examined. The causes, progress, and consequences of the 44-Day War in 2020 will be analyzed in detail. Then, the fundamental changes this war brought to Azerbaijan-Armenia relations and the geopolitical transformations in the region will be addressed. To conclude, the provisions of the 10 November Ceasefire Agreement and the efforts to restructure relations between the two states will be

examined. The challenges faced after the agreement, particularly key normalization issues such as border demarcation, the opening of a transport corridor (Zangezur Corridor), and the return of displaced persons and refugees, will be detailed. This chapter aims to shed light on the obstacles to lasting reconciliation between the two countries while evaluating potential peace and cooperation opportunities that could influence the future trajectory of Azerbaijan-Armenia relations.

7.2. Short Background

As is well known, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's new foreign policy was dominated by its approach of being the "guarantor of peace and stability" in the former Union territories. The reason for this was that the Russia regarded the neighboring territories to its south, including Turkistan and the Caucasus, as "part of its strategic sphere of influence" for ensuring its security.⁷³⁵

Thus, the Russia sought to freeze the conflict in Karabakh, aiming to maintain its influence in the South Caucasus by acting as a mediator and ensuring a military presence in the region. Considering these developments, during the CIS Interparliamentary Council meeting held in Bishkek on May 4-5, 1994, the Speakers of the Parliaments of Republic of Armenia and Republic of Azerbaijan met through the initiative of representatives from the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Foreign Ministry of Russia. As a result of the discussions, the Bishkek Protocol was signed. Though the ceasefire regime came into effect on May 12, 1994, the sides had frequently accused each other of violations for a quarter-century, and the effectiveness of the ceasefire remained a constant subject of debate.⁷³⁶

After the ineffective ceasefire agreement in Bishkek, the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan met numerous times under Russia's supervision, proposing various road

⁷³⁵ Oles M. Smolansky, "Russia and Transcaucasia: The case of Nagorno-Karabakh," in *Regional Power Rivalries in the New Eurasia: Russia, Turkey, and Iran*, ed. by Alvin Z. Rubinstein, and Oles M. Smolansky, 201-230, (London: Routledge, 2016), 205, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315481616>.

⁷³⁶ Araz Aslanlı, "Brief history of ceasefire in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict," *IFIMES Mednarodni inštitut za bližnjevzhodne in balkanske študije*, (2020).

maps for resolving the conflict. Two of these were the “package deal” and the “step-by-step deal” proposed in 1997.⁷³⁷

The “package deal” proposed by OSCE MG in July 1997 consisted of two main agreements: the end of armed hostilities and the status of Karabakh. According to this deal, Armenian forces would withdraw from Azerbaijani territories except the territories of the former NKAO. In return, Azerbaijan would grant the Armenians of Karabakh broad autonomy within the former NKAO territories. This autonomous region would have its own constitution, flag, and anthem, in compliance with the Constitution of Azerbaijan. However, this proposal was not accepted by the Armenia’s senior leadership and the unrecognized leadership in Karabakh.⁷³⁸

The “step-by-step deal” was proposed by OSCE MG, again in December 1997. According to this proposal, all armed forces were planned to be withdrawn in two phases. In the first phase, forces along the current line of contact would be withdrawn to create buffer zones, with OSCE peacekeeping units deployed in these areas. In the second phase, Armenian forces were to withdraw from Azerbaijani territories, and Armenian armed groups in Karabakh were to retreat within the boundaries of the former NKAO. Negotiations on the final status of Karabakh were left to subsequent stages of the process. This proposal was also not accepted by Armenian side.⁷³⁹

These deals were approached positively by then-president Ter-Petrosyan but were rejected by Armenia’s senior leadership, again. This situation paved the way for Ter-Petrosyan’s resignation. Serving as Armenia’s President since 1991, Ter-Petrosyan announced his resignation in 1998 under political pressure following a heated debate with Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan over policies regarding Karabakh. While Ter-

⁷³⁷ “Armenia/Azerbaijan: Karabakh wants package solution.” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, October 9, 1997, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1086944.html>.

⁷³⁸ “Minsk Group proposal (‘package deal’),” July 1997, United Nations, accessed June 6, 2024, <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/package20deal.pdf>.

⁷³⁹ “Minsk Group proposal (‘step-by-step deal’),” December 1997, United Nations, accessed June 6, 2024, <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/step20by20step20deal.pdf>.

Petrosyan advocated a calming approach to overcome Armenia's economic difficulties, Kocharyan, a Karabakh native, criticized him for making excessive concessions. This disagreement led to Ter-Petrosyan's decision to step down.⁷⁴⁰

Apart from these, during Heydar Aliyev's period, two additional deals were discussed by the leaders of two states under Russia's mediation. One of these, the "common state deal," was proposed by CSTO MG in November 1998 and attempted to offer a solution based on a model that viewed Azerbaijan and the administration in Karabakh as equal entities. According to this proposal, the administration in Karabakh would gain the status of a separate state-territorial entity within Azerbaijan, with powers shared between the two sides. Furthermore, this administration would have the right to establish foreign relations in specific areas and participate in international organizations. However, this time, this deal was not accepted by Azerbaijan.⁷⁴¹

As can be seen, in the 1990s, during Heydar Aliyev's period, a series of Russian-centered negotiations had happened regarding the resolution of the conflict. While it appeared that these discussions did not give any results, claims made in the next years uncovered that Russia played a significant role in the persistence of this deadlock. One of these claims⁷⁴² is based on Colonel Aleksander Litvinenko, a former senior official of RF's Federal Security Service (FSB) who later sought asylum in Britain. Litvinenko, who was assassinated with polonium-210 by his former colleagues in Russian intelligence due to allegations of betrayal, made interview in 2005 with an Azerbaijani online publication.⁷⁴³

⁷⁴⁰ Hasmik Mkrtchyan, "Armenian President Resigns amid land dispute," *Relief Web*, February 3, 1998, <https://reliefweb.int/report/armenia/armenian-president-resigns-amid-land-dispute>.

⁷⁴¹ "Minsk Group proposal ('common state deal')," November 1998, United Nations, accessed June 6, 2024, <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/minsk20group20proposal20-20common20state20deal.pdf>.

⁷⁴² "Shooting of the Armenian Parliament was Organized by Russian Special Services," *AZG Daily*, November 9, 2008, <http://www.azg.am/EN/2005050307>.

⁷⁴³ Luke Harding, "Alexander Litvinenko: the man who solved his own murder," *The Guardian*, January 19, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/19/alexander-litvinenko-the-man-who-solved-his-own-murder>.

In this interview, he said that Moscow orchestrated a plot to block the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. He also claimed that the 1999 Armenian parliament shooting, that resulted in the deaths of Prime Minister Vazgen Sarkisyan, Parliament Speaker Karen Demirchian, and six other senior officials, was organized by Russia's Main Directorate of the General Staff (GRU). According to Litvinenko, this operation allowed Russia's political leadership to prevent the signing of a peace agreement between the Armenian President Robert Kocharian and Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev, that was planned for the OSCE Summit in Istanbul in December 1999. Litvinenko also pointed out that the two leaders were making progress toward a peaceful resolution before the attack. And on the same day of the attack, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott was in Yerevan discussing the Karabakh peace process with Armenian officials.⁷⁴⁴ However, Litvinenko's statement was later firmly denied by both Armenian and Russian officials.⁷⁴⁵

The happening of this incident and its later admission by a former senior official significantly undermined Azerbaijan's trust in Russia regarding the Karabakh conflict. Although this event was not thought to have a direct link to the Karabakh process, it had a profound impact on it. The attack triggered fears of internal risks and assassinations among political leaders on both sides, hindering their willingness to continue the peace process.⁷⁴⁶

Before the Ilham Aliyev period, there were no other major negotiations in which Russia did not act as a mediator. However, in April 2001, Presidents Robert Kocharian and Heydar Aliyev met in Key West, USA, under the leadership of U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell.⁷⁴⁷

⁷⁴⁴ "Armenian officials deny Russian role in 1999 Parliament carnage," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, May 4, 2005, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/1576814.html>.

⁷⁴⁵ Emil Danielyan, "Russia denies role in 1999 Armenian Parliament attack," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, May 12, 2005, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/1576912.html>.

⁷⁴⁶ "Nagorny Karabakh: Halting a slide to conflict," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 28, 2011, <https://carnegieendowment.org/events/2011/03/nagorny-karabakh-halting-a-slide-to-conflict>.

⁷⁴⁷ "Key West talks: For a peaceful resolution to the Karabakh conflict," *Azerbaijan International* 9, no. 1, (2001): 55-57.

During these negotiations, a framework for a peace agreement was outlined. This deal proposed that Azerbaijan would cede the former NKAO territories to Armenia, while in return, Armenian forces would withdraw from the remaining occupied territories of Azerbaijan. While the Key West principles were thought to provide a foundation for future negotiations, this deal was ultimately rejected by the Azerbaijan administration.⁷⁴⁸

Between 2004 and 2006, under the mediation of the MG co-chaired by Russia, a series of secret meetings known as the Prague Process were held between the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The purpose of these meetings was to facilitate future discussions between the Presidents of the two countries. During this process, the MG co-chairs proposed certain principles to lay the groundwork for a peace agreement. In addition, the determination of status in Karabakh was deferred, with the idea of “phased peace” taking precedence. Following this process, four meetings were held between Kocharian and Aliyev, but no significant progress was achieved in any of the discussions.⁷⁴⁹

Nevertheless, because of these negotiations, the Madrid Principles were introduced in 2007. Like previous proposals, this solution envisioned the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from the surrounding districts of Karabakh where Armenians did not reside. It also proposed a referendum in the future to determine the Armenian administration’s status. Moreover, an updated version of these Principles was introduced following the negotiations held in Italy in 2009.⁷⁵⁰

This new six-point document included the return of territories around “Nagorno-Karabakh” to Azerbaijani control, interim status for “Nagorno-Karabakh” with security and self-governance, a corridor linking Armenia to “Nagorno-Karabakh,” a

⁷⁴⁸ “Azerbaijan says it is in ‘no hurry’ to settle Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,” *Eurasianet*, February 27, 2004, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-says-it-is-in-no-hurry-to-settle-nagorno-karabakh-conflict>.

⁷⁴⁹ Nicholas W. Miller, “Nagorno Karabakh: A war without peace,” in *Stopping Wars and Making Peace*, ed. Kristen Eichensehr and W. Michael Reisman, 43-75, (Leiden: Nijhoff, 2009), 70, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004178557.i-228.13>.

⁷⁵⁰ Cansu Güleç, “Nagorno-Karabakh dispute: Why intractable conflict for Armenia?,” *Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi* 11, no. 22, (2015): 8-9.

referendum to decide “Nagorno-Karabakh’s” final status, the return of displaced persons and refugees, and international security guarantees with peacekeeping forces.⁷⁵¹

Until the Four-Day War in 2016, numerous negotiations were held under Russian mediation. Two similar plans emerged from these talks, but neither was accepted by the parties. The first was the Kazan Plan of 2011, a framework agreement proposed during the meetings between Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian President Serzh Sarkisyan in Kazan. Based on OSCE MG’s basic principles, this plan, like its previous examples, addressed issues such as the return of territory, status, and security. However, after four hours of discussions, a vague statement was issued, and no concrete agreement was reached. The primary reason for this negative outcome was the failure to determine the date for the planned referendum. After the failure of agreement, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev expressed his disappointment and announced that no new summit would be held unless the parties reached a mutual understanding on the basic principles.⁷⁵²

The second was a set of Russian proposals known as the Lavrov Plan. Introduced in 2015, this phased solution proposed the return of five districts to Azerbaijan in the first stage, with the remaining two districts being returned following the clarification of the Armenian administration’s status. The key aspect of this plan was the idea of deploying Russian troops in Karabakh as a peacekeeping force, which was intended to occur years later as part of a separate agreement. However, this plan was also rejected by both leaders.⁷⁵³

The deadlock in these negotiations reinforced the belief within the Azerbaijani state that the Karabakh conflict could not be resolved diplomatically under Russia’s

⁷⁵¹ “Statement by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries,” OSCE, accessed June 7, 2024, <https://www.osce.org/mg/51152>.

⁷⁵² Emil Danielyan, “Armenia, Azerbaijan again fail to agree on Karabakh peace framework,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 8, no. 125, (2011), <https://jamestown.org/program/armenia-azerbaijan-again-fail-to-agree-on-karabakh-peace-framework>.

⁷⁵³ Hovsep Kanadyan, “Nikol Pashinyan’s imprint on the 2020 Karabakh War: Did he instigate the war?,” *Russian International Affairs Council*, May 24, 2021, https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/columns/eurasian-policy/nikol-pashinyan-s-imprint-on-the-2020-karabakh-war-did-he-instigate-the-war/?sphrase_id=167398913.

mediation. By 2016, Azerbaijan had significantly increased its defense budget and expanded its military capacity. According to a report, Azerbaijan's defense budget in 2013 rose by 6.4 percent compared to the previous year, reaching \$3.7 billion. It was also noted that Azerbaijan's defense budget exceeded Armenia's total state budget by \$1 billion. In the same year, Armenia increased its defense budget to \$450 million, that amounted to only one-eighth of Azerbaijan's defense spending.⁷⁵⁴

These figures indicate that, especially during Ilham Aliyev's period, Azerbaijan had prepared to resolve the Karabakh conflict through military methods for decades. As an outcome of this preparation, the Four-Day War broke out on April 1-5, 2016.

As a result of the Four-Day War, for the first time since the 1994 ceasefire, Azerbaijan managed to liberate a small part of its territories in Karabakh, celebrating this outcome as a victory. On the other hand, Armenia experienced disappointment due to the lack of support from Russia, with which it had close relations. Russia, positioning itself as a mediating power, avoided criticizing Azerbaijan while using its mediation to push both sides into a ceasefire agreement on April 5. The cause of this war is attributed to Russia's desire to increase its influence in the South Caucasus following its successes in Syria. At the same time, it is also claimed that Azerbaijan escalated the clash into a war to test its growing military strength and gauge Russia's reaction.⁷⁵⁵

As a result, shortly after this brief war, Armenians in Armenia began to develop the perception that Russia, with whom they shared economic and military alliances, had failed to support them. While Russia continued its mediating role under the pretext of preventing a repeat of this brief war,⁷⁵⁶ Armenians protesting in front of the Russian

⁷⁵⁴ Bakhtiyar Aslanov, "Azerbaijan and Armenia stockpile new weapons," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, October 30, 2013, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/field-reports/item/12841-azerbaijan-and-armenia-stockpile-new-weapons.html>.

⁷⁵⁵ Hans-Joachim Schmidt, "The Four-Day War has diminished the chances of peace in Nagorno-Karabakh," in *OSCE-Yearbook 2016*, ed. Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy Hamburg, 111-123, (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2017), 111-112.

⁷⁵⁶ Gulshan Pashayeva, "Russia's Karabakh mediation efforts show early hints of promise," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 13, no. 122, (2016), <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-karabakh-mediation-efforts-show-early-hints-of-promise>.

embassy⁷⁵⁷ became the first spark of the pro-Western revolution that would emerge two years later, following the parliamentary elections.

It should also be noted that the Republic of Belarus, a co-member of Russia's Union State, attempted to mediate the resolution of the Karabakh conflict following the Four-Day War. In secret audio recordings that surfaced years later, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko was heard suggesting that the seven districts under Armenian control should be returned to Azerbaijan and proposing the deployment of peacekeeping forces in Karabakh. Lukashenko also claimed that Azerbaijani President Aliyev had offered \$5 billion in exchange for the transfer of these districts. In response, Armenian President Sarkisyan stated that he was ready to offer \$6 billion for Azerbaijan to renounce claims to its seven districts.⁷⁵⁸

From all that has been described, it shows that Russia aims to resolve the Karabakh issue through its own mediation, thereby pulling both Armenia and Azerbaijan into its orbit and ensuring the security of its southern borders by uniting at least a part of the former Soviet geography.

7.3. Old Conflict & Last War

To better understand the 44-Day War of 2020 and the post-conflict order that followed, it is necessary to carefully analyze the steps leading to the war. Exactly 22 years after the signing of the Bishkek Protocol in 1994,⁷⁵⁹ clashes along the frontline in early April 2016⁷⁶⁰ opened the way for resolving the Karabakh conflict through

⁷⁵⁷ "Armenians protest against Russian arms sales to Azerbaijan," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, April 13, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-protest-russian-arm-sales-to-azerbaijan/27673173.html>.

⁷⁵⁸ "Former Armenian President Sarkisian's office does not deny authenticity of leaked audio." *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, December 8, 2020. <https://www.rferl.org/a/former-armenian-president-sarkisian-s-office-refuses-to-comment-on-leaked-audio/30990481.html>.

⁷⁵⁹ Araz Aslanli, "The politics of ceasefire and the occupation," in *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Historical and Political Perspectives*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz, and Michael Gunter, 150-167, (London: Routledge, 2022), 159, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003261209>.

⁷⁶⁰ Ali Askerov, "The Nagorno Karabakh conflict," in *Post-Soviet Conflicts: The Thirty Years' Crisis* ed. Ali Askerov, Stefan Brooks, and Lasha Tchantouridze, 55-82, (Mayland: Lexington Books, 2020), 73.

military means. Azerbaijan had long sought to resolve the issue through diplomatic efforts. Thus, in 1992, Azerbaijan joined the Minsk Group (MG) established by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) together with Armenia.⁷⁶¹

This group operated as a platform co-chaired by the United States, the Russian Federation, and the French Republic, with the inclusion of countries such as the Federal Republic of Germany, the Italian Republic, the Kingdom of Sweden, the Netherlands, and the Republic of Türkiye. Despite numerous peace plans developed by the MG with the support of the international community during this period, none of these plans were implemented. As a result, while these diplomatic efforts have failed to yield sufficient outcomes, the tension in the region has escalated into military conflict. The April Clashes (*Aprel Döyüşləri*) of 2016 has not only reshaped regional power dynamics but also has brought international diplomatic efforts to a new dimension, initiating a new phase in the negotiations over the future of Karabakh.⁷⁶²

These clashes underscored the need for the international community to take a more active role in addressing the long-standing tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The MG, established to facilitate the peaceful resolution of the Karabakh conflict, initially generated significant optimism within the international community. However, over time, the attitudes of the co-chairing countries, that played an active role within the group, have raised serious suspects about the effectiveness of the MG.⁷⁶³ The Madrid Principles, developed under the leadership of the OSCE MG in 2009 with the aim of achieving diplomatic progress, could not be effectively implemented over the following seven years or thereafter.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁶¹ Zaur Shiriyev, "Azerbaijan's perspectives on the OSCE Minsk Group," *Security and Human Rights* 27, no. 3-4, (2016): 453, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02703016>.

⁷⁶² Mais Emrahov, "44 günlük II Qarabağ-Vətən müharibəsində Türkiyə," *Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi* 10, no. 2, (2023): 499, <https://doi.org/10.46868/atdd.2023.>

⁷⁶³ Abilov, "OSCE Minsk Group," 143.

⁷⁶⁴ Azad Garibov, "OSCE and conflict resolution in the post-soviet area: The case of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict," *Caucasus International* 5, no. 2, (2015): 82.

The Four-Day War (*Aprel Döyüşləri*) that took place from April 2-5, 2016, resulted in over a hundred casualties on both sides, serving as an event where both sides tested each other's military capabilities.⁷⁶⁵ By 2018, the efforts of Serzh Sargsyan, the president from the long-dominant Karabakh clan, to remain in power in Armenia led to widespread protests. These demonstrations continued until Nikol Pashinyan was elected as Prime Minister by Parliament on May 8.⁷⁶⁶

Following the snap elections in December 2018, Nikol Pashinyan secured a majority in the Armenia Parliament. By 2019, adopted a more aggressive political rhetoric and policy. On the first anniversary of his election as a prime minister, on May 8, 2019, Pashinyan visited Shusha. This Azerbaijani city had been occupied by Armenian forces 27 years earlier, and Pashinyan attended the so-called presidential inauguration ceremony on May 21. In August 2019, during a rally held in Khankendi (Stepanakert as the so-called capital), he declared "Karabakh is Armenia" motto, prompting the gathered crowd to chant the slogan "Unification" (*Miatsum*).⁷⁶⁷

These events further reinforced Armenia's claims over Karabakh and heightened tensions in the region. In July 2020, attacks by Armenia forces on Azerbaijan's Tovuz region resulted in the martyrdom of a general, a colonel, and two majors from the Azerbaijan military, leading to increased domestic calls for military intervention in Karabakh.⁷⁶⁸ The protests, which did not result in a direct police response, were followed by a series of military exercises conducted by Azerbaijan in August and September with the support of Türkiye.⁷⁶⁹

These exercises were seen as a demonstration of Azerbaijan's military capabilities and preparation for a potential conflict. On the morning of September 27, 2020,

⁷⁶⁵ Gulshan Pashayeva, "New outbreak of violence in Karabakh: Cause and effect," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 14, no. 28, (2017), <https://jamestown.org/program/new-outbreak-violence-karabakh-cause-effect>.

⁷⁶⁶ Kate Samuelson, "Armenia's peaceful protester."

⁷⁶⁷ Joshua Kucera, "Pashinyan calls for unification."

⁷⁶⁸ Ruslan Rehimov, and Jeyhun Aliyev, "Azerbaijanis call for mobilization against Armenia."

⁷⁶⁹ Ruslan Rehimov, "Turkey-Azerbaijan joint military drills continue," *Anadolu Agency*, August 8, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkey-azerbaijan-joint-military-drills-continue/1929548>.

Azerbaijan launched the *Iron Fist Operation* in response to attacks by Armenian forces. From the very first day of the operation, the liberation of several villages generated significant excitement and a morale boost among the Azerbaijan public.⁷⁷⁰

The operation focused on the southern section of the occupied territories, where significant progress was achieved by breaking through the heavily mined and fortified frontlines along the Aras River. The operational effectiveness of Bayraktar unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) procured from the Türkiye enabled Azerbaijan to defeat Armenian armed forces with minimal losses and in a short period. This allowed Azerbaijan to liberate a substantial portion of its occupied territories before international pressure could escalate.⁷⁷¹ During the war, there were ceasefire attempts between the parties as a result of international pressure and diplomatic efforts. However, these efforts failed after a ballistic missile attack on the city of Ganja on October 10, that resulted in the deaths of 10 civilians and injuries to 40 others, leading to the continuation of hostilities.⁷⁷²

On November 8, 2020, the city of Shusha, known as the “cultural capital of Azerbaijan” due to its historical and cultural significance, was liberated by the Azerbaijan, Armed Forces. President Aliyev said the following in an address to the nation on the same day: “*Dear Shusha, you are liberated! Dear Shusha, we are back! Dear Shusha, we will revive you!*”⁷⁷³ This development provided a significant strategic advantage, bringing Azerbaijan forces within a few kilometers of the so-called capital of the self-proclaimed state.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷⁰ Robin Forestier-Walker, “Fighting erupts between Armenia, Azerbaijan over disputed region,” *Al Jazeera*, September 27, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/27/heavy-fighting-erupts-in-disputed-nagorno-karabakh-region>.

⁷⁷¹ Alex Gatopoulos, “The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is ushering in a new age of warfare,” *Al Jazeera*, October 11, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/10/11/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-ushering-in-new-age-of-warfare>.

⁷⁷² Ruslan Rehimov, “Armenian attack kills 12 civilians in Ganja, Azerbaijan,” *Anadolu Agency*, October 17, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/azerbaijan-front-line/armenian-attack-kills-12-civilians-in-ganja-azerbaijan/2009288>.

⁷⁷³ Ulkar Natiqqizi, “Azerbaijanis celebrate retaking of Shusha,” *Eurasianet*, November 8, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijanis-celebrate-retaking-of-shusha>.

⁷⁷⁴ Bethan McKernan, “Azerbaijan claims to have captured key town in Nagorno-Karabakh,” *The Guardian*, November 8, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/08/azerbaijan-claims-to-have-captured-key-city-in-nagorno-karabakh>.

However, on the night of November 9 to 10, alongside the incident of a Russian helicopter being downed over Nakhchivan, the parties reached an agreement on a ceasefire. During a teleconference, that Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan did not attend despite signing the document, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev officially signed the ceasefire agreement.⁷⁷⁵

The most critical clause of the 10 November Agreement is the commitment of Armenian forces to withdraw from the Azerbaijani territories outside the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) that had not yet been liberated. Although there were some delays in fulfilling these commitments, the districts known as the “surrounding districts,” that had historically been home to a significant Turkic population but were later devastated, came under the control of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces by December 1, 2020. This process marked a pivotal turning point, allowing Azerbaijan to reclaim a large portion of its occupied territories and advancing to a new phase in resolving the Karabakh conflict.⁷⁷⁶

On November 10, 2020, the 44-Day War came to an end with the signing of a comprehensive agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia to establish a new status quo in the region and ensure sustainable peace. This agreement, consisting of nine clauses, included provisions for halting hostilities and restructuring control over specific areas. Mediated by Russia, the ceasefire agreement also involved the deployment of a peacekeeping force in the region and the coordination of humanitarian aid. The primary objectives of the agreement were to end the conflict, reclaim occupied territories, and establish stability in the region. The articles of the agreement⁷⁷⁷ can be categorized and summarized as follows:

1. As of 00:00 Moscow time on November 10, 2020, a complete ceasefire and the cessation of all military operations in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone will be

⁷⁷⁵ “Azerbaijan, Turkey signed Shusha Declaration on allied relations,” President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, accessed April 13, 2024, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/52115>.

⁷⁷⁶ Muhittin Ataman, “Azerbaijan’s victory in Karabakh,” *SETA*, November 11, 2020, <https://www.setav.org/en/opinion/azerbaijans-victory-in-karabakh>.

⁷⁷⁷ “Statement by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation,” President of the Russia, November 10, 2020, accessed April 24, 2024, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384>.

declared. The Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, hereinafter referred to as the Parties, will remain in their current positions.

The first article contains a clear commitment from both parties to remain in their current military positions as of the specified date and to ensure that no further hostilities occur.

2. The Aghdam region will be returned to the Republic of Azerbaijan by November 20, 2020.

6. The Republic of Armenia will return Kalbajar to the Republic of Azerbaijan by November 15, 2020, and Lachin by December 1, 2020. The Lachin Corridor, which will ensure communication between Nagorno-Karabakh and the Republic of Armenia without affecting the city of Shusha, will remain under the control of the Russian Federation's peacekeeping forces.

The second and sixth articles provide for the transfer of the Aghdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin districts, that had been under Armenian occupation, to Azerbaijan. Despite delays in the handover of Kalbajar, these three strategic districts were evacuated by Armenian forces by the planned date of December 1. The return of Aghdam to Azerbaijan and the placement of the Lachin Corridor under the control of the Russia peacekeeping forces to maintain communication between Armenians in Karabakh and Armenia were key objectives. These transfers were seen as a significant milestone in strengthening Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and ensuring regional peace.

3. Along the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Lachin Corridor, the Russian Federation has deployed a peacekeeping contingent consisting of 1,960 lightly armed military personnel, 90 armored personnel carriers, 380 vehicles, and specialized equipment.

4. The Russian Federation's peacekeeping contingent will be deployed in parallel with the withdrawal of Armenian forces. The duration of the peacekeeping contingent's stay is 5 years, and unless one of the Parties declares its intention to terminate this provision 6 months before the end of the term, it will be automatically extended for subsequent 5-year periods.

The third and fourth articles relate to the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces in the region. Significantly, the fourth article specifies that the arrival of Russian forces would follow the withdrawal of all Armenian armed groups, not just the Armenian Armed Forces. This detail encompassed not only the Armenian military but also the armed separatists present in the territories of Karabakh that had not yet

been liberated. Although the clause requiring the withdrawal of Armenian armed groups from these areas was not fully implemented until September 2023, when complete control over Karabakh was achieved, it underscored that these separatists were considered terrorist elements by Azerbaijan rather than a legitimate party. Utilizing this clause, Russian peacekeeping forces entered Karabakh from the first hours of the ceasefire. However, the failure of separatist Armenian armed groups to withdraw ultimately led to the issue being resolved again through military means in the future.

7. Internally displaced persons and refugees will return to Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas under the supervision of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

8. Prisoners of war, detainees, and the remains of the deceased will be exchanged.

The seventh and eighth articles, though brief, are significant as they address the return of internally displaced persons and refugees as well as the exchange of prisoners of war. While these articles may appear to have been written primarily for the Armenian population leaving the region during the final days of the war as Azerbaijani forces approached Khankendi, they also encompassed the return of the Turkic population to areas such as Khojaly, which had not yet been liberated at the time.

9. All economic and transport connections in the region will be unblocked. The Republic of Armenia will guarantee the security of the transport network linking the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic to ensure the unimpeded movement of citizens, vehicles, and goods in both directions. Control over the transport network will be carried out by the Border Guard Service of the Russian FSB.

The final and ninth articles are committed to opening all transport routes. Through this clause, Armenia guaranteed the connection between Azerbaijan's mainland and Nakhchivan. This clause introduced the concept of the "Zangezur Corridor" into the regional agenda, a term frequently heard since then. With this corridor, Türkiye would gain the opportunity to establish a direct link to the Turkic geography.

After the surrender agreement, Azerbaijan launched an anti-terror operation in December against armed Armenian separatist forces that refused to recognize the

ceasefire and carried out attacks from the mountainous parts of Karabakh that had not yet been liberated. During this operation, more than 100 armed militants were captured.⁷⁷⁸

In the following months, despite the Armenian diaspora's "Release Armenian POWs" [Prisoner of War] campaign, these militants were not recognized as prisoners of war because they were captured during post-ceasefire operations. Instead, they were returned "gradually" in exchange for mine maps provided by the Armenian side, some of which were inaccurate.⁷⁷⁹

In December 2020, an official military parade showcasing the captured weapons and military vehicles was held, with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in attendance.⁷⁸⁰ This event was organized to highlight Azerbaijan's military achievements and its strategic partnership with the Türkiye. The deep-rooted closeness between the two states was further solidified in June 2021 with the signing of the Shusha Declaration in the heart of Karabakh.⁷⁸¹

The Shusha Declaration aims to deepen cooperation between Azerbaijan and Türkiye across various fields, particularly emphasizing principles of mutual support and partnership in political, military, and economic matters. This agreement stands as evidence that the friendship and cooperation between the two states will grow even stronger in the future.⁷⁸²

⁷⁷⁸ "Nagorno-Karabakh: Dozens of Armenian soldiers 'captured in raid,'" *BBC*, December 16, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55329493>.

⁷⁷⁹ David M. Herszenhorn, "Azerbaijan trades Armenian prisoners of war for mine maps," *Politico*, June 12, 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/azerbaijan-armenia-prisoners-war-nagorno-karabakh-landmine-maps-blinken>.

⁷⁸⁰ Naile Bagirova, and Tuvan Gumrukcu, "Turkey's Erdogan, at Nagorno-Karabakh parade, says Armenia needs new leaders," *Reuters*, December 10, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN28K1T2>.

⁷⁸¹ Seda Sevcenkan, and Faruk Zorlu, "Turkey, Azerbaijan sign 'Shusha Declaration' to boost defense cooperation," *Anadolu Agency*, June 15, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkey-azerbaijan-sign-shusha-declaration-to-boost-defense-cooperation/2274968>.

⁷⁸² Emin Arif Shikhaliyev, "The reality of "big policy" of great powers and their stances on the Second Karabakh War," *Review of Armenian Studies* 45 (2022): 145.

The declaration emphasizes the importance of combining the capabilities and potential of both countries in political, economic, defense, cultural, humanitarian, health, education, social, youth, and sports fields to protect their mutual interests. The declaration aims to further advance the existing strategic partnership between the two countries, particularly by strengthening cooperation in areas such as defense industry, military training, and joint exercises. It also includes provisions for enhancing economic integration, reinforcing cultural ties, and coordinating humanitarian aid. These steps contribute to regional security while strengthening the bonds of friendship between the peoples of the two states.⁷⁸³

In this new fragile status quo, where the Russian peacekeeping force was deployed in areas controlled by Armenian separatists, a serious border clash erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan in September 2022. The primary cause of these clashes was the failure to achieve a comprehensive peace agreement shortly after the ceasefire and the incomplete adherence to the terms of the agreement by both parties. Non-compliance with the provisions of the ceasefire agreement further escalated tensions between the two countries and reignited hostilities. The September 2022 border clash occurred on a larger scale than similar incidents before and after it. During the clashes, the Azerbaijan military suffered the loss of 80 soldiers, while Armenia reported 202 casualties according to its official statements.⁷⁸⁴

This incident highlighted once again the high level of tension between the two states and the challenges in implementing the ceasefire agreement. By securing control over strategic heights along the undefined border line, Azerbaijan aimed to prevent potential attacks from the Western Zangezur region. Despite three years passing since the war, due to the failure to fulfill the obligations of the surrender agreement, Azerbaijan's military launched a new anti-terror operation on September 19–20, 2023, liberating the remaining territories under the control of Armenian

⁷⁸³ “Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti arasında müttefiklik ilişkileri hakkında: Şuşa Beyannamesi,” Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı, accessed May 19, 2024, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/assets/dosya/2021-06-15-Azaebaycan-SusaBeyannamesi.pdf>.

⁷⁸⁴ Ruslan Rehimov, “Azerbaijan says clashes broke out on border due to provocations by Armenia,” *Anadolu Agency*, September 13, 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/azerbaijan-says-clashes-broke-out-on-border-due-to-provocations-by-armenia/2683554>.

separatists.⁷⁸⁵ Following this brief operation, both the native and later-settled Armenian population of Karabakh migrated en masse to Armenia.⁷⁸⁶

Along the Lachin Corridor, under the supervision of Azerbaijan customs officials, individuals among these Armenians who had committed war crimes during the First and Second Karabakh Wars, including so-called state officials, were identified and detained for prosecution.⁷⁸⁷ As a result, on October 15, 2023, President Ilham Aliyev raised the Azerbaijani flag in front of the so-called presidential palace established in Khankendi. Thus, the entirety of Karabakh came under Azerbaijan's control, marking the end of the 35-year-long active Karabakh conflict.⁷⁸⁸

7.4. Post-conflict Normalization

Following the 44-Day War, several challenges remain regarding the establishment of a new order in the South Caucasus and the achievement of peace and stability in the region. Azerbaijan's full control over Karabakh, the return of internally displaced populations within the country, the regaining of control over exclaves and villages that were under occupation, delimitation, the opening of trade and transportation routes, and the return of refugees are all critical issues for ensuring lasting peace and stability in the region. To establish a post-conflict order, it was first necessary for Azerbaijan to achieve full control over its internationally recognized territories in Karabakh and repopulate the areas that had been under occupation. The primary aim of the ceasefire/surrender agreement signed on November 10, 2020, was to accomplish this. The agreement envisioned the withdrawal of Armenian forces, the deployment of the Russian Peacekeeping Force in the region, and the return of

⁷⁸⁵ Cavid Veliyev, "Legal, political and military reasons for Azerbaijan's anti-terror ops," *Daily Sabah*, September 25, 2023, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/legal-political-and-military-reasons-for-azerbaijans-anti-terror-ops>.

⁷⁸⁶ Fin DePencier, "Armenian exodus from Karabakh begins," *Eurasianet*, September 25, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/armenian-exodus-from-karabakh-begins>.

⁷⁸⁷ Elena Teslova, "Azerbaijan confirms arrest of former head of Karabakh separatists," *Anadolu Agency*, October 5, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/azerbaijan-confirms-arrest-of-former-head-of-karabakh-separatists/3008358>.

⁷⁸⁸ Ruslan Rehimov, "Azerbaijani president raises national flag in Karabakh," *Anadolu Agency*, October 16, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/azerbaijani-president-raises-national-flag-in-karabakh/3021308>.

internally displaced persons. However, various challenges emerged during this process. One of the main difficulties in implementing the ceasefire agreement was the continued presence of Armenian separatists in areas of Karabakh that had not yet been liberated. Although the Russian Peacekeeping Force was tasked with maintaining stability in the region, it failed to fully eliminate the presence of these separatist elements.⁷⁸⁹

This situation negatively impacted the peace process in the region and delayed Azerbaijan's ability to achieve full control over Karabakh. The anti-terror operation carried out by Azerbaijan in September 2023 marked a turning point in establishing full control over Karabakh. This operation resulted in the complete reclamation of territories that remained under the control of Armenian separatists and significantly eliminated security threats in the region.⁷⁹⁰

Following the operation, the Azerbaijan government implemented a comprehensive strategy to reopen the region for resettlement. Under this strategy, resettlement efforts in Karabakh were accelerated, and returns to the region were encouraged.⁷⁹¹ To ensure the safety and well-being of the returning population, the Azerbaijan government introduced various support programs and incentives. The resettlement process is also aimed at promoting cultural and social cohesion. In this context, significant investments were made in education, healthcare, and social services to facilitate the integration of the returning population. Moreover, to support economic development in the region, projects were initiated in agriculture, industry, and trade, creating new job opportunities.⁷⁹²

⁷⁸⁹ "What is Nagorno-Karabakh and why are tensions rising again?" *Al Jazeera*, April 24, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/24/explainer-what-is-nagorno-karabakh-why-are-tensions-rising>.

⁷⁹⁰ Muhammed Enes Calli, "Azerbaijan, Türkiye 'want peace, stability in region, not war,' says Azerbaijani president," *Anadolu Agency*, September 25, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/azerbaijan-turkiye-want-peace-stability-in-region-not-war-says-azerbaijani-president/3000661>.

⁷⁹¹ Ruslan Rehimov, "Azerbaijan's liberated Karabakh now a construction site for modern projects," *Anadolu Agency*, November 10, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/azerbaijans-liberated-karabakh-now-a-construction-site-for-modern-projects/2417129>.

⁷⁹² Khazar Akhundov, "Investors in Karabakh to be encouraged by tax incentives," *Caliber.az*, April 19, 2023, <https://caliber.az/en/post/investors-in-karabakh-to-be-encouraged-by-tax-incentives>.

Ultimately, achieving full control over Karabakh and facilitating the return of the population represent a critical milestone in Azerbaijan's long-term goals of peace and stability. This process has required coordinated efforts in both military and civilian spheres, with the implementation of a comprehensive strategy for the region's reconstruction. Another significant issue that needs resolution is the enclaves and border villages occupied by both countries. While Armenia has the enclave village of Artsvashen within Azerbaijan's borders, Azerbaijan has eight villages spread across three enclaves under Armenia's control: Baganis Ayrim, Hayrimli, Barkhudarli, Sofulu, Yukhari Askipara, Gizil Hajili, Ashagi Askipara, and Karki. Seven of these villages are located in the northwestern border areas of Azerbaijan's Gazakh district, while Karki village is in the south, part of Nakhchivan.⁷⁹³

The strategic importance of these enclaves for Azerbaijan lies in their location along key trade and transportation routes connecting Armenia with its neighbors both in the north and south. This situation is one of the main reasons why Armenia is reluctant to return these enclaves. The mountainous terrain of the region makes the creation of new transportation routes challenging, thereby increasing the strategic importance of controlling existing routes. Control over these enclaves is not only essential for Azerbaijan to reinforce its territorial integrity but also crucial for ensuring the security of regional trade and transportation networks. By reclaiming these enclaves, Azerbaijan aims to eliminate potential threats that Armenia could pose through its northern territories. On the other hand, Armenia seeks to retain these enclaves to maintain its strategic advantage. Returning these enclaves to their rightful owners would be a critical step toward peace and stability in the region. An agreement between both states on this issue is vital for clarifying borders and ensuring security. In this context, the support of the international community and regional actors is of critical importance in facilitating a lasting solution.⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁹³ "Qazaxın işğal altında olan 7 kəndi haqqında nə bilirik?" *Ordu.az*, May 26, 2021, <https://ordu.az/az/news/138719>.

⁷⁹⁴ "Hikmat Hajiyev: Armenia doesn't want to sign peace treaty, trying to gain time, March 13, 2023." *Studia* 12, no. 3, (2023): 125.

One of the most critical issues for ensuring stability in the region is delimitation, the determination of borders. To date, Armenia has not signed an official border agreement with any of its neighbors. As is well known, disputed territories are one of the primary causes of war between nations. In 2019, when Ermeni Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan championed the slogan Unification (*Miatsum*), his rhetoric shifted towards recognizing Azerbaijan's territorial integrity following Azerbaijan's victory in Karabakh in 2020. Pashinyan has frequently stated that while Armenia expects Azerbaijan to recognize Armenia's territorial integrity of 29,800 square kilometers, Armenia also recognizes Azerbaijan's 86,600 square kilometers of territory.⁷⁹⁵

Facing intense criticism from his own opposition, Nikol Pashinyan has adopted this rhetoric due to the risk of Armenia losing its current territorial integrity. In an attempt to address Türkiye's discomfort with the depiction of Mount Ararat on Armenia's national emblem, Pashinyan stated, "*The highest mountain in Armenia is Aragats [Alagöz Mountain], which is currently within Armenia's borders, not Ararat [Mount Ağrı].*"⁷⁹⁶

This statement indicates that the Armenian leadership aims to demonstrate a stance against expansionist policies not only along its eastern borders but also its western borders. In 2011, then-President of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, responded to a young person's question, "*Will we be able to reclaim Ararat [Mount Ağrı] and our western lands?*" by saying, "*That is something for your generation to achieve. For instance, my generation successfully fulfilled its duty by liberating part of Artsakh [Karabakh]. Every generation has a mission to accomplish.*"⁷⁹⁷

However, this shift in rhetoric has yet to translate into practical actions. Türkiye demands changes to Armenia's constitution, specifically removing references in its

⁷⁹⁵ Anelise Borges, "Armenia's Prime Minister Pashinyan: 'Nobody promised it was going to be easy to reach peace,'" *Euronews*, August 2, 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/2023/08/02/armenias-prime-minister-pashinyan-nobody-promised-it-was-going-to-be-easy-to-reach-peace>.

⁷⁹⁶ "'The highest mountain in Armenia is Aragats,' prime minister," *Radar Armenia*, May 22, 2023, <https://radar.am/en/news/politics-2569589319>.

⁷⁹⁷ "AGOS ve 'Ararat' vurgusu," *Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi*, October 11, 2018, <https://avim.org.tr/tr/Yorum/AGOS-VE-ARARAT-VURGUSU>.

declaration of independence that support the so-called Armenian genocide and eliminating the depiction of Mount Ağrı on the state emblem. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, calls for the redrawing of borders as part of a peace agreement. While Pashinyan suggests using maps from 1975 prepared by the General Staff of the Soviet Union for border delimitation, Azerbaijan has not made an official statement on the matter. One of the primary reasons for this is the existence of various maps from 1918–1920 and beyond that define the border between the two states.⁷⁹⁸

These maps, which changed during the Soviet period, depict differing borders between the two peoples. However, this shift in rhetoric has yet to translate into practical actions. Another contentious issue concerns the opening of trade and transportation routes in the region. Azerbaijan demands the establishment of uninterrupted and customs-free travel between its mainland and Nakhchivan, in line with Article 9 of the 10 November Agreement. It should be noted, however, that the details of Article 9 specify that the security of this uninterrupted and customs-free travel via a corridor will be ensured by Russia's internal intelligence service, the FSB.⁷⁹⁹

The proposed route, which is intended to include both road and rail connections, is expected to run along the Aras River, linking the cities of Minjivan and Ordubad. This route has been named the Zangezur Corridor by Azerbaijan. The opening of this corridor will not only directly connect Baku to Nakhchivan but also enable goods transported through Azerbaijan to reach European markets more quickly. This development will enhance Azerbaijan's geopolitical significance, strengthening its position on strategic trade routes. Additionally, the corridor will establish Türkiye's connection to the Turkic geography, further bolstering regional cooperation and trade.⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁸ Burç Erüygür, "Azerbaijan says Armenia has not given up 'political manipulations'," *Anadolu Agency*, October 11, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/azerbaijan-says-armenia-has-not-given-up-political-manipulations-/3016044>.

⁷⁹⁹ "Statement by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, November 10, 2020."

⁸⁰⁰ Hatice Dilaver, and Aziz Cumhur Kocalar, "Anatolia: The end point of the Silk road," *Journal of International Eastern European Studies* 6, no. 1, (2024): 109, <https://doi.org/10.59839/jiees.1477533>.

The current Armenia administration, while expressing willingness to open trade routes, has proposed an alternative project. Introduced by Pashinyan on October 26, 2023, the *Crossroads of Peace* project bypasses the Zangezur Corridor plan and aims to establish customs checkpoints along the route passing through Western Zangezur. This project is based on four main principles: the opening of all routes in accordance with the sovereignty of each state, the right of every state to establish customs checkpoints, the use of routes for domestic purposes, and the operation of all infrastructure based on the principle of reciprocity.⁸⁰¹

This project has two primary motivations. The first is to enhance Armenia's sovereignty over its own territory by not implementing the Zangezur Corridor. This is because Armenia's borders with Türkiye and Iran are currently guarded by the border protection service of Russia's internal intelligence agency, the FSB. Similarly, customs operations at Zvartnots International Airport, the country's largest airport, are also under the protection of the FSB.⁸⁰²

Recently, the Pashinyan government, seeking to remove FSB, Russian domestic security agency's units from customs and borders, including Zvartnots Airport, also opposes Moscow's oversight of a corridor with direct passage.⁸⁰³ The second reason is that Armenia aims to shift the East-West trade route to its territory and establish customs checkpoints along this route to maximize its economic benefits. However, Azerbaijan does not favor this proposal. The primary reason is that Azerbaijan does not wish to transport goods to its own territory in Nakhchivan through foreign customs checkpoints. Azerbaijan demands that the corridor operate uninterrupted and customs-free, as this would provide significant economic and strategic advantages.⁸⁰⁴

⁸⁰¹ "The crossroad of peace brochure," Prime Minister of Armenia, accessed April 24, 2024, https://www.primeminister.am/u_files/file/documents/The%20Crossroad%20of%20Peace-Brochure.pdf.

⁸⁰² Ani Avetisyan, "Armenian PM sees 'no advantage' in Russian troop presence as ties with Moscow deteriorate further," *Eurasianet*, October 31, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/armenian-pm-sees-no-advantage-in-russian-troop-presence-as-ties-with-moscow-deteriorate-further>.

⁸⁰³ Teodor Detchev, "Armenia's geopolitical double-cross through the lens of the arms trade," *Bulgarian Journal of International Economics and Politics* 4, no. 2, (2024): 44, <https://doi.org/10.37075/BJIEP.2024.2.03>.

⁸⁰⁴ Gulgun Guliyeva Mubariz, "Geostrategic analysis of the Zangezur Corridor's potential commercial and logistic impacts on the region," *European Political and Law Discourse* 12, no. 3, (2025): 8, <https://doi.org/10.46340/eppd.2025.12.3>.

In addition, according to Article 9 of the 10 November Ceasefire Agreement signed after the 44-Day War in 2020, Armenia guaranteed uninterrupted two-way access between Azerbaijan's mainland and Nakhchivan. Therefore, Azerbaijan seeks to utilize all the rights granted under this post-war ceasefire agreement. This debate holds critical importance for ensuring peace and stability in the region. The opening of trade routes will not only support economic development but also promote regional cooperation and integration. The U.S. favors diplomatic and political resolutions rather than military action, seeing Türkiye as a crucial ally in countering the influence of China, Russia, and Iran, which may hamper the corridor's implementation.⁸⁰⁵

Finally, one of the most critical issues that could impact regional peace is the refugee crisis that emerged from the onset of the Karabakh conflict in 1987–1988. The glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) policies initiated by the Soviet administration in 1985 led to increased ethnic unrest within the Union. As a result of these policies, ethnic-based conflicts arose in the South Caucasus, and with the collapse of the Union, minority groups in their respective states were forced to migrate to regions where they were in the majority. Similar forced migrations occurred between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Although the numbers are contested, there was a movement of refugees amounting to 600,000 people between Armenia and Azerbaijan until their independence in 1991. This figure does not include the more than 650,000 Azerbaijani Turks forced to leave Karabakh and its surrounding districts.^{806 807}

For lasting stability in the region, as seen in the Azerbaijan-Georgia example, it is essential for local ethnic minorities from both states to return to the territories they previously inhabited. In this context, the Azerbaijani government, particularly after

⁸⁰⁵ Turan Gafarlı, "Unlocking the potential in the South Caucasus: The Zangezur Corridor's impact on the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor)," *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 29, no. 2, (2024): 166.

⁸⁰⁶ Alovzat Aliyev, "Migration to and from Azerbaijan," 27.

⁸⁰⁷ Gagik Yeganyan, "The migration situation in Armenia: Challenges and solutions," in *Migration Perspectives, planning and managing labour*, ed. Roger Rodríguez Rios, 17-26, (Vienna: International Organization for Migration, 2006), 17.

its military victories in 2020, has begun taking steps to facilitate the return of Azerbaijanis forcibly displaced from Armenia to their homelands. To this end, the organization initially established in 1989 as the Azerbaijan Refugee Society (*Azərbaycan Qaçqınlar Cəmiyyəti*) was renamed and reorganized in 2022 as the Western Azerbaijan Community (*Qərbi Azərbaycan İcması*). With the support of this organization, the goal is to enable Azerbaijanis to return to their ancestral lands in and around the capital Yerevan as equal citizens following the planned peace agreement with Armenia.⁸⁰⁸

The Azerbaijan government views the return of refugees not only as a humanitarian necessity but also as a guarantee for regional peace and stability. Ensuring the return of Azerbaijani refugees within the framework of a peace agreement with Armenia will not only contribute to reducing tensions between the two countries but also play a significant role in the broader peace and stability process in the South Caucasus. This process represents a critical step toward establishing lasting peace and ensuring long-term stability in the region. The Azerbaijan government is taking concrete steps to implement this policy. One of the strongest indicators of the seriousness of this initiative is President Ilham Aliyev's statements during his visit to Karabakh in October 2023. During this visit, Aliyev emphasized that Azerbaijan seeks to achieve this goal through diplomatic means, declaring, "*We will return to Zangezur, not with tanks, but with vehicles.*"⁸⁰⁹

This statement clearly demonstrates Azerbaijan's determination to restore the rights of its citizens who were ethnically cleansed from Armenia and to facilitate their return to their ancestral lands. In this regard, resolving the Karabakh conflict and ensuring the return of refugees are of critical importance for regional peace and stability. This process will not only contribute to the normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia but also foster a broader environment of peace and stability across the South Caucasus. The two peoples, who will relearn to coexist

⁸⁰⁸ "‘Qərbi Azərbaycan İcması’ adlı yeni təşkilat yaradılıb," *Report.az*, August 3, 2022, <https://report.az/daxili-siyaset/azerbaycan-qacqinlar-cemiyyeti-ictimai-birliyinin-umumi-yigincagi-kecirilib>.

⁸⁰⁹ "Aliyev: We will return to Zangezur not by tanks but by cars." *Alpha News*, October 17, 2023. <https://alphanews.am/en/aliyev-we-will-return-to-zangezur-not-by-tanks-but-by-cars>.

within the same region, will help prevent the emergence of ethnically motivated conflicts in the future. However, achieving this goal will require the determined and coordinated efforts of both Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as neighboring states and the international community. Upholding international law and human rights is essential to ensuring the safe and dignified return of refugees.

7.5. Conclusion

This section has thoroughly examined the multifaceted and complex nature of Azerbaijan-Armenia relations. The key findings clearly indicate that the Karabakh issue had been the main axis of the relationship between the two states for many years, and that diplomatic efforts, despite various mediation attempts, had been insufficient in achieving a lasting solution. Especially the failure of the peace plans of the 1990s (package and step-by-step agreements) and later proposals such as the Madrid Principles of the 2000s had revealed how difficult it is to reach a solution due to the intransigent attitudes of the parties and the complex influence of regional powers. It has been determined that Russia's role as a mediator has created distrust on the Azerbaijani side and further complicated the process.

As emphasized in the chapter, the exhaustion of diplomatic avenues has led Azerbaijan to increase its military capacity and turn to military solutions such as the Four-Day War in 2016 and the 44-Day War in 2020. The 2020 War fundamentally changed the geopolitical balance in the region and marked the beginning of a new era with Azerbaijan re-establishing control over internationally recognized territories. The 10 November Ceasefire Agreement signed after this war became a critical turning point in determining the fate of Karabakh, but it did not solve all the problems.

In the post-agreement period, issues such as border demarcation, the opening of transportation corridors (Zangezur Corridor), the return of displaced persons, and the refugee problem have emerged as the main challenges of the normalization process. Especially the continued presence of Armenian separatist forces made the anti-terror operation in 2023 inevitable, resulting in Azerbaijan gaining control over all of

Karabakh. As a result, the future of Azerbaijan-Armenia relations depends on resolving these key issues, establishing mutual trust, and developing regional cooperation. It is essential for both countries to recognize each other's territorial integrity in accordance with international law and to re-establish the bonds between their peoples for lasting peace and stability.



CHAPTER 8

AZERBAIJAN-TÜRKİYE RELATIONS

8.1. Introduction

Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations have gained momentum and reached the highest level of strategic partnership since Ilham Aliyev took office as the President of Azerbaijan in October 2003, following the direction set by the late President Heydar Aliyev's motto "One Nation, Two States." During this period, the relations between the two "brother states" have gained depth and diversity in diplomatic, security, economic, and socio-cultural fields. Based on mutual trust, common interests, and unwavering solidarity, these relations have become a balancing element in regional geopolitics and have strengthened the position of both countries on the international stage.

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye. It comprehensively addresses the development of the ties between the two countries from their historical origins to the present day. The section aims to examine relationships through their diplomatic, security, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. From the beginning of diplomatic relations, it will be explained that Türkiye was the first country to recognize Azerbaijan's independence and the subsequent diplomatic steps taken. The points of tension in the past, especially the "Armenian Opening" policy in 2009 that strained relations between the two countries and the events that occurred during this process, will be detailed. The section will reveal how this difficult period was overcome and how the relations were strengthened again. Within the framework of security cooperation, the joint military efforts of the two countries will be examined. Military training agreements, joint exercises, and Türkiye's contributions to Azerbaijan's military capacity will be emphasized. Especially during the 44-Day War, the support Türkiye provided to

Azerbaijan and its impact on military outcomes will be evaluated. Additionally, the importance of the “Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support Agreement” in terms of security will be emphasized. In the context of economic relations, topics such as trade volume, energy projects, and mutual investments will be addressed. Türkiye’s strategic role in the transportation of Azerbaijan’s energy resources to international markets and the contributions of significant projects like TANAP will be explained in detail. The development of economic cooperation between the two countries over time and their future potential will be discussed.

Finally, socio-cultural relations will be discussed. It will be emphasized how language, history, culture, and inter-people connections form the foundation of this deep relationship. Collaborations in the fields of education, art, sports, and media and their contributions to the interaction between the two societies will be examined. Additionally, the mutual perceptions of the public in Azerbaijan and Türkiye and the spirit of solidarity formed around shared values will be addressed. This chapter aims to present the multifaceted structure of Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations, highlighting the place and significance of this strategic partnership within regional and international dynamics from a comprehensive perspective.

8.2. Short Background

For Azerbaijan, the relationship with Türkiye holds very special significance. The reason for this is that Türkiye, among Azerbaijan’s neighbors, is the closest state to it due to historical, cultural, and strategic reasons. For Türkiye as well, similar reasons have made Azerbaijan the main subject of its Caucasus policy. Thus, the first country to recognize Azerbaijan’s independence, which re-declared its independence on October 18, 1991, and to establish relations with it was Türkiye on November 9, 1991.⁸¹⁰

Türkiye’s initial policy towards Azerbaijan was focused on preserving its independence and ensuring its territorial integrity through Karabakh. For this reason,

⁸¹⁰ Svante E. Cornell, “Turkey and the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh: A delicate balance,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 1, (1998): 59.

there have been instances where it opposed the policies implemented by Azerbaijan. For example, Süleyman Demirel, who returned to the prime ministerial seat 11 years after the 1980 Turkish coup d'état, criticized Azerbaijan's policy of abolishing Karabakh's autonomy. Azerbaijan's independence was so important that, initially, the fact that the head of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan was in power was not a reason for Türkiye to avoid developing relations. Therefore, the Turkish embassy was opened in Baku without delay in January 1992.⁸¹¹

With the coming to power of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA) under the leadership of Elchibey, a significant strategic change occurred in Azerbaijan's foreign policy. During this period, Türkiye was given a special position in Azerbaijan's foreign policy. Stating that he is ideologically a Turkish nationalist and frequently expressing his admiration for Atatürk, President Elchibey mentioned that they see Türkiye as Azerbaijan's strategic partner and that despite the lack of an official agreement between the two countries, they try to conduct their foreign policy in a way that does not harm Türkiye's strategic interests.⁸¹²

After Heydar Aliyev came to power again, the foundation of Azerbaijan's foreign policy was based on the principles of independence, pragmatism, and balancing, while the foundation of its domestic policy was based on the principles of stability and Azerbaijanism. Especially the friendship between Heydar Aliyev and Turkish President Süleyman Demirel played an important role in the development of bilateral relations.⁸¹³

The balanced foreign policy established by Heydar Aliyev has also positively influenced Türkiye's policy in the Caucasus. Heydar Aliyev's Türkiye-focused

⁸¹¹ Suha Bolukbasi, "Ankara's Baku-centered Transcaucasia policy: Has it failed?" *The Middle East Journal* 51, no. 1, (1997): 83.

⁸¹² Nazım Cafersoy, *Elçibey Dönemi Azerbaycan Dış Politikası (Haziran 1992-Haziran 1993): Bir Bağımsızlık Mücadelesinin Diplomatik Öyküsü*, (Ankara: ASAM, Avrasya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi Yayınları, 2001), 69.

⁸¹³ Cüneyt M. Özşahin, and Orhan Battır. "One nation, two leaders: Foreign policies of Heydar Aliyev and Suleyman Demirel," in *Heydar Aliyev and the Foundations of Modern Azerbaijan*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz, Michael M. Gunter, and Shamkhal Abilov, 305-339, (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 305, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58265-3_12.

foreign policy can be summarized under the following five headings: the relations are based on pragmatic rather than ideological principles; it is an important part of foreign policy in maintaining the regional power balance; the established relations have facilitated breaking out of the existing information and economic blockade; trilateral relations have developed by including Georgia; the relations are based on the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of two sovereign states.⁸¹⁴ After the death of Heydar Aliyev in 2003, Ilham Aliyev, who became President, continued the balanced policy in Azerbaijan's foreign policy that he inherited from the previous period. As a result, Türkiye has always held a special place in Azerbaijan's foreign policy.⁸¹⁵

8.3. Diplomacy

In this period, it is possible to base the beginning of diplomatic relations between the two countries on the words expressed by Ilham Aliyev for Türkiye during his oath ceremony at the Gülüstan Palace on November 1, 2003. In his speech during this ceremony, Ilham Aliyev stated that they always say the following: *"Wherever Türkiye is, Azerbaijan is there too; wherever Azerbaijan is, Türkiye is there too."* With this statement, the future direction of the relationship between the two states has been indicated.⁸¹⁶

Later, while it became the route for his first trip abroad as president, he said the following in a speech at the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (GNAT) on April 14, 2004: *"I have been in Türkiye many times, I am very tied to Türkiye, I love this country very much. I consider Türkiye as my homeland."*⁸¹⁷

⁸¹⁴ Cavid Vəliyev, "Azərbaycan–Türkiyə münasibətləri: 1991-2016," in *Azərbaycan Respublikasının Xarici Siyasətinin Əsas İstiqamətləri (1991-2016): Məqalələr Toplusu*, ed. Fərhad Məmmədov, Cavid Vəliyev and Aqşin Məmmədov, 97-158, (Bakı: "Poliart" MMC, 2017), 111-112.

⁸¹⁵ Cagla Gul Yesevi, and Burcu Yavuz Tiftikcigil, "Turkey-Azerbaijan energy relations: A political and economic analysis," *International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy* 5, no. 1, (2015): 27.

⁸¹⁶ "'Gülüstan' sarayında rəsmi qəbul: Azərbaycan respublikasının Prezidenti İlham Əliyevin yekun nitqi." *AZƏRTAC*, November 11, 2003. <https://azertag.az/print/299120>.

⁸¹⁷ "Azərbaycan–Türkiyə dostluğu, qardaşlığı sarsılmaz və əbədidir." *AZƏRTAC*, April 16, 2004. <https://azertag.az/print/310153>.

Although the origins are deep, in the new period, the relations that began with these expressions have continued with important projects that further tightly bind Azerbaijan and Türkiye to each other. In this regard, the existence of political stability in Azerbaijan, that would continue with a new president, and a national will which would implement the signed agreements have been in the interest of Türkiye as well as other states. However, it should also be noted that during İlham Aliyev's presidency, the priorities of Azerbaijan's foreign policy have made Türkiye important for Azerbaijan, too. Both the resolution of the Karabakh issue with Armenia and Türkiye's stance on the transfer of Azerbaijan's energy resources to the West have been significant for Azerbaijan in strengthening its relations with Türkiye.⁸¹⁸

As is known, from the early years of Azerbaijan's re-independence, the strong diplomatic support given by Türkiye has formed the foundation of the relations between the two states. So much so that, shortly before the re-independence, on the eve of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Türkiye opened its consulate in Baku on May 25, 1991. After the re-declaration of independence on October 18, 1991, Türkiye became the first country to recognize Azerbaijan's independence on November 9, 1991, and diplomatic relations officially began on January 14, 1992. During this process, Türkiye became the first country to elevate its consulate in Baku to the level of an embassy in January 1992, opening an embassy in Azerbaijan later. Moreover, it opened its consulates in Nakhchivan in 1992 and in Ganja in 2010. Azerbaijan reciprocated these close relations by opening its embassy in Ankara in August 1992 and its consulate in Istanbul in January 1993.⁸¹⁹

Finally, during İlham Aliyev's presidency, a new consulate was opened in the province of Kars on April 12, 2004. The establishment of the Kars Consulate General in 2004⁸²⁰ meant that Azerbaijan was further solidifying its diplomatic

⁸¹⁸ Zehra Karayel, "Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations in the context of security community: One nation, two states," *Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi* 20, no. 49, (2024): 380, <https://doi.org/10.17752/guvenlikstrj.1565134>.

⁸¹⁹ Şeyda Çevikel, "Resulzade'den İlham Aliyev'e Azerbaycan-Türkiye siyasi ilişkileri üzerine bir değerlendirme," *Anasay* 7, no. 25 (2023): 156-171, <https://doi.org/10.33404/anasay.1380834>.

⁸²⁰ "İkitaraflı ilişkiler hakkında." Azerbaycan Cumhuriyetinin Türkiye Cumhuriyetindeki Büyükelçiliği. Accessed September 12, 2024, <https://ankara.mfa.gov.az/tr/category/iki-taraflı-iliskiler>.

presence in Türkiye at a strategic land. The importance of Kars for Azerbaijan is not only due to its being the eastern gateway of Türkiye but also because it shares a border with Armenia and has a presence of Azerbaijani-origin Turkish citizens living in the region. In this context, the Kars Consulate General has undertaken a critical mission with a wide scope of duties spread across a total of 17 provinces, including Ardahan, Ağrı, Artvin, Batman, Bingöl, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Erzurum, Hakkari, Iğdır, Kars, Mardin, Muş, Siirt, Şanlıurfa, Şırnak, and Van, to provide consular services to Azerbaijani citizens in the region and to further deepen Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations in the political, economic, and cultural fields in this sensitive and strategic geography.⁸²¹

Türkiye provided significant diplomatic support to Azerbaijan in the early years of its re-independence. It allowed some embassies in Ankara to be accredited to Azerbaijan and enabled Turkish embassies to represent Azerbaijan in many countries. Türkiye even took this support further by providing space in Turkish embassies for Azerbaijani ambassadors until their own buildings were constructed. And the opening of the Kars Consulate General is a continuation of this deep-rooted and mutual solidarity.⁸²²

The Kars Consulate General has also taken a clear and resolute stance against the “Armenian Opening” process, [that will be detailed later.] Especially, it has made efforts both locally and nationally to ensure that the border gate between Armenia and the city of Kars, that was closed in 1993 due to the Armenian forces’ occupation of Karabakh, is not reopened. The consulate, that received support from the local public, played an effective role in preventing this plan from becoming reality. In an interview in 2009, the then Consul General Hasan Zeynalov stated that “*the Alicant border crossing between Türkiye and Armenia was being repaired, the roads leading to the border were being asphalted, and repairs were being made to the customs buildings,*” while describing Türkiye’s policy as a misguided initiative in terms of

⁸²¹ “Azerbaycan Kars Başkonsolosluğu,” Euroasia Global Visa Services, accessed September 13, 2024, <https://www.eagvs.com/azerbaycan/azerbaycan-kars-baskonsoloslugu>.

⁸²² “Azərbaycan-Türkiyə diplomatik münasibətləri – 30,” *Azərbaycan – Türkiyə əlaqələri*, Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin İşlər İdarəsinin Prezident Kitabxanası (2020): 2-3, <https://files.preslib.az/projects/azerturk/a1.pdf>.

deteriorating relations with Azerbaijan. Because in those years when the Karabakh occupation had continued, a normalization with Armenia would be a process that Azerbaijan would not accept.⁸²³

When the rigid stance of the Kars Consulate combined with local support, and influenced by developments in foreign policy, it could affect Ankara's stance soon. However, minor groups within Türkiye that harbor anti-Azerbaijani sentiment have been working towards the opening of this border gate. These groups, also present in the Kars region, argued that Azerbaijan was an obstacle to the Türkiye-Armenia "normalization" and lobbied for Türkiye to accept Armenian claims, including the so-called "genocide."⁸²⁴

However, as will be seen at the end of another event that took place during the same period, these groups with anti-Azerbaijani sentiment constituted only an organized minority in both the local context of Kars and the general context of Türkiye. Another event that strained the relationship between the two countries in the Kars region was the "*Humanity Monument*," that began construction in Kars in 2006 but was never completed. The "*Humanity Monument*" was an almost completed monument about 30 meters high in Kars, Türkiye.⁸²⁵

It was a reinforced concrete structure consisting of two human figures. When completed, one of the figures' hands would be reaching out to hold the other figure's hand. The only missing part that needed to be installed for the monument to be completed was the outstretched hand. Designed by Turkish sculptor Mehmet Aksoy and approved by the then ruling party's Mayor Naif Alibeyoğlu, the structure was positioned on a hill in the protected area right across from the city castle. Although it is technically impossible to see it from a distance of approximately 50 km, this

⁸²³ Şinasi Çapa, "Azerbaycan feda edilemez!" *Hakikat*, May 1, 2009, <https://www.hakikat.com/hakikat-dergisi/188/azerbaycan-feda-edilemez>.

⁸²⁴ Alin Ozinian, "Kars: Gözden Düşmüş Bir Eski Zengin," *PolitiKars*, March 24, 2011, <https://www.politikars.com/kars-gozden-dusmus-bir-eski-zengin-17204h.htm>.

⁸²⁵ Sindelar, Daisy, "The end of Turkish-Armenian dialogue?" *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, April 27, 2011, https://www.rferl.org/a/monuments_demolition_end_of_turkish_armenian_dislogue/16795987.html.

structure was built on a hill dominating the city with the claim that it could be seen from Armenia. It aimed to convey a message of “friendship” to the Armenians on the other side of the border and implicitly recognize the so-called “genocide” of 1915.⁸²⁶

However, the discomfort that arose in the city, especially among the Azerbaijani-origin population, resulted in Ankara’s involvement in this matter. Ankara’s involvement in this matter became more concrete during a visit by then-Prime Minister [current President] Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Kars on January 8, 2011.⁸²⁷

During his visit, Prime Minister Erdoğan referred to this structure as a “freak” in a rally and called for its demolition. Although Prime Minister Erdoğan stated that the reason for this call was entirely based on aesthetic concerns, some commentators believe that the main reason for this outburst was the expectations of the local public. Because many people in Kars considered this structure as a tacit acceptance of Armenia’s so-called “genocide” claims.⁸²⁸

Indeed, while the then Mayor of Kars, Naif Alibeyoğlu, who commissioned the construction, was not re-nominated by the ruling party in the 2009 local elections due to the impact of these discussions and the increasing pressure from the local public, primarily the Azerbaijani-origin Turks; in this election, the candidate of the ruling party was elected as mayor. As a result of these developments, the demolition process of this structure was initiated with the indirect influence of the Azerbaijani Consulate, and it was completely removed in 2011.⁸²⁹

In the following years, there have been other positive developments affecting Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations. As is known, bilateral relations are based on Türkiye

⁸²⁶ Emre Keser, “Gazing at monsters: Aesthetics, politics, and the national distribution of the sensible,” *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 16, no. 1, (2024): 1-13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004214.2024.2315657>.

⁸²⁷ “Başbakan Erdoğan Kars’ta,” *GazeteKars*, January 8, 2011, <https://www.gazetekars.com/basbakan-erdogan-karsta-3228h.htm>.

⁸²⁸ Nicholas Birch, “Armenia and Turkey: As reconciliation process moves forward, Kars monument fuels controversy,” *Eurasianet*, October 16, 2009, <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-and-turkey-as-reconciliation-process-moves-forward-kars-monument-fuels-controversy>.

⁸²⁹ “Two vast and ugly blocks of stone,” *The Economist*, January 13, 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/17905911>.

being the first state to recognize Azerbaijan's independence and its exceptional role in establishing peace and stability in the region. These relations, officially defined as "strategic cooperation" in the National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan adopted on May 23, 2007, have exhibited a continuously developing and deepening multidimensional partnership.⁸³⁰

The essence of this strategic bond is formed by the shared ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritage that closely ties the two countries together. On this basis, Türkiye's key role in the implementation of transregional economic projects and its efforts, in complete alignment with Azerbaijan, to resolve the Armenia-Azerbaijan Karabakh issue clearly demonstrate that the cooperation between the two states is not only strategic but also comprehensive, high-quality, and continuously expanding.⁸³¹

However, in the 33 years since Azerbaijan regained its independence, the development that seriously damaged the relations between the two states has been the policy known as the "Armenian Opening," implemented by Türkiye in 2008. This policy, implemented by then-Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, had been shaped according to the doctrine of "zero problems with neighbors,"⁸³² detailed in his book *Strategic Depth*.⁸³³

The beginning of the process of normalization between Türkiye and Armenia, also known as the "Armenian Opening," actually dates back several years before this initiative. Wanting to improve its relations with Armenia, Türkiye invited Armenian President Robert Kocharian to the NATO Summit held in Istanbul on June 29, 2004. But Kocharian declined the invitation, citing that Turkish-Armenian relations had not

⁸³⁰ "Azərbaycan Respublikasının milli təhlükəsizlik konsepsiyasının təsdiq edilməsi haqqında Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin Sərəncamı," May 23, 2007, e-qanun.az, accessed September 11, 2024, <https://e-qanun.az/framework/13373>.

⁸³¹ "Azərbaycan Respublikasının milli təhlükəsizlik konsepsiyası."

⁸³² Mustafa Kibaroglu, "What went wrong with the 'zero problem with neighbors' doctrine?" *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 11, no. 3, (2012): 86.

⁸³³ Ali Askerov, "Turkey's 'zero problems with the neighbors' policy: Was it realistic?" *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 4, no. 2, (2017): 149-167, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347798917694746>.

normalized. According to the Armenian press, behind this rejection lay Russia's demand to maintain its influence in the South Caucasus.⁸³⁴

By 2007, Türkiye's desire to establish good relations with Armenia had begun to gain momentum. The restoration of the Akdamar Church on Lake Van by Türkiye and the commencement of flights between Yerevan and Antalya occurred as gestures of goodwill. In 2008, a new process was initiated to normalize relations. The first initiative of this year has been named "Cheese Diplomacy." The reason for this is the "Caucasian cheese" project initiated by cheese producers from Türkiye, Georgia, and Armenia who participated in a fair held in Kars, that has reignited discussions about opening the border between the two countries.⁸³⁵

The second initiative is called "Football Diplomacy" because the national football teams of the two countries, that were in the same group in the 2010 World Cup qualifiers, created an opportunity for normalizing relations while Armenian President Serj Sarkisyan invited Turkish President Gül to Armenia to watch the match on September 6, 2008, in Yerevan.⁸³⁶

The developments up to this date have disturbed Azerbaijan, but it had not necessitated a direct stance against Türkiye. The reason for this is that since Türkiye severed its relations with Armenia in 1993 following the occupation of Kalbajar, it has continued to present Karabakh as a precondition for normalizing bilateral relations. However, this situation was turned upside down with the events of 2009. First, after the meeting between the Turkish and Armenian Presidents in Davos in January 2009,⁸³⁷ the new U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Ankara on March 7, 2009, and met with then-President Abdullah Gül, then-Prime Minister

⁸³⁴ Selçuk Ural, and Güzin Çaykiran, "Robert Koçaryan dönemi Ermenistan dış politikası," *Kafkas Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 1, no. 8, (2011): 119.

⁸³⁵ "A Caucasian cheese circle: The secret diplomacy of cheesemaking," *The Economist*, May 2, 2008, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2008/05/22/a-caucasian-cheese-circle>.

⁸³⁶ Barış Özdal, "Türkiye-Ermenistan diyalogu: Uzun bir sürecin başlangıcı mı?" *Ortadoğu Analiz* 1, no. 10, (2009): 67-75.

⁸³⁷ Michael M. Gunter, "A century later: Towards Turkish-Armenian rapprochement?" *Armenian Studies* 31, (2015): 167.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and then-Foreign Minister Ali Babacan.⁸³⁸ Shortly after U.S. President Barack Obama visited Ankara and spoke at the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye on April 6, 2009,⁸³⁹ Türkiye and Armenia announced in a joint statement on April 22, 2009, that they had agreed on a “comprehensive framework” and a “roadmap” for normalizing relations with Swiss mediation.⁸⁴⁰

Although these developments began to disturb Azerbaijan, on May 13, 2009, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Baku with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. In a speech to the Azerbaijani parliament, Erdoğan stated clearly that it was impossible to open the Türkiye-Armenia border gates without the end of the occupation of Karabakh.⁸⁴¹

But the main reason behind Azerbaijan’s discomfort was the conspiracy it faced based on the intelligence it obtained. According to the intelligence received, shortly before Erdoğan’s visit to Baku, there would be a terrorist attack on the Sunni Mosque at the Baku Turkish Martyrs’ Memorial, that is dedicated to the Turkish soldiers martyred during World War I in Azerbaijan. And after this attack, public opinion in Türkiye would be directed towards anti-Azerbaijani sentiment, removing the obstacles to “normalization” with Armenia. Therefore, Azerbaijani authorities, who temporarily closed the mosque at the memorial site, also temporarily closed the mosque of the Türkiye Diyanet Foundation at Baku State University.⁸⁴² Despite all

⁸³⁸ Saban Kardas, “Turkish-American “strategic partnership”: On the way to rejuvenation?” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 6, no. 45, (2009), <https://jamestown.org/program/turkish-american-strategic-partnership-on-the-way-to-rejuvenation>.

⁸³⁹ Robert Tait, “Barack Obama woos Muslims from secular Turkey,” *The Guardian*, April 7, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/apr/07/barack-obama-turkey-islam>.

⁸⁴⁰ “No: 56, 22 April 2009, Joint Statement of The Ministries of Foreign Affairs of The Republic of Turkey, The Republic of Armenia and The Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs,” Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed March 19, 2024, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-56_-22-april-2009_-press-release-regarding-the-turkish-armenian-relations.en.mfa.

⁸⁴¹ Mina Muradova, “Azerbaijan: Turkish Prime Minister offers strong support for Baku’s position on Karabakh,” *Eurasianet*, May 13, 2009, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-turkish-prime-minister-offers-strong-support-for-bakus-position-on-karabakh>.

⁸⁴² “ADNA-dakı terror nələri dəyişdi?” *Müsavat*, June 23, 2009, https://musavat.com/news/olke/adna-daki-terror-neleri-deyishdi_55256.html.

the precautions, the attackers carried out a terrorist attack on the Azerbaijan State Oil Academy, resulting in the deaths of 12 people.⁸⁴³

After this, the full text of the protocols planned to be signed between Türkiye and Armenia on August 31, 2009, was made public for the first time. On October 10, 2009, an official signing ceremony for the protocols was held at the University of Zurich. The ceremony took place three hours late due to a last-minute disagreement over the content of the speeches by the Foreign Ministers, and ultimately, no speeches were made before the signatures were affixed.⁸⁴⁴

These protocols, although not ratified in the parliaments of either country, have brought Türkiye's relations with Azerbaijan to a level that could damage them. So much so that, with this "Armenian Opening," media organizations in Azerbaijan have begun to make statements criticizing Ankara for the first time.⁸⁴⁵ Although Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's speech in Baku in May largely reduced the disappointment in the Azerbaijani public, the signing of the protocols in October quickly revived the previously existing doubts among the Azerbaijani people.⁸⁴⁶

While these tensions were ongoing, a rematch between Türkiye and Armenia was planned to be played in Bursa as part of the 2010 World Cup qualifiers. Before the match, there were reports that the Armenian national team and the invited Armenian President Serj Sarkisyan would be protested by Turkish spectators and that Azerbaijani flags would be displayed in the stadium. In response, the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) made a decision to ban the entry of Azerbaijani flags into the stadium. In a note sent by FIFA to the Turkish Football Federation (TFF), it was stated that if Azerbaijani flags were allowed, the match

⁸⁴³ Madina Mammadova, "16 years have passed since the terrorist attack at ADNA," *EDnews*, April 30, 2025, <https://www.ednews.net/en/news/incident/681914-years-have-passed-since-the>.

⁸⁴⁴ David L. Phillips, *Diplomatic history: The Turkey-Armenia protocols*, (New York: Columbia University, 2012), 55-56.

⁸⁴⁵ Timuçin Kodaman, "Ermeni açılımı ve Türk dünyası," *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 2013, no. 30, (2013): 118.

⁸⁴⁶ Elhan Mehtiyev, "Turkish-Armenian protocols: An Azerbaijani perspective," *Insight Turkey* (2010): 43.

would be canceled. As a result, under the order of the TFF, on the match day, the Azerbaijani flags were collected from those who tried to bring them into the stadium. Meanwhile, the media coverage of some security personnel throwing the Azerbaijani flag into a trash can has caused a great uproar in Azerbaijan.⁸⁴⁷

As a retaliation against the flag ban and the signing of protocols with Armenia, on October 19, 2009, the Azerbaijani administration decided to lower the flags of Türkiye that were erected at the Turkish Martyrs' Cemetery in Baku in memory of the martyrs of the Islamic Army of Caucasus (IAC), that liberated Baku in 1918. This action was based on the newly enacted Flag Law by Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan Presidential official Ali Hasanov emphasized that under the new law, flags of any country, including Türkiye, cannot be flown except in "permitted places" such as embassies, consulates, and international organization offices.⁸⁴⁸

Türkiye did not remain indifferent to this situation. The then Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu expressed his sadness over the removal of Turkish flags during his visit to Baku on October 22, 2009. Davutoğlu stated that for Türkiye, the Azerbaijani flag carries the same meaning as the Turkish flag and that they do not consider the Azerbaijani flag as a foreign country's flag.⁸⁴⁹ Shortly after, the flags were raised again at the martyrdom site,⁸⁵⁰ and the Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations, having hit a historical low, has managed to reach their highest level to date. Despite the deep crisis in 2009, the tension in bilateral relations did not last long. With the new year, relations began to return to their old course, and important steps were taken for long-term development. The most important of these took place in the second half of 2010. On August 16, 2010, during Turkish President Abdullah Gül's visit to Azerbaijan, the *Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support* was signed

⁸⁴⁷ Kaan Gaytancıoğlu, "Son dönem Türkiye-Azerbaycan ilişkileri çerçevesinde yaşanan bayrak krizi'nin değerlendirilmesi," *Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Dergisi* 2, no. 1, (2010): 46.

⁸⁴⁸ "Türk bayrağının Şehidlər Xiyabanından götürülməsinə Bakıda etiraz edirlər," *BBC Azeri*, October 19, 2009, https://www.bbc.com/azeri/news/story/2009/10/091019_baku_protest.

⁸⁴⁹ "Azerbaijani flag is dear for Turkey & all Turkish people: Turkish FM," *Trend News Agency*, October 22, 2009, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/1564401.html>.

⁸⁵⁰ "Bayraqlar yerinə qaytarılıb." *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, October 28, 2009. <https://www.azadliq.org/a/1862673.html>.

between the parties for the first time in many years.⁸⁵¹ Although the importance of this agreement will be discussed in the next section, it should be noted. Three days after the signing of the agreement, then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev visited Yerevan and signed an agreement to extend the duration of the Russian military base in Armenia by 49 years.⁸⁵² The agreement was met with discontent in Azerbaijani society once again, as it could shift the balance of power in the South Caucasus in favor of Armenia. Another major event that advanced Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations also took place in the second half of 2010. *The Joint Declaration on the Establishment of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC) between Türkiye and Azerbaijan*, made by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev during the 10th and final Summit of Turkic Speaking States Heads of States held in Istanbul on September 15-16, 2010, was a significant step that increased cooperation between the two countries to a higher level.⁸⁵³

The HLSCC meetings, held eight times under the chairmanship of the Presidents from 2011 to 2020, have contributed to the deepening of relations in every field. In these meetings, dozens of agreements have been signed in areas such as trade, science, technology, industry, energy, defense, banking, visa applications, tourism, health, agriculture, infrastructure, transportation, development, education, communication, culture, and the environment.⁸⁵⁴

While the 1st of these meetings was held in İzmir on October 25, 2011,⁸⁵⁵ the 2nd was held in the city of Qabala, Azerbaijan on September 11, 2012.⁸⁵⁶ On November 13,

⁸⁵¹ Hasan Kanbolat, "Türkiye-Azerbaycan: Hukuksal temelde işbirliği," *Ortadoğu Araştırmaları Merkezi*, August 29, 2011, <https://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/turkiye-azerbaycan-hukuksal-temelde-isbirligi>.

⁸⁵² Cenap Çakmak, and M. Cüneyt Özşahin, "Explaining Russia's inertia in the Azerbaijan-Armenia dispute: Reward and punishment in an asymmetric alliance," *Europe-Asia Studies* 75, no. 6, (2023): 978, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2023.2191903>.

⁸⁵³ Hasan Kanbolat, "Türkiye-Azerbaycan Yüksek Düzeyli Stratejik İşbirliği Konseyi," *Ortadoğu Araştırmaları Merkezi*, October 24, 2011, <https://demo3.orsam.org.tr/yayinlar/turkiye-azerbaycan-yuksek-duzeyli-stratejik-isbirligi-konseyi>.

⁸⁵⁴ Ulviyye Aydın, "Türkiye-Azerbaycan ilişkilerinin son on yılı (2006-2016): Kardeşlikten stratejik işbirliğine uzanan yol," *Avrasya Uluslararası Araştırmalar Dergisi* 6, no. 13, (2018): 41, <https://doi.org/10.33692/avasyad.509957>.

⁸⁵⁵ Kanbolat, "Türkiye-Azerbaycan Yüksek Düzeyli Stratejik İşbirliği Konseyi."

2013, in Ankara, the 3rd HLSCC evaluated bilateral relations in all aspects. As a result of the meeting, a total of six agreements were signed in various fields, ranging from scientific and technological cooperation to transportation, security, employment, and social security.⁸⁵⁷

During the 4th HLSCC held in Ankara on January 15, 2015, projects such as TANAP, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway, and similar initiatives were predominantly discussed. President Ilham Aliyev was received with a grand welcome ceremony,⁸⁵⁸ and the significance of the reception was further enhanced by a 21-gun salute and a ceremonial unit featuring the flags of 16 major Turkic states, where Aliyev's walk added to the occasion's meaning.⁸⁵⁹

The 5th HLSCC meeting, planned to be held in Baku in 2016, was canceled twice because the Azerbaijani visit plans of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, announced to the public, for February 18, 2016, and March 15, 2016, had to be canceled following the terrorist attacks carried out in Ankara on February 17, 2016, and March 13, 2016. On March 14, 2016, after the decision to cancel the visit scheduled for March 15, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev stated that he wanted to come to Ankara,⁸⁶⁰ and the 5th HLSCC meeting was held in Ankara during those days when an atmosphere of fear was being instilled in Türkiye.⁸⁶¹

⁸⁵⁶ "Gebele, Erdoğan'ı misafir etmenin heyecanını yaşıyor," *İlgazetesi*, September 10, 2012, <https://www.igazetesi.com.tr/gebele-erdogan-misafir-etmenin-heyecanini-yasiyor-171080h.htm>.

⁸⁵⁷ "The third meeting of Turkey-Azerbaijan High Level Strategic Council was held in Ankara," Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed March 27, 2024, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-third-meeting-of-turkey-azerbaijan-high-level-strategic-council-was-held-in-ankara.en.mfa>.

⁸⁵⁸ "Azerbaycan ile askerî, siyasi, ticari, kültürel ve eğitim alanlarındaki ilişkilerimizi daha ileri taşıyacağız." Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı, accessed March 27, 2024, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/2710/azerbaycan-ile-asker-siyasi-ticari-kulturel-ve-egitim-alanlarindaki-iliskilerimizi-daha-ileri-tasiyacagiz>.

⁸⁵⁹ Alizade, Mayis, "Turkish, Azerbaijani presidents start one-on-one meeting in Ankara," *Apa.az*, January 15, 2015, <https://en.apa.az/foreign-policy/xeber-turkish-azerbaijani-presidents-start-on-221720>.

⁸⁶⁰ Araz Aslanlı, "Türkiye-Azerbaycan ekonomik ilişkileri," *Yönetim ve Ekonomi Dergisi* 25, no. 1, (2018): 21, <https://doi.org/10.18657/yonveek.396170>.

⁸⁶¹ İlkey Güder, "Aliyev tarihi zirve için Türkiye'de," *Anadolu Agency*, March 15, 2016, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/aliyev-tarihi-zirve-icin-turkiyede/537522>.

On October 30-31, 2017, various agreements were signed at the 6th HLSCC meeting held in Azerbaijan to further strengthen bilateral relations. This meeting held special significance as it coincided with the 25th anniversary of the establishment of relations. Furthermore, the three leaders, along with Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili, attended the ceremony for the launch of train services on the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway route.⁸⁶²

Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev made his first official foreign visit after the presidential elections held on April 11, 2018, to attend the 7th HLSCC in Türkiye on April 24-25, 2018.⁸⁶³ The 8th and final HLSCC meeting took place on February 25, 2020, at the Zagulba Palace in Baku, with the main topic of the meeting being Nakhchivan and the transportation routes and trade that would occur through it.⁸⁶⁴

During the 44-Day War that took place at the end of 2020, Türkiye provided Azerbaijan with all kinds of diplomatic support against both major powers and Armenia. After the victory, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who attended the military parade, saluted the military units alongside his counterpart.⁸⁶⁵

However, a poem delivered in Azerbaijani Turkish by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during this military parade was perceived by Iran as an attempt to interfere with its territorial integrity and incite separatism, leading to diplomatic tension between the two countries. The verses of poem point to Aras River and

⁸⁶² “Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu accompanied President Erdoğan during his visit to Azerbaijan, 30-31 October 2017,” Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed March 29, 2024, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-mevlut-cavusoglunun-sayin-cumhurbaskanimiza-refakatle-azerbaycani-ziyareti_en.en.mfa.

⁸⁶³ “Dış Politika Kronolojisi 2018,” Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı, accessed April 2, 2024, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/nisan2018.tr.mfa>.

⁸⁶⁴ “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: ‘Dört bir yanımız çatışma, terör ve asayiş sorunlarıyla boğuşurken, Türkiye ve Azerbaycan birer istikrar abidesi olarak yükseliyor,’” Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı İletişim Başkanlığı, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-dort-bir-yanimiz-catisma-teror-ve-asayis-sorunlariyla-bogusurken-turkiye-ve-azerbaycan-birer-istikrar-abidesi-olarak-yukseliyor>.

⁸⁶⁵ Bagirova, and Gumrukcu, “Turkey’s Erdogan, at Nagorno-Karabakh parade.”

complains of the distance between Azerbaijani Turks on the two sides of the river. The poem includes the lines:⁸⁶⁶

*They divided the Aras,
They filled it with sand,
I would not part with you,
They broke us up by force.*

*O Lachin, dear Lachin,
I sacrifice myself for you, Lachin.*

Iran summoned Türkiye's ambassador to Tehran and demanded an explanation, stating that the poem is one of the separatist symbols of Pan-Turkism and refers to the division of Azerbaijani territories between Russia and Iran in the 19th century. The incident has raised concerns that Iran could ignite separatism among its ethnic Turkish minority, with the Iranian Foreign Ministry saying, "*the era of territorial claims and expansionist empires is over.*"⁸⁶⁷

Another significant development in bilateral relations also occurred around this time. Following Azerbaijan's victory in the Karabakh War, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan proposed the establishment of a "six-nation platform" to foster closer cooperation among the six countries in the region. In a statement after the Victory Parade in Baku, Erdoğan announced that he had discussed this "six-nation platform" with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. Erdoğan's initiative was later transformed from the "six-party platform" to the "3+3" (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia + Türkiye, Russia, Iran) format.⁸⁶⁸

Exactly one year after Erdoğan's statement, on December 10, 2021, the first working meeting of the "3+3" was held in Moscow at the level of Deputy Foreign Ministers. While Georgia did not attend the meeting, the host country, Russia, included the

⁸⁶⁶ "Iran protests to Turkey over 'meddling' poem recited by Erdogan." *AlJazeera*, December 11, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/11/iran-protests-to-turkey-over-meddling-poem-recited-by-erdogan>.

⁸⁶⁷ "Iran protests to Turkey." *AlJazeera*.

⁸⁶⁸ "Iran supports Turkey's 3+3 mechanism for South Caucasus: Envoy," *Daily Sabah*, November 23, 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/iran-supports-turkeys-33-mechanism-for-south-caucasus-envoy>.

Georgian flag in the meeting, indicating its openness to the participation of this state. The next meeting was planned to be held in Türkiye in February 2022. However, the meetings planned under this format were postponed after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.⁸⁶⁹

Therefore, the second meeting was held a year later, on October 23, 2023, in Tehran, with the participation of the foreign ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Russia, and Türkiye. This meeting took place in a *de facto* "2+3" format due to the absence of Georgia, the third South Caucasian country, that has refused to participate in the process since it has been occupied by Russia since 2008. At that time, Türkiye and Iran made statements indicating that they preferred this interaction format with the South Caucasian countries due to the exclusion of external players. Similar views were also expressed by some Azerbaijani officials.⁸⁷⁰

The third meeting of the 3+3 South Caucasus Regional Cooperation Platform took place in Istanbul on October 18, 2024. At this important meeting, the significance of reestablishing the platform in view of the current complex developments threatening regional and international peace and stability was emphasized, recalling the previous meetings in Moscow and Tehran. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to the principles of the United Nations Charter, that form the basis of good neighborly relations, such as the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with mutual interests, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and international law.⁸⁷¹

After the Victory in Karabakh, another turning point in Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations was the Shusha Declaration. The Presidents of Türkiye and Azerbaijan signed "*the Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations between the Republic of Türkiye and the*

⁸⁶⁹ Eka Javakhishvili, "The '3+3' Platform for regional cooperation: Conflicting foreign policy preferences," *Caucasus Analytical Digest* 128 (2022): 3, <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000558266>.

⁸⁷⁰ "In the absence of Georgia, the 3 + 3 meeting in Tehran was again incomplete," *Commonspace.eu*, October 24, 2023, <https://www.commonspace.eu/news/absence-georgia-3-3-meeting-tehran-was-again-incomplete>.

⁸⁷¹ "The third meeting of the '3+3' Regional Cooperation Platform Joint Communiqué, 18 October 2024," Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed April 8, 2024, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-third-meeting-of-the-3-3-regional-cooperation-platform-joint-communique-18-october-2024.en.mfa>.

Republic of Azerbaijan” (a.k.a. the Shusha Declaration) in the newly liberated Karabakh’s cultural capital, Shusha, on June 15, 2021.⁸⁷² The significance of the Shusha Declaration was not only due to the place where it was signed. At the same time, this declaration emphasized the commitment to all international documents signed between the two friendly and brotherly countries, and especially to the Kars Agreement dated October 13, 1921.⁸⁷³

This treaty, which is still binding today, was signed between the three Sovietized South Caucasian republics and the Ankara Government at that time, and it determined the modern borders of these four states. In addition, this agreement also clarified the status of Azerbaijan’s Nakhchivan exclave.⁸⁷⁴ However, the most important point of the Shusha Declaration was that it elevated the relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan to a new level. With this document, this deep-rooted bond, that began as *friendship* in 1994, transformed into *strategic cooperation* in 1997, and became a *strategic partnership* in 2010, was elevated to the level of an *alliance*.⁸⁷⁵

Another reflection of the Shusha Declaration in bilateral relations has been that both states have taken on a locomotive role in the integration of the Turkic World. Shortly after the Shusha Declaration, the institution formerly known as the Turkic Council, that advocated for the cooperation of Turkic states with Gaspirali’s motto “*Unity in language, thought, and action!*”, changed its name to the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) during a summit held in Istanbul on November 12, 2021, under the leadership of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.⁸⁷⁶

⁸⁷² “Shusha Declaration is pinnacle of Türkiye, Azerbaijan ties: PM,” *Daily Sabah*, November 06, 2022, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/shusha-declaration-is-pinnacle-of-turkiye-azerbaijan-ties-pm>.

⁸⁷³ “Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey,” President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, accessed April 13, 2024, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/52122>.

⁸⁷⁴ Aleksandr Tsoi, “The role of Atatürk and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in the Treaties of Moscow and Kars,” *Eurasian Journal of Higher Education* 1 (2020): 37, <https://doi.org/10.31039/ejohe.2020.1.28>.

⁸⁷⁵ Metin Çelik, and Kenan Aslanlı, “Geopolitical analysis of the Shusha Declaration: Constructing theoretical framework in the regional order context,” *Bilig* 111 (2024): 66, <https://doi.org/10.12995/bilig.11103>.

⁸⁷⁶ Murodjon Mustofaev, “The organization of Turkic States: A new approach to global and regional challenges,” *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 27, no. 1, (2022): 107.

As mentioned in a previous chapter, the OTS, which emerged with the unifying power of Turkic identity and the ideal of a Turkic World extending “from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China”, promising significant gains in geopolitical, economic, energy, defense, and cultural fields, was established in 2009 in Nakhchivan with Azerbaijan’s active role.⁸⁷⁷

The relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, that made significant progress without any setbacks in the 2010s, reached a level where a crisis would no longer occur by the 2020s especially after Türkiye’s support during the 44-Day War and the events that followed. In these fifteen years after 2010, many events have occurred that demonstrate the development of the relations between the two states. Among these, there is also Azerbaijan’s support for Türkiye’s fight against the Gulenist secret cult (officially the Fethullah Terror Organization [FETÖ]). Against this organization, which the Turkish state accuses of attempting to overthrow its government twice, the Azerbaijani state has officially ended the educational activities of high schools⁸⁷⁸ and the Qafqaz University affiliated with this organization in Azerbaijan.⁸⁷⁹

However, despite Baku was warned by Russia due to its special relationship with Ankara,⁸⁸⁰ after the downing of the Russian jet that violated Turkish airspace on November 24, 2015, President Aliyev made mediation efforts between Turkish President Erdoğan and Russian President Putin.⁸⁸¹ In addition, another indication of the advanced relations was Azerbaijan’s lifting of visa requirements for Turkish

⁸⁷⁷ Can Demir, “The Organization of Turkic States: Implications for the regional balance of power,” *Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi* Spec. Issu (2022): 65, <https://doi.org/0.17752/guvenlikstrj.1104776>.

⁸⁷⁸ “Təhsil İdarəsi bağlanan türk liseyləri ilə bağlı açıqlama verib,” *Oxu.az*, July 30, 2014, <https://oxu.az/cemiyyet/tehsil-idaresi-baglanan-turk-liseyleri-ile-bagli-aciqlama-verib>.

⁸⁷⁹ “Azerbaijan suspends FETÖ-linked university,” *Daily Sabah*, January 18, 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/01/18/azerbaijan-suspends-feto-linked-university>.

⁸⁸⁰ Emre Erşen, “Evaluating the fighter jet crisis in Turkish-Russian relations,” *Insight Turkey* 19, no. 4, (2017): 94, <https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2017194.06>.

⁸⁸¹ “Azerbaijan mediation efforts in Eastern Europe and the Middle East,” *Eureporter*, December 25, 2024, <https://www.eureporter.co/world/azerbaijan-world/2024/12/25/azerbaijan-mediation-efforts-in-eastern-europe-and-the-middle-east>.

citizens in July 2019⁸⁸² and the commencement of reciprocal visits using chip-enabled identity cards from April 2021 onwards.⁸⁸³

Türkiye and Azerbaijan's e-government systems integration in 2022 has been a significant factor in enhancing bilateral relations by forging a digital bridge. This collaboration, realized by the principle of "one e-government," not only simplified access to public services by connecting Türkiye's e-Devlet Portal with Azerbaijan's ASAN system, but also boosted interaction between the citizens and business communities of both nations.⁸⁸⁴

Alongside all these developments, in addition to the fact that no serious issues have arisen between the two states since 2010, there are two fundamental factors that shape the course of relations with Azerbaijan from the perspective of the Turkish public opinion: Cyprus and Israel. These two issues, while being topics of discussion in the relations between the two states from the very beginning, have become more serious matters of conversation, especially in the 2020s. At the same time, these issues have been heavily utilized by anti-Azerbaijani groups in Türkiye.

The general criticism of the Turkish public regarding the Cyprus issue was Azerbaijan's failure to recognize the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in parallel with Türkiye's foreign policy. However, Azerbaijan, being the first country to have direct flights to the TRNC after Türkiye in 2005,⁸⁸⁵ preferred to pursue a balanced policy on this issue due to its own sensitive matters such as its

⁸⁸² Azerbaijan Cumhurbaşkanı'ndan muhteşem karar: 'Vize kaldırıldı,'" Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı İletişim Başkanlığı, July 26, 2019, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/dis-basinda-turkiye/detay/azerbaycan-cumhurbaskanindan-muhtesem-karar-vize-kaldirildi>.

⁸⁸³ "Azerbaycan'a kimlikle seyahat 1 Nisan'da başlıyor," Türkiye Cumhuriyeti İçişleri Bakanlığı Nüfus ve Vatandaşlık İşleri Genel Müdürlüğü, March 18, 2021, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://nvi.gov.tr/bolu/azerbaycana-kimlikle-seyahat-1-nisanda-basliyor>.

⁸⁸⁴ "Türkiye-Azerbaycan e-devlet sistemleri entegrasyonu için ilk adım atıldı," Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Dijital Dönüşüm Ofisi, September 1, 2022, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://cbddo.gov.tr/haberler/6467/turkiye-azerbaycan-e-devlet-sistemleri-entegrasyonu-icin-ilk-adim-atildi>.

⁸⁸⁵ Daria Isachenko, *The Making of Informal States: Statebuilding in Northern Cyprus and Transdnistria*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 164.

position in the international arena and the Karabakh issue. Especially in the case of recognizing the TRNC, there was a hesitation among Western countries, particularly Greece, to recognize the occupying structure in Karabakh.⁸⁸⁶

After the 44-Day War in 2020, Azerbaijan's stance towards recognizing the TRNC began to become increasingly evident. This support was further solidified by concrete steps such as Azerbaijan's role in TRNC gaining observer status in the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) and the invitation extended to TRNC President Ersin Tatar to the informal summit in Shusha.⁸⁸⁷ However, it does not seem possible for Azerbaijan to fully recognize the TRNC until a peace agreement is signed with Armenia. Another significant focus of criticism towards Azerbaijan in the Turkish public opinion was its relations with Israel. Especially the closeness with Israel formed by issues such as the Karabakh problem, balancing Iran,⁸⁸⁸ and arms supply fed the basis of these criticisms. Especially, the weapons and technologies provided by Israel to Azerbaijan, particularly the Harop "suicide" drones, had proven their worth in the 44-Day War.⁸⁸⁹ However, after October 7, 2024, with the resurgence of the Israel-Palestine conflict, Azerbaijan's oil exports to the international market and subsequently to Israel through Türkiye, led to Azerbaijan being targeted again by certain groups with anti-Azerbaijani sentiment in Türkiye, particularly those who close to Iran.⁸⁹⁰

Despite these criticisms, it should not be overlooked that Azerbaijan has taken on an important mediating role in Türkiye-Israel relations. Azerbaijan, due to its good relations with both countries, serves as a bridge in reducing regional tensions and

⁸⁸⁶ Rufat Abbasov, "Azerbaijan embraces Northern Cyprus," *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, July 28, 2005, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/azerbaijan-embraces-northern-cyprus>.

⁸⁸⁷ "Aliyev voices support for Turkish Cyprus' recognition at global forum," *Türkiye Today*, April 9, 2025, <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/region/aliyev-voices-support-for-turkish-cyprus-recognition-at-global-forum-142453>.

⁸⁸⁸ Oğuzhan Göksel, "Beyond countering Iran: A political economy of Azerbaijan-Israel relations," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 4, (2015): 655-656, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2015.1048973>.

⁸⁸⁹ Idan, and Shaffer, "Israel's role," 199.

⁸⁹⁰ Elchin Alioghlu, "Who stands behind provocation against Azerbaijan's SOCAR in Türkiye?," *Trend News Agency*, June 3, 2024, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3907584.html>.

maintaining diplomatic dialogue. This situation highlights Azerbaijan's versatility in foreign policy and its potential to contribute to regional stability.

8.4. Security

It is possible to trace the security cooperation between Azerbaijan and Türkiye back even 100 years. As detailed in a previous chapter, the most primary example of modern military cooperation with Türkiye occurred at the end of WWI. The Islamic Army of Caucasus (IAC), composed of Anatolian and Azerbaijani soldiers under the command of Türk Nuri Pasha, liberating Baku in 1918, became a cornerstone of cooperation between the two states.⁸⁹¹

However, to understand the security perspective of the recent relations, which is the subject of this study, it is necessary to know the steps of cooperation that began in the post-1991 re-independence process. The first of these steps are the military agreements made between Azerbaijan and Türkiye. Firstly, on August 11, 1992, during the Elchibey period, preliminary activities such as military training and logistical support were initiated under the "Military Training Cooperation Agreement" signed with Türkiye, with personnel assigned by the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) for the re-establishment and training of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces (AAF). In parallel with these steps taken in Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani students were sent to the TAF's military academies for training. With the contributions of the joint military training, cooperation, and coordination activities carried out with Türkiye for over thirty years, the AAF has today become a self-sufficient, strong force and a modern army in the region.⁸⁹²

Another agreement is a protocol signed in 1996 between the two states, aimed at cooperation in armed forces delegation activities. In addition to this protocol, a declaration aimed at enhancing strategic cooperation was also adopted in 1997. The declaration included provisions regulating flight operations in a bilateral 10-

⁸⁹¹ Bulent Gokay, "The battle for Baku (May-September 1918): A peculiar episode in the history of the caucasus." *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 1, (1998): 44-45.

⁸⁹² Ahmet Yüce "The Caucasus and the World," *International Scientific Journal* 21, (2016): 56.

kilometer zone along the Azerbaijan border. Thus, there were increases in the level of operational coordination and mutual trust between the two states.⁸⁹³

By September 1999, a peacekeeping unit from the AAF was deployed for the first time to participate in international peacekeeping operations in Kosovo as part of NATO-led peacekeeping efforts, within the Turkish Battalion. The 34-member unit, which ensured the security of the city of Dragos in Kosovo, operated until Kosovo declared its independence in April 2008. This participation provided Azerbaijan with its first practical test for the AAF and allowed it to join a multinational operation that increased its visibility through its partnership with Türkiye.⁸⁹⁴

As a result of these rapprochements, it has been claimed that 75 percent of the high-ranking generals and officers in the AAF, numbering around 4000, were trained in Türkiye during the period leading up to the start of the 44-Day War for the liberation of Karabakh.⁸⁹⁵ Furthermore, according to another claim, since the official start of the training programs in 1991, more than 7500 Azerbaijani citizens have received military training at various levels in Türkiye. The number of graduates from military schools is 600, and the number of those who have received staff training and diplomas from military academies is close to 200. The number of Azerbaijani military students currently receiving education in Türkiye has also approached 350.⁸⁹⁶

In this regard, the “Turkish military school,” which has shown long-term development in Azerbaijan’s defense and security system, has emerged as a balancing element against the “Russian military school” that dates back to the Soviet

⁸⁹³ Mehmet Fatih Öztarsu, “Military relations of Turkey and Azerbaijan,” *Strategic Outlook* 1, no. 2, (2011): 70-85.

⁸⁹⁴ Azizaga Tofiq oglu, Gani-zade, “Azerbaijan-NATO relations 1991–2003.” *Научовий Журнал «Політикус»* 94, no. 479.24, (2020): 11, <https://doi.org/10.24195/2414-9616.2020-4.1>.

⁸⁹⁵ Mayis Alizade, “FETÖ’nün hedefindeki komutanlar Azerbaycan ordusunu nasıl kurmuştu,” *Oda TV*, October 8, 2020, <https://www.odatv.com/analiz/fetonun-hedefindeki-komutanlar-azerbaycan-ordusunu-nasil-kurmustu-193292>.

⁸⁹⁶ Sedat Ergin, “Azerbaycan 1990’ların başında neden kaybetti, 2020’de neden kazandı?” *Hürriyet*, November 12, 2020, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sedat-ergin/azerbaycan-1990larin-basinda-neden-kaybetti-2020de-neden-kazandi-41660506>.

period. It is believed that Azerbaijani General Polad Hashimov, Colonel Ilgar Mirzayev, Colonel Anar Novruzov, and Colonel Ilgar Mirzayev, who were martyred in the July 2020 attack by Armenian armed forces on the Tovuz district, had represented the “Turkish school” as officers who were trained in Türkiye. In fact, during the 44-Day War, the “Turkish school” is believed to have provided an advantage, positively contributing to the outcome of the war and strengthening Türkiye’s position within the Azerbaijani military system.⁸⁹⁷

Among the agreements made, perhaps the most important was the “Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support” signed on August 16, 2010. And shortly after this agreement, on 15 September 2010, bilateral ties were raised to a “strategic level” following the initiation of the Türkiye-Azerbaijan High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC).⁸⁹⁸

As for this agreement, it can be said the following. After the crises between the two countries in 2009, this agreement, which elevated bilateral relations to a higher level, brought Türkiye and Azerbaijan under a common umbrella in military terms as well. While the first nine articles of this comprehensive agreement, consisting of 23 articles, are directly dedicated to military and defense cooperation, the foundation of this section is Article 2. This article clearly states that if one of the parties is subjected to armed attack or military aggression by a third state or states, this attack will be considered as an attack on the other party as well, and that all necessary assistance, including military capabilities, will be provided to implement the right to self-defense in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter.⁸⁹⁹

In addition, according to Article 9 of this agreement, the following measures are planned to be taken within the framework of defense cooperation between the

⁸⁹⁷ Levon Hovsepyan, and Artyom A. Tonoyan, “From alliance to ‘soft conquest’: The anatomy of the Turkish-Azerbaijani military alliance before and after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 35, no. 4, (2024): 634, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2024.2312957>.

⁸⁹⁸ Mitat Çelikpala, “Toward a bright or bleak future in the South Caucasus,” *GeoPolitics*, May 4, 2024, <https://politicsgeo.com/article/61>.

⁸⁹⁹ “Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti arasında Stratejik Ortaklık ve Karşılıklı Yardım Anlaşması.” (May 28, 2011). *1. Mükerrer Resmi Gazete (Sayı: 27947)*, <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2011/05/20110528M1-30-1.pdf>.

parties: provision of defense-related products for defense purposes; design and production of defense-related products; conduct of joint military exercises; provision of logistical support to the armed forces.⁹⁰⁰

As a result of these measures, in addition to the establishment of defense industry cooperation and joint law enforcement forces, joint military exercises have been conducted uninterruptedly between the two states over the past fifteen years. With the participation of Georgia, many joint military exercises, which have turned into trilateral exercises in some years, include the following: Anatolian Phoenix, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, TurAz Eagle 2019, Haydar Aliyev, Erciyes 2019, EFES, Winter Training, Anatolian Star, and Unshakable Brotherhood.⁹⁰¹

Moreover, the Organization of the Eurasian Law Enforcement Agencies with Military Status (TAKM) was established on January 25, 2013, in Baku, under the leadership of Türkiye and Azerbaijan, with the participation of Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia.⁹⁰² This extensive cooperation demonstrates the depth and continuity of the military aspect of the strategic partnership between the two countries. Another significant outcome of the agreement in 2010 was Türkiye starting to supply various weapons and military equipment to meet Azerbaijan's military-technical needs. Some of these advanced technology weapons and equipment include: OMTAS (Medium Range Anti-Tank Missile System) and UMTAS (Long Range Anti-Tank Missile System) anti-tank weapons,⁹⁰³ SOM-B1 guided missiles,⁹⁰⁴ T-155 Fırtına

⁹⁰⁰ "Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations: Ideological ties or strategic relations?" *Trends Research & Advisory*, June 1, 2025, <https://trendsresearch.org/insight/turkiye-azerbaijan-relations-ideological-ties-or-strategic-relations>.

⁹⁰¹ "Turkish-Azerbaijani military cooperation." USC Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies, accessed December 30, 2024, <https://dornsife.usc.edu/armenian/turkish-azerbaijani-military-cooperation>.

⁹⁰² "Internal Troops within the framework of international relations," Republic of Azerbaijan Internal Troops of Ministry of Internal Affairs, accessed January 1, 2025, <https://dq.mia.gov.az/?limited/en/menu/16>.

⁹⁰³ "Azerbaijan to purchase Turkish-made Roketsan UMTAS and OMTAS anti-tank missiles 1502143," *Army Recognition*, February 15, 2014, <https://armyrecognition.com/archives/archives-land-defense/land-defense-2014/azerbaijan-15-february-2014-news-uk>.

⁹⁰⁴ "Azerbaijan acquired Turkish SOM air-launched cruise-missiles," *European Security & Defence*, December 16, 2019, <https://euro-sd.com/2019/12/news/15586/azerbaijan-acquired-turkish-som-air-launched-cruise-missiles>.

howitzers,⁹⁰⁵ T-300 Kasirga,⁹⁰⁶ T-122 Sakarya, and TRLG-230 Multiple Rocket Launcher System (MLRS).⁹⁰⁷ And, the Bayraktar TB2 UAVs, which garnered a lot of attention during the 44-Day War, were also acquired during this process.⁹⁰⁸ Thus, Azerbaijan moved Türkiye to second place after the US by purchasing \$202 million worth of weapons and defense industry products in 2021 alone.⁹⁰⁹

The training, exercises, and weaponry shared with Azerbaijan by Türkiye have been the main reason for Azerbaijan's successful outcome in the 44-Day War. In addition to this long-term support, Türkiye provided military-based diplomatic support to Azerbaijan during the 2020 war. During the most intense times of the war, world media reported that there were at least two F-16 jets belonging to the Turkish Air Force at Azerbaijan's Ganja Airport.⁹¹⁰

Some commentators claimed that Türkiye had stationed these jets to deter Armenia.⁹¹¹ In fact, a spokesperson for the Armenian Ministry of Defense claimed that one of these jets shot down an Armenian Su-25 jet. This claim, which later turned out to be false, was strongly rejected by Turkish and Azerbaijani officials.⁹¹²

⁹⁰⁵ "Turkey to start delivery T-155 Firtina 155mm self-propelled howitzer to Azerbaijan 2014 0201144," *Army Recognition*, January 2, 2014, <https://armyrecognition.com/archives/archives-land-defense/land-defense-2014/azerbaiajan-2-january-2014-news-uk>.

⁹⁰⁶ Rashid Shirinov, "Turkey supplies T-300 Kasirga rocket system to Azerbaijan," *Azernews*, September 21, 2016, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/102564.html>.

⁹⁰⁷ "Azerbaijani Army Deploys Advanced ROKETSAN TRLG-230 Missile System on KAMAZ Trucks," *Military Leak*, October 23, 2023, <https://militaryleak.com/2023/10/23/azerbaijani-army-deploys-advanced-roketsan-trlg-230-missile-system-on-kamaz-trucks>.

⁹⁰⁸ Burak Ege Bekdil, "Azerbaijan to buy armed drones from Turkey," *Defence News*, June 25, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/unmanned/2020/06/25/azerbaijan-to-buy-armed-drones-from-turkey>.

⁹⁰⁹ Cavid Veliyev, "Türkiye-Azerbaycan diplomatik ilişkilerinin 30 yılının özeti," *Kriter* 6, no. 64, (2022): x-x.

⁹¹⁰ Mansij Asthana, "Satellite images bust Turkish assertions; reveals presence of F-16 jets in Azerbaijan," *The Eurasian Times*, October 8, 2020, <https://www.eurasiantimes.com/satellite-image-reveals-presence-of-turkish-f-16s-syrian-mercenaries-in-azerbaijan>.

⁹¹¹ "Turkish F-16s kept in Azerbaijan as 'deterrent' against Armenia," *Middle East Monitor*, October 8, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20201008-turkish-f-16s-kept-in-azerbaijan-as-deterrent-against-armenia>.

⁹¹² Joseph Trevithick, "Satellite images confirm Turkish F-16 fighters secretly deployed to Azerbaijan," *TWZ*, October 7, 2020, <https://www.twz.com/36955/satellite-images-confirm-turkish-f-16-fighters-secretly-deployed-to-azerbaijan>.

Officials from both countries stated that these aircraft were brought for the TurAz Qartalı-2020 military exercise in July 2020⁹¹³ and would remain in Azerbaijan for a while longer since they were not taken back immediately. Near the end of the war, President Ilham Aliyev stated that these jets could be used in the event of external aggression against Azerbaijan.⁹¹⁴

After this statement, all eyes were turned to Iran. Because a similar incident had occurred in Azerbaijan about 20 years before these events. On July 24, 2001, an Iranian gunboat, moving with two research vessels, violated Azerbaijani territorial waters. In this crisis, which occurred during a period when Azerbaijan was just beginning to stabilize, Azerbaijani officials issued a note to Iran, and the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson said this: “We are deeply astonished with the Azerbaijani hue and cry against measures taken by Iran to defend its legitimate rights.”⁹¹⁵

Shortly after this incident, Türkiye issued a note to Iran. Then, the Turkish Stars (*Türk Yıldızları*), which perform demonstration flights under the Turkish Air Force, were seen in the skies over Baku.⁹¹⁶ Shortly after this incident, too, on August 17, 2001, according to a statement from the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), it was reported that “some misunderstandings” were resolved during a phone conversation between then-Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi and then-Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Vilayat Guliyev.⁹¹⁷

⁹¹³ Boyko Nikolov, “Turkey has deployed F-16 fighter jets to Azerbaijan,” *Bulgarian Military*, June 31, 2020, <https://bulgarianmilitary.com/2020/07/31/turkey-has-deployed-f-16-fighter-jets-to-azerbaijan>.

⁹¹⁴ “Turkish F-16 may be used in case of external aggression against Azerbaijan — Aliyev,” TASS Russian News Agency, October 26, 2020, <https://tass.com/world/1216505>.

⁹¹⁵ Michael Lelyveld, “Caspian: Tempers flare in Iran-Azerbaijan border incident,” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, July 25, 2001, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1097012.html>.

⁹¹⁶ Araz Aslanlı, “10. yılında Azerbaycan-Türkiye Stratejik Ortaklık Anlaşması ve ortak askeri tatbikatlar,” *Oda TV*, October 8, 2020, <https://www.odatv.com/analiz/fetonun-hedefindeki-komutanlar-azerbaycan-ordusunu-nasil-kurmustu-193292>.

⁹¹⁷ Michael Lelyveld, “Iran: Hurdles remain in improving ties with Azerbaijan,” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, August 21, 2001, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1097192.html>.

In summary, Türkiye's protection of Azerbaijan against Iran, as it had done previously, was perhaps the lesser-known but highly significant military-based diplomatic support during the 44-Day War in 2020. With this support, the Azerbaijani army liberated its occupied territories, focusing on Karabakh, without encountering any Iranian military intervention to maintain the status quo.⁹¹⁸

Despite the successful operations carried out by the AAF within 44 days, the prevailing view on the Armenian side was that the war was lost due to Türkiye's military intervention. Since Türkiye's direct military intervention could not be proven, it was claimed that Azerbaijan brought mercenaries from Syria to the front lines from the late stages of the war.⁹¹⁹ The resurgence of these claims on the Armenian side began again after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's remarks towards Israel. While President Erdoğan said about Israel, "We can do what we did in Karabakh and Libya,"⁹²⁰ the idea of a Turkish military intervention in Karabakh was supported under the impression that this statement was a threat of military intervention. Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, referring to the small number of Armenian armed forces, stated, "*We have 100,000 soldiers who can be tripled in a few days. These claims are 'fake news' aimed at damaging our country's image.*"⁹²¹

As a result, Azerbaijan emerged victorious from the 44-Day War thanks to Türkiye's indirect diplomatic and military support. And, as detailed in another chapter, Azerbaijan held a victory parade on December 10, 2020, with the participation of 3,000 personnel. In the parade, where Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was the guest of honor, part of the military trophies seized by AFF was also featured.⁹²²

⁹¹⁸ Mirmehdi M. Aghazada, "Azerbaijani-Iranian relations after the Second Karabakh War: Features and trends." *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations* 23, no. 4, (2023): 722.

⁹¹⁹ Karine Ghazaryan, "Turkish-backed mercenaries from Syria are geolocated at the Azerbaijani Horadiz military base," *Media.am*, October 3, 2020, <https://media.am/en/verified/2020/10/03/24452>.

⁹²⁰ "Erdoğan to Israel: We can do what we did in Karabakh, Libya," *Daily Sabah*, July 29, 2024, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/erdogan-to-israel-we-can-do-what-we-did-in-karabakh-libya/news>.

⁹²¹ "Chronicles of Victory: President Ilham Aliyev gave interview to US Fox News TV channel," *Trend News Agency*, October 25, 2024, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3961145.html>.

⁹²² "A Victory parade dedicated to Victory in the Patriotic War was held at the Azadlig Square, Baku," President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, December 10, 2020, accessed January 10, 2025, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/48788>.

After Azerbaijan regained the territories in the surrounding seven districts under occupation by Armenian militants, the Joint Russian-Turkish Monitoring Centre (RTJMC), which includes Türkiye and Russia, was established in Karabakh to monitor the proper implementation of the provisions of the 10 November Agreement.⁹²³

Finally, the “Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support” (*Shusha Declaration*), signed on June 15, 2021, in Shusha, the cultural capital of Karabakh liberated from occupation, has also been another milestone in bilateral relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. The Shusha Declaration is the first document between Türkiye and Azerbaijan to use the word “*alliance*,” and it also constitutes a mutual defense agreement between the two states.⁹²⁴ While security, defense, and military areas are prominent in the declaration, its Paragraph 20, like NATO’s Article 5, includes the other party in the event of an attack on one of the parties.⁹²⁵

8.5. Economics

The bilateral economic relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan have reached a level of quality and dynamism in the last 35 years that can serve as an example and model for other neighboring countries. The “Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation between Türkiye and Azerbaijan,” which forms the legal framework for economic relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, was signed in 1992, the “Agreement on Credit between Türkiye and Azerbaijan” in 1992, the “Agreement on the Promotion and Protection of Investments between Türkiye and Azerbaijan” in 1994, and the “Agreement on the Avoidance of Double Taxation between Türkiye and Azerbaijan” in 1997, thereby significantly completing the legal infrastructure.⁹²⁶

⁹²³ “Turkey approves sending troops to joint Russian monitoring center in Azerbaijan,” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, November 17, 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkey-approves-sending-troops-to-joint-russian-monitoring-center-in-azerbaijan/30955412.html>.

⁹²⁴ Ali Hajizade, “Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations: The building of an alliance,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, March 7, 2024, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/feature-articles/item/13794-t%C3%BCrkiye-azerbaijan-relations-the-building-of-an-alliance.html>.

⁹²⁵ Çelik, and Aslanlı, “Geopolitical analysis of the Shusha Declaration,” 66.

⁹²⁶ Ali Mesimov, “Bağımsızlık yıllarında Azerbaycan-Türkiye ilişkileri,” *Avrasya Dosyası Uluslararası İlişkiler ve Stratejik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 23 (2001): 276.

Türkiye's strategic role in the process of delivering Azerbaijan's energy resources to international markets is noteworthy. Starting to export its first oil to Western markets with the signing of the "Contract of Century" in 1994,⁹²⁷ Azerbaijan has made Türkiye an important bridge by enabling its oil to directly reach global markets through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Crude Oil Pipeline, which became operational in 2005.⁹²⁸

Türkiye's relations, especially with Azerbaijan, have significantly developed thanks to the close social, economic, and high-level political cooperation established since 2010. In October 2011, an intergovernmental agreement was signed for the export of natural gas from Shah Deniz Phase-II through Türkiye. TANAP is of strategic importance to both countries because it enables Azerbaijani gas to reach Europe for the first time through Türkiye.⁹²⁹

From the perspective of bilateral economic relations, foreign trade between two states should be considered as one of the main items. In this context, when the foreign trade indicators are examined, a regular development can be observed when considering 5-year periods. In this context, the bilateral trade volume between Türkiye and Azerbaijan was \$326 million in 2000, doubled to \$800 million in 2005, recorded at \$2.4 billion in 2010, and reached \$2.1 billion in 2015 with a slight decrease.⁹³⁰ As of 2021, the total trade volume has risen to \$5 million.⁹³¹

In 2013, Azerbaijan's development of crude oil sales and the opening of a new oil refinery in Türkiye proved progress in this regard. The foundation of the project,

⁹²⁷ Kamran Agasi, "The contract of the century and its long term implications on the development of Azerbaijan," *Studia Orientalne* 1, no. 5, (2014): 139.

⁹²⁸ Vladimir Socor, "Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline inaugurated," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 2, no. 105, (2005), <https://jamestown.org/program/baku-tbilisi-ceyhan-oil-pipeline-inaugurated>.

⁹²⁹ Volkan Ş. Ediger, and Duygu Durmaz, "The new geopolitical game in the Caspian region: Azerbaijan-Turkey energy relations," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 15, no. 2, (2016): 149.

⁹³⁰ Bestenigar Kara, and Alexandru Gribincea, "An assessment on bilateral economic relations Turkey & Azerbaijan," *Economie şi Sociologie* 2 (2016): 52.

⁹³¹ "Economic Relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan," Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed February 25, 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/economic-relations-between-turkey-and-azerbaijan.en.mfa>.

which would be called the STAR oil refinery, was laid on October 25, 2011, by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, İlham Aliyev, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The STAR oil refinery was built in the western part of Türkiye, near another Turkish refinery in İzmir, with the aim of meeting the demand of Türkiye's major cities. The main raw material supplier for the refinery, which has a total capacity of 10 million tons, was State of Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SOCAR). Aiming to reduce Türkiye's dependence on imported raw materials in the petrochemical industry, the refinery has helped decrease the country's current account deficit.⁹³²

8.6. Socio-culture

The foundation of the socio-cultural relations between the Azerbaijan and Türkiye was laid in the early 1990s through various cooperation agreements in the fields of education, science, culture, art, sports, and media. These agreements cover a wide range of areas, from the training of expert personnel to the development of education and scientific research, and from television broadcasts to cultural and artistic activities. Especially television broadcasts and scientific cooperation protocols aimed to strengthen communication and information exchange between the peoples of the two countries. General cooperation agreements, on the other hand, have laid the groundwork for deepening relations by providing a comprehensive framework for collaboration in scientific, technical, social, cultural, and economic fields.⁹³³ With the attainment of re-independence, the cultural and societal policies implemented in Azerbaijan have been reorganized with the aim of preserving and passing on moral, national, and spiritual values to future generations. Many decisions have been adopted that emphasize national, traditional, and moral values and embrace humanistic and humanitarian views.⁹³⁴

⁹³² Elçin Suleymanov, Cihan Bulut, and Farhad Rahmanov, "Economic and political analysis of Azerbaijan-Turkey energy relations," *Journal of Management, Economics, and Industrial Organization* 1, no. 2, (2017): 41, <https://doi.org/10.31039/jomeino.2017.1.2.3>.

⁹³³ Tolga Gürler, *Azerbaycan – Türkiye İlişkileri (1991-2003) Siyasi, Askeri, Sosyo-Kültürel ve Ekonomik Açıdan*, (MA thesis, Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University [Türkiye], 2015), 120-121.

⁹³⁴ Ayça Ergun, "Türkiye-Azerbaycan İlişkilerinin Toplumsal Boyutları," *Global Panorama*, November 20, 2023, <https://www.globalpanorama.org/2023/11/turkiye-azerbaycan>.

Azerbaijan's victory following the 44-Day War played a transformative and transformative role in the region's geopolitical environment. Since the restoration of independence, Azerbaijan has become a stronger state in the region with reinforced nation and state-building. Türkiye, on the other hand, has redefined itself as a regional power and has adopted a proactive role during the war process. The Turkish public considers Azerbaijan to be the closest state in foreign policy. The main reason for the formation of this perception is the historical enemy/common threat perception rather than direct acquaintance and familiarity. It can be said that public interest and support during the 44-Day War were at their highest level throughout Azerbaijan's independence period. What is decisive here is not the limited daily interactions of Turkish citizens with Azerbaijanis, but rather empathy, sympathy, and solidarity. This empathy can be seen in the detailed reflection of the war process through written and visual media, as well as in support messages on social media where Turkish and Azerbaijani flags are used side by side. In the post-war process, the common stance of the political elites of both countries on peacebuilding and the evaluation of regional cooperation opportunities is also reflected in the social sphere.⁹³⁵

8.7. Conclusion

This chapter presents the key findings that emerged from the in-depth examination of Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations and a general evaluation of these findings. It has been clearly observed that the ties between the two countries are built not only on diplomatic or economic grounds but also on a deep-rooted history, shared culture, and strategic goals. It has been determined that supportive steps in the early stages played a critical role in the development of relations. Türkiye being the first state to recognize Azerbaijan's independence and the rapid establishment of diplomatic missions laid the foundation for this relationship. However, this process has not always been smooth, especially with political initiatives like the "Armenian Opening" in 2009, which led to temporary tensions. Nevertheless, thanks to the deep

⁹³⁵ Ayça Ergun, "Türkiye-Azerbaycan İlişkilerinin Toplumsal Boyutları," *Global Panorama*, November 20, 2023, <https://www.globalpanorama.org/2023/11/turkiye-azerbaycan>.

ties and mutual understanding between the two countries, such crises have been overcome, and the relations have even strengthened to the level of an alliance.

Security cooperation is one of the most prominent and important aspects of relations. The vital role of the training, logistical support, and military equipment provided by Türkiye in the restructuring and modernization of the Azerbaijani army has been emphasized. Joint exercises and military agreements have ensured that the two countries aligned their regional security understanding. Especially during the 44-Day War, Türkiye's diplomatic and indirect military support played a key role in Azerbaijan's victory, which elevated the relations to the level of "alliance" with the Shusha Declaration. Economic relations, on the other hand, have grown along the axis of energy and trade. Türkiye is a key transit country for delivering Azerbaijan's energy resources to Western markets. Major energy projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Pipeline and TANAP demonstrate the strategic importance of economic ties. The continuous increase in trade volume and mutual investments reflect the dynamic nature of economic cooperation. Finally, socio-cultural ties form the basis of the "one nation, two states" philosophy of the two countries. Collaborations in the fields of education, science, art, and media have deepened inter-people interactions and contributed to the preservation of a shared cultural heritage. Mutual empathy, sympathy, and solidarity in the public sphere, especially during sensitive periods, clearly demonstrate the societal reflections of these deep bonds.

CHAPTER 9

AZERBAIJAN-IRAN RELATIONS

9.1. Introduction

Since regaining its independence, relations with Iran have always played a central role in Azerbaijan's foreign policy, sometimes becoming one of its most important priorities. This situation can be explained not only by the geographical closeness of the two states but also by the combination of deep historical and cultural ties, geopolitical interests, and mutual economic benefits. Generations of shared heritage have linked the destinies of the two neighboring states, making their interactions on the political stage inevitable.

Over the past three dozen years, it would not be accurate to say that the relations between Azerbaijan and Iran have always been smooth or monotonous. From time to time, ups and downs have been experienced, and tensions arising from differences have been observed. However, despite all these difficulties, the prevailing view among the political decision-makers and elites of both states has been that the foundation of the relations should be built on the principles of good neighborliness and mutually beneficial cooperation. This approach is primarily fueled by the common interests of the two states that affect each other. As a result, both sides have tended to maintain their relationship from a long-term harmony perspective by emphasizing common ground instead of disagreements.

9.2. Short Background

Establishing relations with Iran was not as easy for Azerbaijan as it was thought to be in 1991, when independence was restored. The presence of millions of

Azerbaijani Turks in Iran has caused disturbances in the Iranian administration after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Even during the dissolution phase of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijanis in the North and South disregarded the existing border along the Aras River and initiated a social “unification” movement. In the events that began on December 31, 1989, thousands of Azerbaijanis bypassed the barbed wire on the Soviet-Iran border, and today it is celebrated as Day of Solidarity in Azerbaijan.⁹³⁶

With the rise to power of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA) under the leadership of Abulfaz Elchibey, relations with Iran did not reach the expected level. During the period when Iran intensified its efforts to increase its influence in Azerbaijan, the PFA had two fundamental policies towards Iran. The first was the establishment of the principle of reciprocity and equality between the two states. The second was the recognition of Azerbaijan by Iran. The first steps were taken when Azerbaijan’s former Foreign Minister visited Tehran from August 18-20, 1992. It was decided to open reciprocal consulates in Tabriz and Nakhchivan.⁹³⁷

However, the start of Elçibey’s vocalization of the goal to unite (North) Azerbaijan, which remained from the disintegrated Soviet Union, with the (South) Azerbaijan regions in Iran, led to a deadlock in the relations between the two countries. Although this tension was attempted to be reduced with Heydar Aliyev becoming president, it was brought to a certain point. Even in this chapter, as will be read, the Tehran administration has periodically pursued aggressive policies against Baku. This has led Azerbaijan to perceive its southern neighbor as a threat.⁹³⁸

Nevertheless, for some, the restoration of independence in its early years was not solely due to President Elchibey's ideological approach, but also to the deterioration

⁹³⁶ Arif Yunusov, “Azerbaijan – Between America and Iran,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, July 12, 2006, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/azerbaijan-between-america-and-iran>.

⁹³⁷ Nazım Cafersoy, *Elçibey Dönemi Azerbaycan Dış Politikası (Haziran 1992-Haziran 1993): Bir Bağımsızlık Mücadelesinin Diplomatik Öyküsü*, (Ankara: ASAM, Avrasya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi Yayınları, 2001), 115.

⁹³⁸ Murad Ismayilov, “The impact of energy resources on nation-and state-building: The contrasting cases of Azerbaijan and Georgia,” In *Beyond the Resource Curse*, ed. Brenda Shaffer, and Taleh Ziyadov, 203-224, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 208. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812206173.203>.

of relations with Iran. Similar problems occurred during the Heydar Aliyev period, when he sought to establish a more balanced and secure relationship with neighbors. Although Heydar Aliyev took some steps to soften relations with Iran after coming to power, the crises that occurred during and after that period show that Tehran was not receptive to this softening.⁹³⁹

9.3. Diplomacy

Since taking office in October 2003, Ilham Aliyev has maintained the foreign policy balance established by former president Heydar Aliyev. Shortly after taking office, he directed the state's foreign policy towards better relations with neighboring countries. Among these states, the relationship with Iran entered a new phase, but it was not very different from the previous phase. At the beginning of Ilham Aliyev's term, bilateral relations appeared to be more moderate. In those years, a series of official visits took place at both the presidential and high-level bureaucratic levels. On February 10, 2004, President Aliyev received Iranian Ambassador Ahad Qazaei, marking the beginning of official diplomatic contacts that would later become a tumultuous relationship. Aliyev extended his sincere congratulations to the Iranian people and leadership on the 25th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, emphasizing the historical friendship between the two states. He also recalled the cooperation measures taken during former president Heydar Aliyev's official visit to Tehran in 2002 and emphasized that the new administration would prioritize maintaining Azerbaijan-Iran relations and strengthening friendly ties.⁹⁴⁰

On May 11, 2004, President Aliyev received Mehdi Safari, the Special Representative of the Iranian President for Caspian Issues.⁹⁴¹ During the meeting, Mehdi Safari conveyed the greetings of Iranian President Mohammad Khatami and

⁹³⁹ Araz Aslanlı, "Foreign Policy of Heydar Aliyev," in *Heydar Aliyev and the Foundations of Modern Azerbaijan*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz, Michael M. Gunter, and Shamkhal Abilov, 163-200, (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 23, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58265-3_7.

⁹⁴⁰ "President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev receives Iranian Ambassador," *AZƏRTAC*, February 10, 2004, <https://azertag.az/en/print/550931>.

⁹⁴¹ "Azərbaycan Respublikasının Prezidenti İlham Əliyevin görüşləri," *Diplomatiya Aləmi* no. 7, (2004): 13.

emphasized the administration's commitment to enhancing bilateral relations with Azerbaijan. He emphasized the high level of cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the fields of energy and agriculture. Safari expressed his confidence that the negotiations on transporting Iranian natural gas to Nakhchivan would conclude successfully. Later, he described the construction of the Astara-Baku highway as a sign of the strengthening economic relations between the two states.⁹⁴²

However, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami's visit to Baku on August 10, 2004, represented the first presidential-level bilateral visit in the new era and set a model for similar interactions in the following years. This three-day visit was recorded as the first visit by an Iranian President to Azerbaijan in a decade. The visit, which took place after such a long interval, reflected the past tensions between the two states. During the visit, the parties signed an agreement to improve the connection of roads and railways and to finance the construction of an energy line from Imishli in southern Azerbaijan to Astara on the Iranian border. Expressing his satisfaction with the agreements, Aliyev stated that electricity and gas would be supplied to Nakhchivan through energy and gas swap agreements.⁹⁴³

One of the most significant outcomes of the visit was Iran's approval for Azerbaijan to open a consulate in Tabriz. This development gave rise to the hope in Baku that Tehran might adopt a more tolerant approach towards the millions of Azerbaijani Turks living in Iran.⁹⁴⁴ In fact, the idea of opening a consulate was planned as part of an agreement signed during former President Heydar Aliyev's visit to Iran in 1994. However, due to the deterioration of relations between the two states in the following decade, the plan was postponed for a significant period.⁹⁴⁵

⁹⁴² "Azerbaijan-Iran relationship has good prospects President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev receives Special Representative of Iranian President for Caspian issues," *AZƏRTAC*, May 11, 2004, <https://azertag.az/en/print/553104>.

⁹⁴³ Antoine Blua, "Iran/Azerbaijan: Iranian President visits Azerbaijan, calls for closer ties," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, August 6, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1054211.html>.

⁹⁴⁴ Shahin Abbasov, "Iran-Azerbaijan relations: On a better footing after Khatami's Baku visit," *Eurasianet*, August 10, 2004, <https://eurasianet.org/iran-azerbaijan-relations-on-a-better-footing-after-khatamis-baku-visit>.

⁹⁴⁵ "Azerbaijan opens consulate general in Tabriz." *AZƏRTAC*, October 20, 2004, <https://azertag.az/en/print/556936>.

Nevertheless, the Azerbaijani Consulate General was officially opened in Tabriz on October 20, 2004. Although the state had not yet fully stabilized and approximately 20 percent of its territory was still under occupation, the opening of this consulate can be seen as evidence of the careful attention the Azerbaijani state shows to Azerbaijanis living in neighboring states. Especially, another consulate was opened in the same year in Türkiye's Kars province, which has a large Azerbaijani population.⁹⁴⁶

Relations with Iran became even more strained before President İlham Aliyev's visit to Iran. In December 2004, Aliyev held meetings with many high-ranking Iranian officials, including Mehdi Safari. Among those involved were Intelligence Minister Ali Younesi; Minister of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ali Shamkhani; and Minister of Health and Medical Education Masoud Pezeshkian, who would become Iran's president 20 years later.⁹⁴⁷

Between January 24-26, 2005, President Aliyev made a short official visit to Iran. During the first two days in Tehran, he primarily held a series of official meetings with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.⁹⁴⁸ After the meeting, it was stated that joint efforts would continue to promote trade and scientific-technical cooperation.⁹⁴⁹ As a result of these meetings, several agreements were signed. These agreements addressed issues such as facilitated border crossing arrangements for citizens living in border regions, cooperation between the Ministries of Education and Health, joint sharing of the hydroelectric potential of the Aras River, and increased cooperation in the field of civil aviation.⁹⁵⁰

⁹⁴⁶ "Qars şəhərində Azərbaycan Respublikasının Baş konsulluğunun açılış mərasimi," *Diplomatiya Aləmi* no. 9, (2004): 97-98.

⁹⁴⁷ "Azərbaycan Respublikasının Prezidenti İlham Əliyevin görüşləri," *Diplomatiya Aləmi* no. 9, (2004): 8-9.

⁹⁴⁸ "Azərbaycan Respublikasının Prezidenti İlham Əliyev Təbriz şəhərində," *Prezident İlham Əliyev və Azərbaycan diasporu*, Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin İşlər İdarəsinin Prezident Kitabxanası (2005): 35, <https://files.preslib.az/projects/diaspora/a5.pdf>.

⁹⁴⁹ "Azərbaycan Respublikasının Prezidenti İlham Əliyevin İran İslam Respublikasına rəsmi səfərinin yekunlarına dair mətbuat üçün birgə bəyanat," *Diplomatiya Aləmi* no. 10, (2005): 6.

⁹⁵⁰ Məsiəğa Məhəmmədi, "Azərbaycan–İran münasibətləri," in *Azərbaycan Respublikasının Xarici Siyasətinin Əsas İstiqamətləri (1991-2016)*, ed. Fərhad Məmmədov, Cavid Vəliyev, and Aqşin Məmmədov, 225-252, (Bakı: "Poliart" MMC, 2017), 242.

On January 26, 2005, after completing his program in Tehran, President Aliyev departed for the city of Tabriz. In the meeting at the East Azerbaijan Governorate, Aliyev emphasized that his three-day visit to Iran was successful and yielded promising results in strengthening bilateral cooperation between the two countries. He also added that the opening of the consulate in Tabriz was an important step and a positive development.⁹⁵¹

Later, he visited the consulate, reviewed relations with Iran, and answered journalists' questions in detail.⁹⁵² In 2006, Ilham Aliyev held a series of meetings with representatives of Iran at various levels. On May 4, 2006, during the 9th ECO Summit held in Baku, which was attended by numerous heads of state from member countries, President Aliyev met with Iranian President Ahmadinejad. In this meeting, both presidents declared that relations between the two countries were at a high level.⁹⁵³

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev had continued to hold several significant meetings within the framework of relations with Iran in 2007. On January 25, 2007, he met with former Iranian President Muhammad Khatami during the annual World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos.⁹⁵⁴

On August 21, 2007, President Aliyev met with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad both face-to-face and in a group setting during his official visit to Azerbaijan. This visit, although Ahmadinejad's third trip to Azerbaijan, was actually his first official state visit there. The talks lasted two days and focused on bilateral relations, energy cooperation and the Caspian Sea. The two leaders also addressed

⁹⁵¹ "Azərbaycan Prezidenti İlham Əliyevin çıxışı," *AZƏRTAC*, January 27, <https://azertag.az/print/325061>.

⁹⁵² "Prezident İlham Əliyev Azərbaycanın Təbrizdəki baş konsulluğunda olmuşdur," *AZƏRTAC*, January 27, 2005, <https://azertag.az/print/325063>.

⁹⁵³ Ziya Şamilli, "Azərbaycan-İran iki tərəfli siyasi münasibətlər," *Veteninfo.az*, May 28, 2021, <https://veteninfo.az/azerbaycan-iran-iki-terefli-siyasi-munasibetler>.

⁹⁵⁴ "Azerbaijani President held a number of meetings in Davos," *Trend News Agency*, January 25, 2007, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/871615.html>.

Russia's proposal to offer Azerbaijan's Gabala radar station,⁹⁵⁵ leased by Russia, to the United States as part of its missile defense system.⁹⁵⁶

President Aliyev visited Iran on March 10, 2008, to attend the 10th Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Summit,⁹⁵⁷ where he held both face-to-face and expanded meetings with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Tehran.⁹⁵⁸ He also met with Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.⁹⁵⁹ After the meetings, various intergovernmental agreements covering areas such as taxation, economy and trade, tourism, cultural heritage, interlibrary cooperation, statistics, and postal services were signed between the two states.⁹⁶⁰

The year 2009 witnessed both cooperation and diplomatic tensions in Azerbaijan-Iran relations. During this period, two significant events stood out. First, following the official visit of Israeli President Shimon Peres to Azerbaijan in June 2009, Iran recalled its ambassador to Azerbaijan, Mohammad Bager Bahrami. In response, Novruz Mammadov, head of the Department of Foreign Relations of the Presidential Administration of Azerbaijan, stated that "*Azerbaijan pursues a foreign policy that does not harm any state.*" After subsequent discussions, Ambassador Bahrami returned to Baku on July 8, 2009.⁹⁶¹

⁹⁵⁵ At the time, the United States was seeking a radar station to defend the West against potential missile attacks from Iran. This search was resolved in 2012 with the activation of the Kürecik radar station in Malatya.

⁹⁵⁶ "Iranian, Azerbaijani Leaders hold talks in Baku," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, August 21, 2007, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1078268.html>.

⁹⁵⁷ "10th ECO Summit (Tehran, 11 March, 2009)," ECO, accessed May 11, 2024, <https://eco.int/10th-eco-summit-tehran-11-march-2009>.

⁹⁵⁸ "President Ilham Aliyev meets one-on-one with his Iranian counterpart," *AZƏRTAC*, March 10, 2009, <https://azertag.az/en/print/581475>.

⁹⁵⁹ "Supreme Leader meets with President of Azerbaijan," *Leader.ir*, accessed May 12, 2024, <https://www.leader.ir/en/content/4949/Supreme-Leader-Meets-with-President-of-Azerbaijan>.

⁹⁶⁰ "Official visit of the President of Azerbaijan H.E. Mr. I. Aliyev to the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Diplomatiya Aləmi* no. 22, (2009): 6.

⁹⁶¹ Ariel Farrar-Wellman, "Azerbaijan-Iran foreign relations," *Critical Threats*, April 08, 2010, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/azerbaijan-iran-foreign-relations>.

Second, in mid-November 2009, Iran officially announced its decision to unilaterally lift visa requirements for Azerbaijani citizens, allowing visa-free entry for up to one month starting February 1, 2010. Iran also implied that this period could later be extended to three months, suggesting that the policy would be changed for the sake of the deep cultural and religious ties between the two states.⁹⁶²

However, when Iran expected reciprocity from its neighbor, Azerbaijan remained cautious. Azerbaijan's hesitation was about political unrest in Iran, particularly the persecution of opposition parties. Concerns about a possible refugee crisis was also another reason for Azerbaijan's hesitation. In addition, issues such as Iran's intelligence activities in Azerbaijan, its close ties with Armenia, cross-border drug trafficking, and sponsoring religious extremism deterred Azerbaijan from reciprocating by lifting visa requirements for Iranian citizens.⁹⁶³

However, the year 2012 experienced tensions in Azerbaijan-Iran relations rise due to a decrease in diplomatic contacts and an increase in crises. President Ilham Aliyev received only two diplomatic delegations: one led by Iranian Minister of Education Hamid-Reza Haji Babaei on July 12, 2012; and the other led by Iranian Vice President Hasan Mousavi on September 5, 2012.⁹⁶⁴

The change in the rules regarding the recognition of diplomas of Iranian students studying in Azerbaijan by Iran had triggered developments that will lead to the deterioration of relations between the two states and crises. According to the new regulations announced by the Iranian Ministry of Science, Technology, and Research, only diplomas obtained from certain Azerbaijani universities would be considered valid. For the diplomas to be valid, students would need to receive full-time education, meet certain criteria including language training, and submit a report

⁹⁶² "Iran scraps visa requirements for Azerbaijan," *Sputnik Global*, January 8, 2010, <https://sputnikglobe.com/20100108/157495213.html>.

⁹⁶³ "Azerbaijan Shies away from dropping visa requirements for Iranians," *Eurasianet*, July 19, 2010, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-shies-away-from-dropping-visa-requirements-for-iranians>.

⁹⁶⁴ "Meetings of the President of Azerbaijan H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev," *Diplomatiya Alami* no. 32-33, (2012): 50-51.

every six months documenting their academic progress. With these regulations, both the education of Iranian students in Azerbaijan was being restricted, and the educational relations between the two states have also been negatively affected.⁹⁶⁵

Azerbaijani officials have made efforts to reduce tensions by organizing official visits to Iran, but these efforts have not been enough to appease the Iranian side. As a result, the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) hosted by Azerbaijan in May 2012 became a target for Iranian officials, leading to a diplomatic crisis between the two states. Before the contest, Iran summoned Azerbaijan's ambassador to Tehran, protesting the event with allegations that "Islam's sacred values were insulted" and a "gay parade" was planned, and withdrew its ambassador from Baku. Azerbaijani officials, however, denied these allegations⁹⁶⁶ and demanded an apology from Iran.⁹⁶⁷

Despite Azerbaijan acting with more caution at one point, Iran continued to maintain tense relations until Hassan Rouhani was elected President of Iran in the summer of 2013.⁹⁶⁸ After these events in the first half of 2012, President Ilham Aliyev met with Iranian officials only once until Hassan Rouhani took office. This was the meeting with his counterpart Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the 12th Summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) on October 15, 2012.⁹⁶⁹

During this period of heightened tensions between the two states, there had been no intensive intergovernmental official visits as in previous years. In 2013, Iran-Azerbaijan relations continued to maintain their tension through historical border

⁹⁶⁵ "Iran changes rules of recognition of Azerbaijani diplomas," *Trend News Agency*, January 23, 2012, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/society/1982961.html>.

⁹⁶⁶ "Tehran protests Eurovision 'gay parade' in Baku," *Spiegel International*, May 23, 2012, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/tehran-protests-eurovision-gay-parade-in-baku-a-834709.html>.

⁹⁶⁷ "Baku demands Iran's apology for insulting statements over Eurovision," *Kyiv Post*, May 24, 2012, <https://archive.kyivpost.com/article/content/eastern-europe/baku-demands-irans-apology-for-insulting-statement-1-128194.html>.

⁹⁶⁸ Məhəmmədi, "Azərbaycan–İran münasibətləri," 245.

⁹⁶⁹ "Azerbaijani President meets Iranian counterpart," *AZƏRTAC*, October 15, 2012, <https://azertag.az/en/print/227213>.

issues and political rhetoric. Calls by Iranian parliamentarians to renegotiate the Treaty of Turkmenchay signed in the 19th century have caused strong reactions in Azerbaijan.⁹⁷⁰ According to these calls, the southern territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan were demanded to be annexed to Iran. A conference in Baku, which received harsh criticism from Tehran in March 2013, supported the independence of Azerbaijanis in Iran. In addition, statements by some Iranian politicians and presidential candidates aiming to annex Azerbaijan and other regional countries to Iran had been met with backlash not only in Azerbaijan but also in other neighboring countries like Tajikistan.⁹⁷¹

From this perspective, it is not correct to accuse Azerbaijan of seeking allies from outside the region. Because, since regaining its independence, Azerbaijan has been left in a vulnerable position either under Moscow's pressure or against the threats made by Iranian officials from time to time, such as "*striking Azerbaijan's strategic energy infrastructure in the event of a possible conflict with the West.*"⁹⁷²

Similarly, Shaffer has emphasized that the relationship between Iran and Azerbaijan has historically been tense and that this is independent of cooperation with Israel. According to Shaffer, Iran has tried to obstruct Azerbaijan's energy projects and has supported Armenia, putting Azerbaijan in a difficult position in regional conflicts. She also noted that there are allegations that Iran supports radical groups in Azerbaijan and plans various terrorist attacks.⁹⁷³

With the cabinet formed after the election of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in August 2013, the normalization process in Iran-Azerbaijan relations had begun from

⁹⁷⁰ Marya Hannun, "News you might have missed: Iran considers annexing Azerbaijan (again)," *Foreign Policy*, April 12, 2013, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/12/news-you-might-have-missed-iran-considers-annexing-azerbaijan-again>.

⁹⁷¹ Ron Synovitz, "Azerbaijani lawmaker gleeful about Iranian border treaty threat," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, April 10, 2013, <https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-iran-border-treaty/24953884.html>.

⁹⁷² Alexandros Petersen, "Iran threatens Azerbaijan," *The National Interest*, April 29, 2013, <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/iran-threatens-azerbaijan-8407>.

⁹⁷³ Brenda Shaffer, "Azerbaijan's cooperation with Israel goes beyond Iran tensions," *The Washington Institute* 2067 (2013).

the new year. This year has been a year of increased diplomatic contacts between the two states. First, on January 23, 2014, during the WEF held in Davos, President Ilham Aliyev met with Iran's new President Hassan Rouhani. This meeting has been an important beginning where new cooperation opportunities were discussed between the parties.⁹⁷⁴

However, the role of the Republic of Türkiye in improving the relations between the two states should not be overlooked. Ankara has taken on an important mediating role in reducing tensions between Azerbaijan and Iran. The meetings held in Urmia (April 2011), Nakhchivan (March 2012), and Van (March 2014) within the framework of a trilateral diplomatic dialogue have laid the groundwork for negotiations aimed at resolving common issues among the three countries.⁹⁷⁵

Although Azerbaijan's rapprochement with the West due to the Karabakh Conflict and Iran's support for Armenia played a fundamental role in the deterioration of relations, Azerbaijan has sought to improve relations in order to achieve significant gains both in domestic and foreign policy. In domestic politics, it aimed to suppress the activities of radical Shia groups supported by Iran. While in foreign policy, it sought to prevent the deepening of Iran-Armenia relations.⁹⁷⁶

Official visits between the two states resumed with President Ilham Aliyev's official visit to Iran. Aliyev arrived in Tehran on April 9, 2014. After being welcomed with an official ceremony at the Iranian Presidential Palace, the two leaders discussed the strengthening of bilateral relations in a comprehensive meeting with the participation of their delegations.⁹⁷⁷ During the visit, four important Memorandums of

⁹⁷⁴ "Azerbaijani President meets Iranian counterpart in Davos," *AZƏRTAC*, January 23, 2014, <https://azertag.az/en/print/87669>.

⁹⁷⁵ "Third trilateral meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey is held in Turkey," Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed June 25, 2024, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/third-trilateral-meeting-of-the-ministers-of-foreign-affairs-of-azerbaijan-iran-and-turkey-is-held-in-turkey.en.mfa>.

⁹⁷⁶ Orhan Gafarlı, "Azerbaijan seeks warmer ties with Iran," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 11, no. 216, (2014).

⁹⁷⁷ "Azerbaijani, Iranian presidents have expanded meeting," *AZƏRTAC*, April 9, 2014, <https://azertag.az/en/print/89624>.

Understanding (MoU) were signed to strengthen cooperation between the two states in various fields. Among these agreements were topics such as youth and sports, emergency management, meteorology, and the construction of hydroelectric power plants.⁹⁷⁸

In the joint press statement after the signing of the MoU, President Aliyev emphasized that the visit comprehensively addressed the relations between the two states. He also underlined the significant opportunities for the development of these relations.⁹⁷⁹ Furthermore, Aliyev stated that the two states have been successfully cooperating on international platforms such as the UN, OIC, ECO, and the Non-Aligned Movement, and finally he thanked Iran President Rouhani for his hospitality.⁹⁸⁰

On September 29, 2014, at the 4th Summit of the Heads of State of Caspian Littoral States, a five-party agreement regarding the Caspian Sea was signed, and President Aliyev met once again with Iranian President Rouhani.⁹⁸¹

This summit marked a significant milestone in the perspective of leader-level discussions. The frequent mutual meetings of the presidents have led to the beginning of a breakthrough in the relations. The reflection of this has been the increase in the reciprocal meetings of government officials. For example, on October 20, 2014, Azerbaijan's First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva met with Iran's Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, Shahindokht Molaverdi, who was in Azerbaijan to attend the 5th Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women in Development in OIC Member States in Baku. Mrs. Aliyeva, recalling that the presidents of Azerbaijan and

⁹⁷⁸ "Azerbaijan and Iran sign four documents," *Apa.az*, April 9, 2014, https://en.apa.az/foreign-policy/xeber_azerbaijan_and_iran_sign_several_documents_-209626.

⁹⁷⁹ "Press conference of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hassan Rouhani," *Diplomatiya Aləmi* no. 36, (2014): 5-6.

⁹⁸⁰ "Excellent opportunities for Azerbaijan, Iran relations: President Aliyev," *Azernews*, April 9, 2014, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/65951.html>.

⁹⁸¹ "President Ilham Aliyev met with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani," *AZƏRTAC*, September 29, 2014, <https://azertag.az/en/print/799386>.

Iran had met three times during the year, stated that these reciprocal visits and meetings further strengthened the relations between the two states.⁹⁸²

The meeting between the two heads of state took place once again in November 2014. During his visit to Azerbaijan on November 12, 2014,⁹⁸³ Iranian President Rouhani held meetings with leaders in both bilateral and expanded formats and signed various agreements in many areas.⁹⁸⁴ Then, they came together at the Azerbaijan-Iran business forum and called for the enhancement of economic cooperation.⁹⁸⁵ With these visits, the clouds of uncertainty in the relations between the two countries have dispersed, and the tension that had been escalating over the past three years has significantly decreased.^{986 987}

During the official visit of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to Iran on March 5, 2017, high-level meetings were held. In one of these meetings, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei stated that he believed Israel was trying to weaken the ties between the two countries. Additionally, Khamenei, who added that the two neighbors should be “vigilant” to maintain their friendly relations, praised Azerbaijan’s stance on Iran’s nuclear program without providing details. In the past, Iran criticized Azerbaijan for its strong ties with Israel, which sells weapons and defense equipment to Baku.⁹⁸⁸

⁹⁸² “Azerbaijan’s First Lady meets Iranian Vice-President for women and family affairs,” *Trend News Agency*, October 20, 2014, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2324035.html>.

⁹⁸³ Nigar Orujova, “Hassan Rouhani arrives in Baku,” *Azernews*, November 12, 2014, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/73165.html>.

⁹⁸⁴ “Azerbaijani-Iranian documents were signed,” *AZƏRTAC*, November 12, 2014, <https://azertag.az/en/print/809950>.

⁹⁸⁵ “Azerbaijani, Iranian presidents attend business forum in Baku,” *Trend News Agency*, November 13, 2014, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2332491.html>.

⁹⁸⁶ Joshua Kucera, “Rouhani visits Baku as Azerbaijan-Iran conflicts fade into past,” *Eurasianet*, November 11, 2014, <https://eurasianet.org/rouhani-visits-baku-as-azerbaijan-iran-conflicts-fade-into-past>.

⁹⁸⁷ “Iran, Azerbaijan to accelerate bilateral ties,” *Tasnim News Agency*, November 12, 2014, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2014/11/12/556252/iran-azerbaijan-to-accelerate-bilateral-ties>.

⁹⁸⁸ “Israel seeks to damage Iran-Azerbaijan brotherly ties: Ayatollah Khamenei,” *Iran Front Page*, March 6, 2017, <https://ifpnews.com/israel-seeks-to-damage-iran-azerbaijan-brotherly-ties-ayatollah-khamenei>.

The relations between Iran and Azerbaijan have entered a new phase following the 44-Day War in 2020. During the war, although Iran tried to maintain a neutral image, allegations emerged that Iran helped Armenia. In videos circulating on social media, there are images of trucks carrying military equipment from Iran to Armenia passing through the border crossing. Iran quickly denied these allegations, stating that they were “baseless rumors” aimed at damaging relations with Azerbaijan.⁹⁸⁹

Border crossings to the regions that Azerbaijan took control of after the 44-Day War in 2021 have become a sensitive issue in Iran-Azerbaijan relations. In October, Iran’s Road Maintenance and Transportation Organisation (IRMTO) warned logistics companies that they should only enter Azerbaijan’s Karabakh region from officially designated border crossings by Azerbaijan through Armenia. IRMTO officially announced that entries through other routes would violate Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and carry legal risks. This warning came after Azerbaijan began charging foreign vehicles on the section of the Goris-Kapan Road under its control and detained two Iranian truck drivers for illegal crossing. The delivery of the detained drivers to Iran on humanitarian grounds was interpreted as a diplomatic gesture and helped prevent a potential crisis.⁹⁹⁰

However, by 2022, tensions between Iran and Azerbaijan rose again. Iran began large-scale military exercises called “Mighty Iran” along the Azerbaijan border. These exercises, which began on October 17, 2022, particularly included the practice of crossing the Aras River with pontoon bridges. These exercises, which served as a warning to Azerbaijan, stemmed from Iran’s concerns regarding Azerbaijan’s intention to connect its Nakhchivan exclave with its mainland through the “Zangezur Corridor.”⁹⁹¹

⁹⁸⁹ “Iran’s delicate balancing act in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,” *Al Jazeera*, October 5, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/5/iran-nk>.

⁹⁹⁰ Orkhan Jalilov, “Iran bans lorries from entering Azerbaijan’s Karabakh region via Armenia,” *Caspian News*, October 22, 2021, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/iran-bans-lorries-from-entering-azerbaijans-karabakh-region-via-armenia-2021-10-22-0>.

⁹⁹¹ Joshua Kucera, “Iran’s military starts “massive” drills on Azerbaijani border,” *Eurasianet*, October 20, 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/irans-military-starts-massive-drills-on-azerbaijani-border>.

In retaliation to these exercises by Iran, the Azerbaijani Armed Forces (AAF) conducted joint military drills with Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) along the Iranian border. These exercises, named “Fraternal Fist,” included the practice of crossing the Aras River, which forms the Azerbaijan-Iran border, using pontoon bridges. They were a clear response to Iran’s threatening military display weeks earlier. The drills began on November 20 but were only announced on December 5 when Azerbaijan’s Defense Ministry released a press release, photos, and videos. These images included the laying of a pontoon bridge over the river and the passage of tanks, which was a direct reference to Iran’s simulation of crossing the same river in the opposite direction. Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said at the ceremony on December 6, 2022. *“A friend for one of us is a friend to the other and an enemy is an enemy for both of us.”*⁹⁹²

By the year 2023, a serious turning point occurred in the complex relations between Iran and Azerbaijan. On January 27, a security officer was killed in an armed attack on the Azerbaijani Embassy in Tehran, the capital of Iran. The incident occurred after Azerbaijani diplomats had made several requests to their Iranian counterparts to increase security measures around the embassy. This violent act, seen by some as a turning point in Azerbaijan-Iran relations, was compared to the incident in the summer of 2001 when an Iranian warship and warplanes threatened an Azerbaijani vessel belonging to British Petroleum in a disputed area of the Caspian Sea.⁹⁹³

The year 2024 witnessed significant developments indicating a trend towards the normalization of relations between Iran and Azerbaijan. As a concrete example of this rapprochement, on May 19, 2024, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev jointly inaugurated a dam built on the Azerbaijani border. However, this positive atmosphere was overshadowed by the tragic accident involving the crash of the helicopter carrying Raisi. The fact that only

⁹⁹² Joshua Kucera, “Azerbaijan and Turkey in joint military exercises on Iranian border,” *Eurasianet*, December 7, 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-and-turkey-in-joint-military-exercises-on-iranian-border>.

⁹⁹³ Alexander Yeo, and Emil A. Souleimanov. “Iran-Azerbaijan tensions and the Tehran embassy attack,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, May 8, 2023, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13753-iran-azerbaijan-tensions-and-the-tehran-embassy-attack.html>.

one of the three helicopters crashed in heavily cloudy weather and that a wounded person who survived for a few hours after the accident answered phone calls has raised questions about the cause of the accident. Although Iranian officials stated that they were investigating the cause of the accident, details such as the pilot losing contact with the other helicopters and failing to gain altitude in time raised the possibility that the incident might have been caused by a technical malfunction or pilot error. This tragic incident, while demonstrating the continuation of diplomatic rapprochement, also revealed the fragility of regional equations and potential internal dynamics.⁹⁹⁴

By the end of 2024 and the beginning of 2025, it was observed that military cooperation between Iran and Azerbaijan had significantly strengthened. In November 2024, a joint exercise codenamed “Araz-2024” was held in Iran’s Ardabil Province. Immediately afterward, on November 4, 2024, a joint tactical exercise called “AZIREX-2024” was conducted in the Iranian sector of the Caspian Sea with the participation of the Azerbaijani Naval Forces. The purpose of these exercises was to enhance interoperability and operational readiness between the naval forces of the two states, particularly in search and rescue operations. This positive trajectory culminated in the “Araz-2025” joint exercise conducted in May 2025 in Azerbaijan’s Karabakh region, with the participation of the Special Forces of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Ground Forces and the Special Forces of Azerbaijani Armed Forces.⁹⁹⁵

9.4. Security

Security is another issue that needs to be examined in depth in the relations between Azerbaijan and Iran. During periods of tension in bilateral relations, security issues emerge as fundamental causes. Therefore, it is necessary to address the security aspect of the events that have occurred since the early days of Ilham Aliyev’s period.

⁹⁹⁴ Michael Lipin, “Iran helicopter crash that killed president leaves mysteries unresolved 10 days later,” *Voice of America*, May 30, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/iran-helicopter-crash-that-killed-president-leaves-mysteries-unresolved-10-days-later/7634614.html>.

⁹⁹⁵ Nigar Bayramli, “Azerbaijan, Iran conclude “Araz-2025” joint military exercise in Karabakh region,” *Caspian News*, May 22, 2025, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-iran-conclude-araz-2025-joint-military-exercise-in-karabakh-region-2025-5-22-0>.

During Khatami's visit, on August 10, 2004, no agreement was made regarding the Caspian Sea's legal status. Iran's stance is that the five littoral states should each receive a 20 percent share of the Caspian Sea, which is regarded as a lake. Iran's share of the Caspian was roughly 13 percent under the deal that Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia reached in the city of Aktau in 2018.⁹⁹⁶

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, this dispute has delayed the area's natural resources from being properly utilized and has occasionally increased tensions between the littoral states. During his visit, Khatami tried to give the impression that a settlement might be reached quickly, but neither side was prepared to make any major compromises. Supporting this policy and constituting the second significant event of 2006 in terms of Azerbaijan-Iran relations was Aliyev's stance against the coalition being formed against Iran. On April 26, 2006, prior to his meeting with US President George W. Bush, Aliyev addressed journalists at an event hosted by the Council on Foreign Relations, where he commented on the US's interventionist approach toward Iran's determination to advance its nuclear program. In his speech, Aliyev emphasized Azerbaijan's 300-kilometer border with Iran and its alliance with the US. However, he stated that Azerbaijan could not support any offensive acts by the US against Iran. He explained that Azerbaijan and Iran were prohibited from allowing their territories to be used as a base for threats against the other, under a bilateral agreement.⁹⁹⁷

Similarly, on October 27, 2006, at a press conference held in Baku, Aliyev mentioned that potential sanctions on Iran over its controversial nuclear program could have negative impacts on the region, repeating that such measures could significantly impact regional economic development.⁹⁹⁸

⁹⁹⁶ David Hagman, "Caspian Sea vs Caspian Lake: A unique body of water," *Uttryck Magazine*, June 15, 2022, <https://www.uttryckmagazine.com/2022/06/15/caspian-sea-vs-caspian-lake-a-unique-body-of-water/>.

⁹⁹⁷ "Azerbaijan: Aliyev defends his record on rights," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, April 26, 2006, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1067985.html>.

⁹⁹⁸ "Azerbaijan warns against Iran sanctions," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, October 27, 2006, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1072356.html>.

On October 16, 2007, Aliyev visited Iran to attend the 2nd Summit of Caspian Sea Littoral States in Tehran,⁹⁹⁹ where he met with the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. These meetings were considered significant steps in strengthening diplomatic relations between the two countries. Although no consensus was reached on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, the signed declaration included key agreements: sovereignty over the Caspian Sea belongs to the five littoral states; no littoral state will allow foreign forces to use its territory for attacks against another littoral state; and only ships flying the flags of the five littoral states may navigate the Caspian Sea.¹⁰⁰⁰

The declaration, signed after the meeting, comprised three main sections. The first section emphasized the parties' intent to cooperate in political, economic, cultural, and diplomatic fields. The second addressed the determination of the Caspian Sea's legal status, sustainable use of natural resources, and environmental protection. The third focused on regional security, peaceful resolution processes, and measures against international threats.¹⁰⁰¹

The year 2008 saw not only by a calm atmosphere in Azerbaijan-Iran relations but also by noteworthy developments. While political interactions between the two states kept going, two significant events shaped bilateral affairs during this period. In the first, Azerbaijan released a shipment of equipment destined for Iran's Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant from Russia after nearly a month-long delay. According to an unofficial statement from an Azerbaijani State Customs Committee official, the shipment passed through the Astara customs checkpoint on the Iranian border on May 1, 2008. However, the cargo, reportedly consisting of thermal insulation equipment, had been held by Azerbaijan since March 29, 2008, because Azerbaijani

⁹⁹⁹ "Second Summit of Caspian Sea Littoral States opens in Tehran," *AZƏRTAC*, October 16, 2007, <https://azertag.az/en/print/569765>.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Mithat Çelikpala, "İlham Aliyev Dönemi Azərbaycan Dış Politikası: Sorunlar, Öncelikler ve İlişkiler," in *Kafkasya'nın Yükselen Yıldızı İlham Aliyev Döneminde Azerbaycan*, ed. Çağrı Erhan, 252-296, (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları, 2013), 291.

¹⁰⁰¹ "Azərbaycan Respublikası, İran İslam Respublikası, Qazaxıstan Respublikası, Rusiya Federasiyası və Türkmənistanın Bəyannaməsi," Rəqəmsal İnkişaf və Nəqliyyat Nazirliyi Dövlət Dəniz və Liman Agentliyi, accessed May 4, 2024, <https://ddla.gov.az/pdfs/Tehran%20Convention%20azeri.pdf>.

authorities requested additional information from Russia regarding its nature. For this delay, Azerbaijani officials raised their concerns that the equipment might violate UN sanctions. During this one-month-long time, Atomstroieexport, the Russian state company constructing the Bushehr plant, accused Azerbaijan of purposefully slowed down the shipment. This action of Azerbaijan occurred within international debates over Iran's nuclear program, causing a brief worsening in relations between the two states.¹⁰⁰²

One reason for the lack of tension in security relations with Iran in 2009 was Azerbaijan's decision not to offer the radar station it received back from Russia for US use. The joint use of Russia's Gabala radar station in Azerbaijan by the US was not possible. Experts of the time noted that the effectiveness of such a radar was low due to the region's proximity to Iran. Both the inadequacy of the Gabala radar against Iranian threats and the existing problems in NATO-Russia relations have made it difficult to reach a common point on missile defense between Moscow and Washington. This situation has also been seen as useful for Azerbaijan, which does not want a Western radar in its territory that would confront Iran.¹⁰⁰³

The 3rd Summit of Caspian Sea Littoral States, in 2010, despite the heads of state of the five coastal countries coming together, has once again failed to resolve the long-standing disputes regarding the legal status of the Caspian Sea. Only one significant agreement was signed at the summit, which appeared far from providing equal benefits to the participating countries. Leaders have stated that negotiations should continue to determine the legal status of this sea.¹⁰⁰⁴

Despite its negative outcome, this summit, although aimed at determining the status of the Caspian Sea, was more prominent in terms of bilateral relations between Iran

¹⁰⁰² "Azerbaijan releases Russian equipment for Iran's Bushehr Nuclear Plant," *AZƏRTAC*, May 1, 2008, <https://www.foxnews.com/story/azerbaijan-releases-russian-equipment-for-irans-bushehr-nuclear-plant>.

¹⁰⁰³ "Washington's use of Gabala radar station in Azerbaijan is not question of near future: experts," *Trend News Agency*, September 22, 2009, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/1545110.html>.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Bruce Pannier, "Caspian Summit fails to clarify status, resource issues," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, November 19, 2010, https://www.rferl.org/a/Caspian_Summit_Fails_To_Clarify_Status_Resource_Issues/2225159.html.

and Azerbaijan. Though Iranian President did not return from this visit with any concrete gains, this visit was seen as an indication of Baku's desire to remain indifferent to the sanctions imposed on Iran by the USA and the EU. During the visit, Ahmadinejad stated in a meeting with President Aliyev that they had similar views on international issues. In the official interviews broadcast only on government-affiliated television channels, the two leaders were avoided from being asked questions about problematic issues.¹⁰⁰⁵

In addition to the scarcity of diplomatic visits between the two states, security concerns came to the forefront in Azerbaijan-Iran relations in 2011, leading to incidents that caused indirect tensions compared to previous years. At the beginning of the year, Movsum Samadov, the leader of the banned Azerbaijan Islamic Party (AIP), and four other party members were detained for resisting the police and were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 10 to 15 days.¹⁰⁰⁶

On October 6, 2011, Iran Chief of Staff Hassan Firouzabadi accused the Azerbaijani government of acting "against Islamic principles." In comments to the Fars News Agency, Firouzabadi said President Aliyev "*could be left with a dark future he cannot suppress the people's awakening.*" The Iranian Embassy in Baku has described these remarks as a "*misunderstanding.*"¹⁰⁰⁷

Shortly after this statement, on August 11, 2011, an operation was carried out against three members of the AIP in Azerbaijan. AIP vice chairman Arif Ganiyev, party member Abgul Suleymanov, and Ramin Bayramov, editor of the news site "islam-azeri.az," were detained on charges of possessing illegal weapons and drugs. In a joint statement by the Ministry of National Security of Azerbaijan and the Prosecutor General's Office, it was alleged that Suleymanov received financial support from Iran's Baku Cultural Center to establish a radical group called "*Jafari.*" It has been

¹⁰⁰⁵ Shahin Abbasov, "Azerbaijan: Baku engages Iran, despite sanctions," *Eurasianet*, November 19, 2010, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-baku-engages-iran-despite-sanctions>.

¹⁰⁰⁶ "Azerbaijani Islamic Party members arrested, sentenced," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, January 10, 2011, https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan_islamic_party_arrests/2272207.html.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Joshua Kucera, "Iranian General makes veiled threat against Azerbaijan," *Eurasianet*, August 16, 2011, <https://eurasianet.org/iranian-general-makes-veiled-threat-against-azerbaijan>.

alleged that this group promoted religious radicalism and distributed brochures aimed at expanding hostility towards other religions among Islamic believers. The Iranian Embassy has refused to comment on these allegations and has remained silent on the matter.¹⁰⁰⁸

The biggest development in this matter occurred at the end of the year. On October 7, 2011, Movsum Samadov and six party members were tried by the Baku High Criminal Court on charges of attempting to overthrow the government, and Samadov was sentenced to 12 years, while the other members received prison sentences ranging from 10 to 12 years.¹⁰⁰⁹

Moreover, an armed conflict that occurred in 2011 on the Azerbaijan-Iran border has been a development that raised security concerns between the two states. On July 3, 2011, a conflict occurred near the border post in the village of Arvana, in the Yardımlı region of Azerbaijan, involving armed individuals attempting to cross the border from Iran's territory. During the incident, Border Services Detachment Commander Lieutenant Rufat Guliyev was severely injured and died while being transported to the outpost. As a result of the intervention by the border guards, the attackers fled to Iran's territory.¹⁰¹⁰

However, what brought the relations to a crisis level, according to a report in the *London Times* in February 2012, was the allegation that Israel used Azerbaijan as a base for intelligence activities against Iran. It has been claimed that agents of the Israeli intelligence service MOSSAD have established a wide network along the Azerbaijan-Iran border to monitor its adversary's activities. Furthermore, the report has been stated that Israel's intelligence activities in this region are increasing, and

¹⁰⁰⁸ "Iran declines comment on Baku's Islamic activist accusations," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, August 15, 2011, https://www.rferl.org/a/iran_declines_comment_baku_islamic_activist_accusations/24297463.html.

¹⁰⁰⁹ "Islamic Party of Azerbaijan head jailed for 12 years," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, October 7, 2011, https://www.rferl.org/a/islamic_party_of_azerbaijan_head_jailed_for_12_years/24352745.html.

¹⁰¹⁰ "Shooting on Azerbaijan-Iran border leaves one border guard dead," *Trend News Agency*, July 4, 2011, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/other/1900251.html>.

since Iran's Revolutionary Guards were also active in the area, a "shadow intelligence war" was taking place between the two sides.¹⁰¹¹

Azerbaijan has firmly denied allegations that it cooperated with Israeli intelligence services and helped in the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists. The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry argued that Iran's complaint was related to two people arrested last month on suspicion of planning to carry out assassinations of prominent Israeli citizens in Azerbaijan and who were allegedly linked to Iranian intelligence.¹⁰¹²

Similarly, the Azerbaijani government has highly denied the claims published in Foreign Policy magazine that Israel has gained access to air bases in Azerbaijan for potential airstrikes on nuclear targets in Iran. It has stated that these claims were made by "foreign powers" trying to create problems between Azerbaijan and Iran.¹⁰¹³

However, Azerbaijan's persistent strategic relations with Israel and the increased cooperation in both energy and military fields have further increased tensions with Iran. Likewise, both the proposal by some Azerbaijani PMs to change the state's name to "North Azerbaijan", and Iran's close relations with Azerbaijan's regional rival, Armenia, have further heightened this tension. The reason for Azerbaijan distancing itself from Iran is the previously mentioned incident where two Azerbaijani citizens, linked to Iranian intelligence, were caught while preparing to assassinate foreign public officials. President Aliyev has stated that relations with Israel will continue following these assassination allegations.¹⁰¹⁴

When looking at the state of Azerbaijan's air power in 2012, the military cooperation with Israel becomes more understandable. To protect its airspace, Azerbaijan, which

¹⁰¹¹ Sara Ghasemilee, "Israel's Mossad is using Azerbaijan to spy on Iran: reports" *Al Arabiya*, February 12, 2012, <https://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012%2F02%2F12%2F194168>.

¹⁰¹² "Azerbaijan rejects Iran's Israel spy claim," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, February 13, 2012, https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan_rejects_irans_israel_spy_claim/24482854.html.

¹⁰¹³ "Azerbaijan denies giving Israel air-base access," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, March 29, 2012, https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan_denies_giving_israel_air_base_access/24531187.html.

¹⁰¹⁴ Ghasemilee, "Israel's Mossad."

had not been able to obtain the desired fighter jets from Western powers even to this day and was seeking an alternative to the metal-fatigued Russian fighter jets, needed strong air dominance to liberate its occupied territories. This led Azerbaijan to enter into military cooperation with Türkiye and Pakistan in the following years, and with Israel in the 2010s.¹⁰¹⁵

In 2012, because of this cooperation, Israel approved a sale agreement worth approximately \$1.6 billion to Azerbaijan for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), air defense, and missile systems. This agreement with the state-supported Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) has been confirmed by officials from the Israeli Ministry of Defense. Officials have stated that the agreement has no direct connection to Iran's nuclear program or attempts by Iranian agents to attack Israeli diplomats. Similarly, according to reports, Israel sold 60 unmanned aerial vehicles to Azerbaijan in 2011. And some of these vehicles were used by the Azerbaijani Air Force over front line in Karabakh. In this context, as part of Azerbaijan's efforts to enhance its defense capabilities, discussions on joint unmanned aerial vehicle production with Israel have also come to the spotlight.¹⁰¹⁶

In one of the important studies conducted during this period, Anar Valiyev noted that Azerbaijan was the main catalyst in the deterioration of Azerbaijan-Iran relations, which had been described as “negatively neutral” for many years and where neither side provoked the other until 2011. According to Valiyev, Azerbaijan has adopted a bolder stance during this period compared to previous years. So much so that, although Azerbaijan claimed that it did not purchase the \$1.6 billion worth of weapons from Israel in February 2012 to target Iran; the argument was made that some systems, such as anti-ship missiles, could only be used in the Caspian Sea.¹⁰¹⁷

¹⁰¹⁵ Ilya Roubanis, “The strategic significance of Azerbaijan's acquisition of Pakistani fighter jets,” *European Security & Defence*, May 17, 2024, <https://euro-sd.com/2024/05/articles/38065/the-strategic-significance-of-azerbajians-acquisition-of-pakistani-fighter-jets>.

¹⁰¹⁶ “Israel sells drones, missiles to Azerbaijan,” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, February 27, 2012, https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan_israel_iran_missiles_drones/24496978.html.

¹⁰¹⁷ “Azerbaijan's Israeli weapons: A lot for Armenia, but a little for Iran, too?” *Eurasianet*, April 12, 2012, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbajians-israeli-weapons-a-lot-for-armenia-but-a-little-for-iran-too>.

At the same time, Azerbaijan conducted a large-scale military exercise in the Caspian Sea. While this exercise was conducted with hundreds of soldiers and various equipment, it focused on vital infrastructure protection exercises such as sinking enemy submarines. These developments, occurring during a period when Iran is establishing a new naval unit in the Caspian Sea, indicate that Azerbaijan is increasing its security measures in the region.¹⁰¹⁸

In his evaluations in the following months, Valiyev softened his stance by emphasizing that Azerbaijan had no intention of displaying a hostile attitude towards Iran. Evaluating the agenda more carefully, Valiyev stated that Azerbaijan allowing Israel to use its territory would be a suicidal move and that such an action would lead to serious retaliation from Iran. In addition, he claimed that the collective loyalty of the approximately 20 million Azerbaijanis in Iran is towards the state they live in and that this population does not expect to be “liberated” by the Republic of Azerbaijan. Finally, he supported his argument with examples, stating that Azerbaijan has been trying to maintain diplomatic neutrality and has avoided actions that could be perceived as hostile towards Iran. For example, in December 2011, Azerbaijan did not allow a NATO AWACS aircraft to pass through its airspace, which could create the perception of supporting intelligence-gathering activities against Iran. Valiyev added that Israel was behind the emergence of such claims. He claimed that by exaggerating military cooperation with itself, Israel aims to increase tensions between the two neighboring countries and disrupt the sensitive balance of relations between Baku and Tehran.¹⁰¹⁹

In addition to this view, according to Mamedov, the tension between Iran and Azerbaijan has benefited the political elites on both sides. Although factors such as ideology, religion, and nationalism have played a role in this tension, it has been stated that these elements alone are insufficient to explain the current situation. It has been stated that the main determining factor is the survival strategies of the ruling

¹⁰¹⁸ Anar Valiyev, “Azerbaijan-Iran Relations: Quo Vadis, Baku?,” *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* 244, (2012): 3-4.

¹⁰¹⁹ Anar Valiyev, “Critical time for Azerbaijan-Iranian relations,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 9, no. 80, (2012).

classes of both states. From Azerbaijan's perspective, Iran has been seen as a suitable enemy to increase support both domestically and internationally. From Iran's perspective, Azerbaijan does not pose as great a threat as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and its occasional characterization as the "Western puppet" has served the interests of the ruling elites in Tehran.¹⁰²⁰

One of the radical groups in Azerbaijan that Iran is said to support, the AIP, has also started to become visible again in 2013. At an opposition protest on August 18, 2013, the party's female members drew attention with their demands for both religious rights and social issues. The party's leader, Movsum Samadov, was accused in October 2011 of being involved in an Iran-backed coup attempt and, along with the party's executives, was sentenced to 12 years in prison. The AIP has been viewed in the past as a tool used by Iran to increase its influence in Azerbaijan, while Iran's such initiatives have been interpreted as attempts to interfere in Azerbaijan's political dynamics.¹⁰²¹

Such developments have shown that bilateral relations continue to be tense. Another one of these events occurred in November 2013. An incident of gunfire along the Iran-Azerbaijan border led to the closure of the border between the two states for several days. The incident began when a tractor working on the banks of the Aras River was fired upon by an assailant in military uniform, according to the Azerbaijani side. No injuries occurred in the incident. However, the Azerbaijani side claimed that the person who fired was an Iranian soldier and demanded an explanation from Iran. When they did not receive a response, they decided to close the Shahtakhti border gate. The escalation of this minor incident has once again highlighted the deep-seated mistrust between Baku and Tehran.¹⁰²²

¹⁰²⁰ Eldar Mamedov, "Azerbaijan: Baku-Tehran tension useful for elites on both sides," *Eurasianet*, July 31, 2012, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-baku-tehran-tension-useful-for-elites-on-both-sides>.

¹⁰²¹ Shahla Sultanova, "Azerbaijan: Female believers see opportunity in opposition protests," *Eurasianet*, October 7, 2013, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-female-believers-see-opportunity-in-opposition-protests>.

¹⁰²² Joshua Kucera, "After shooting, lengthy Iran-Azerbaijan border closure," *Eurasianet*, November 12, 2013, <https://eurasianet.org/after-shooting-lengthy-iran-azerbaijan-border-closure>.

On November 25-26, 2015, Azerbaijani security forces conducted a special operation in the town of Nardaran, located 25 kilometers northeast of the capital. The aim of this operation was to neutralize the Muslim Unity Movement (MUM), a militant Shia organization. At the end of the operation, seven people, including five locals and two police officers, lost their lives. The arrest of the group's prominent Shia cleric and leader, Taleh Bağırzade, along with 14 of his accomplices, also triggered mass protests in the town.¹⁰²³

The effects of this incident in Iran were quickly heard. On December 10, 2015, Iranian news agencies reported that dozens of Iranians staged a protest in front of the Azerbaijani Consulate in Tabriz to demonstrate against the alleged "Shia killings" in Nardaran. Protesters accused the Azerbaijani authorities of repressing the Shia community in Azerbaijan and carried placards with the names and pictures of people they described as "Nardaran martyrs." Nardaran, known as a bastion of Shia Islam, is home to hardline clerics influenced by Iran, who often clash with the secular government in Baku. The raids were criticized by Iranian MPs and religious figures.¹⁰²⁴

As of 2017, incidents such as allegations of Iranian interference in Azerbaijan's internal affairs and the arrest of 18 people accused of planning a coup on behalf of Iran have caused tension in the relations between the two countries, but this has not prevented the development of military cooperation.¹⁰²⁵

Especially with the establishment of the Joint Working Group on Military Cooperation in 2015 and its first meeting in 2017, defense ties are being strengthened. In this context, the visits and the fact that Azerbaijani naval ships

¹⁰²³ Emil Aslan Souleimanov, "Azerbaijan, Islamism, and unrest in Nardaran." *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, December 27, 2015. <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13316-azerbaijan-islamism-and-unrest-in-nardaran.html>.

¹⁰²⁴ "Iranians protest outside Azerbaijani Consulate in Tabriz," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, December 10, 2015, <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-protest-azerbaijani-consulate-nardaran/27419640.html>.

¹⁰²⁵ Alex Vatanka, "Iran-Azerbaijan relations hit the rocks over Iranian meddling in Azerbaijani internal affairs," *Middle East Institute*, February 2, 2017, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/iran-azerbaijan-relations-hit-rocks-over-iranian-meddling-azerbaijani-internal-affairs>.

visited Iran for the first time highlight the increase in military contacts. Although there are doubts about potential arms purchases from Iran because Azerbaijan's close military relations with Israel, weapons were mentioned among the undisclosed arms sales in Iranian state media, specifically by the Iran's Armament Industries Group (AIG). Although these products are on the West's sanctions list, military cooperation between the two states has focused more on reducing potential tensions.¹⁰²⁶

9.5. Economics

On December 7, 2005, President Ilham Aliyev met with Iran's new President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for the first time during the 3rd Extraordinary Summit of the OIC in Mecca. In the meeting, Aliyev extended his condolences for the airplane crash in Iran. He also stated that relations between the two states were successfully developing in various fields, particularly in the economy and energy sectors. He further noted that the next transfer of natural gas from Iran to Nakhchivan, based on a gas exchange arrangement, would serve as a strong example of the successful progress in bilateral relations. Ahmadinejad, in turn, expressed gratitude for the condolences and voiced his satisfaction with the development of bilateral ties. Moreover, he emphasized his belief that relations based on the shared historical values of the two peoples would grow further in the future.¹⁰²⁷

Shortly after this meeting, on December 20, 2005, Iranian President Ahmadinejad visited the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (NAR). And a meeting between the two Presidents took place during the visit. As part of the visit, the Presidents signed the "Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Energy between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran," while the Foreign Ministers signed the "Memorandum of Understanding on the Utilization of Development Assistance between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran." Both Presidents attended a large

¹⁰²⁶ Zaur Shiriyeu, "Iran and Azerbaijan boosting military ties," *Eurasianet*, November 1, 2017, <https://eurasianet.org/iran-and-azerbaijan-boosting-military-ties>.

¹⁰²⁷ "Meeting of the President of Azerbaijan with the President of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad," *AZƏRTAC*, December 7, 2005, <https://azertag.az/en/print/558532>.

ceremony that same day to celebrate the natural gas supply to NAR through Iran. This event took place as a significant milestone in bilateral cooperation.^{1028 1029}

In the joint declaration announced after a meeting on August 21, 2007, the sides emphasized the importance of strengthening bilateral cooperation in political, economic, cultural, and humanitarian fields. They highlighted the necessity of implementing joint projects in strategic sectors such as energy, transportation, and communication. In addition, the sides stressed the need to take steps to strengthen mutual cooperation in border areas and expressed their commitment to supporting joint initiatives through international organizations.¹⁰³⁰

The year 2009, much like 2008, passed in a calm atmosphere in Azerbaijan-Iran relations. Cooperation between the two countries continued through diplomatic engagements and mutual visits. President Ilham Aliyev received Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki on February 19, 2009¹⁰³¹ and Iranian Border Police Commander Major General Qasem Rezaei on April 24,¹⁰³² Following the meeting with FM Mottaki, the foreign ministers of both countries signed a memorandum together.¹⁰³³

¹⁰²⁸ “Naxçıvan Muxtar Respublikasının İran İslam Respublikası ilə əlaqələrinin xronologiyası:” İran İslam Respublikasının Səfirliyi – Naxçıvan, accessed April 12, 2024, <https://nakhchivan.mfa.ir/az/generalcategoryservices/12688>.

¹⁰²⁹ Despite having a consulate general in Nakhchivan, it is noteworthy that the official website of this consulate refers to it as the “Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.” According to diplomatic conventions, embassies are exclusively located in a country’s capital. While Iranian officials affirm their commitment to Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity during bilateral meetings, they undertake actions on the ground that do not align with this rhetoric. This indicates a discrepancy between their stated position and practical actions.

¹⁰³⁰ “Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin və İran İslam Respublikası Prezidentinin Birgə Bəyanatı,” October 19, 2007, e-qanun.az, accessed May 4, 2024, https://frameworks.e-qanun.az/14/f_14059.html.

¹⁰³¹ “President Ilham Aliyev receives Iranian delegation led by FM Manouchehr Mottaki,” *AZƏRTAC*, February 19, 2009, <https://azertag.az/en/print/581079>.

¹⁰³² “Meetings of the President of Azerbaijan H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev,” *Diplomatiya Aləmi* no. 23, (2009): 11.

¹⁰³³ “Azerbaijan, Iran sign Memorandum on results of 7th meeting of Joint Intergovernmental Commission,” *AZƏRTAC*, February 19, 2009, <https://azertag.az/en/print/581080>.

This memorandum, which had 76 articles and 8 sections, was intended to improve economic, commercial, and humanitarian cooperation between the two states. The first section addressed projects related to energy, industry, and renewable energy resources. The second one was about improving transportation infrastructure and enhancing border crossings. The third section is centered on increasing trade volume and promoting investments. The fourth covered the development of telecommunications and postal services. The fifth section included issues such as the sharing of genetic material in agriculture and the advancement of agricultural technologies. The sixth one focused on border rules and efforts enhancing crossings. The seventh one was for promoting cooperation in the areas of culture, tourism, education, and health. Finally, the eighth section described the formation of working groups to implement the memorandum and the principles for future meetings.¹⁰³⁴

The year 2010 also featured significant meetings between the leaders of Azerbaijan and Iran. On June 8, during the 3rd Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia held in Istanbul, President Ilham Aliyev met with Iran President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.¹⁰³⁵

Later, on November 17, 2010, President Ahmadinejad paid an official visit to Azerbaijan as part of the 3rd Summit of Caspian Sea Littoral States.¹⁰³⁶ He held face-to-face and broader meetings with President Aliyev. During these discussions, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed, covering cooperation in the fields of energy and transportation.¹⁰³⁷ President Aliyev met with Iranian Oil Minister Masoud Mir Kazemi on January 12, 2011, and according to the agreement between

¹⁰³⁴ “Azərbaycan Respublikası və İran İslam Respublikası arasında iqtisadi, ticarət və humanitar sahələrdə əməkdaşlıq üzrə Dövlətlərarası Müştərək Komissiyanın 7-ci iclasının nəticələri barədə Memorandum,” April 14, 2009, e-qanun.az, accessed May 4, 2024, <https://e-qanun.az/framework/16805>.

¹⁰³⁵ “Azerbaijan’s President meets Iranian counterpart in Istanbul,” *AZƏRTAC*, June 8, 2010, <https://azertag.az/en/print/592083>.

¹⁰³⁶ Giorgi Lomsadze, “Iran’s Ahmadinejad to visit Azerbaijan,” *Eurasianet*, November 10, 2010, <https://eurasianet.org/irans-ahmadinejad-to-visit-azerbaijan>.

¹⁰³⁷ “Azerbaijan, Iran sign MoU on energy and transport cooperation,” *AZƏRTAC*, November 17, 2010, <https://azertag.az/en/print/599245>.

the delegations, Iran committed to purchasing 1 billion cubic meters of natural gas from Azerbaijan.¹⁰³⁸

A MoU designed to further bilateral cooperation in the domains of energy and transportation contains 19 sections organized under two main topics. The first heading includes topics related to energy cooperation. This heading aims for joint efforts in the construction of hydroelectric power plants, the integration of electricity transmission lines, the development of alternative energy sources, natural gas trade, and energy storage. The second heading, on the other hand, addresses cooperation in the field of transportation. In this context, the implementation of railway projects, the improvement of infrastructure at border crossing points, and the development of road and air transportation are among the items under this heading.¹⁰³⁹

Shortly after Aliyev's visit on April 9, 2014, Azerbaijan's Ambassador to Iran, Javanshir Ahundov, emphasized during a meeting with Zanjan province officials as part of a visit to Iranian provinces, that Zanjan offers great opportunities to develop cooperation with Azerbaijani regions due to its geographical location, rich underground resources, favorable climate, and potential in the field of medicine.¹⁰⁴⁰

9.6. Socio-culture

In 2006, a significant event shaped socio-cultural aspects of Azerbaijan-Iran relations. It was the cartoon crisis, which insulted the Turkic population in Southern Azerbaijan, and the second was President Aliyev's negative stance toward the coalition being formed in the West against Iran. The cartoon crisis started with student protests in Tabriz on May 22, 2006, after a controversial cartoon published in the May 19, 2006 weekly supplement of the Tehran-based state newspaper named

¹⁰³⁸ "Azerbaijan, Iran sign Agreement on natural gas deal Azerbaijan agrees to supply 1 BCM natural gas to Iran in 2010," *AZƏRTAC*, January 12, 2011, <https://azertag.az/en/print/601438>.

¹⁰³⁹ "Azərbaycan Respublikası Hökuməti və İran İslam Respublikası Hökuməti arasında enerji və nəqliyyat sahəsində əməkdaşlıq haqqında Anlaşma Memorandumu," December 27, 2010, *e-qanun.az*, accessed May 21, 2024, <https://e-qanun.az/framework/21090>.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Sara Rajabova, "Iran's Zanjan province and Azerbaijan's regions can enhance cooperation: Ambassador," *Azernews*, April 23, 2014, <https://www.azernews.az/business/66344.html>.

Iran. The cartoon depicted a cockroach speaking in Azerbaijani Turkish, that ignited unrest. Although it was a government-affiliated publication, Iranian authorities blamed the ethnic tensions caused by this incident to enemies of the state, namely the U.S., Israel, and the UK. Iranian officials reacted rapidly to the publication of the cartoon. Cabinet members condemned it as an “insult to the entirety of the Iranian people,” while the judiciary ordered the indefinite closure of the newspaper named *Iran* and the arrest of its editor-in-chief and cartoonist. As protests continued, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad claimed in a televised address on May 25 that the incident was a conspiracy related to Iran’s peaceful nuclear ambitions, accusing Western countries of orchestrating it. On May 28, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei joined the debate, asserting that the crisis was artificially created by the US to justify an attack on Iran. However, some experts, including Turaj Atabaki, criticized the Iranian government responsible for the crisis, ignoring any potential Western influence. Since the short-lived Azerbaijan People’s Government of 1945-1946, Azerbaijanis in Iran, has been constituted a significant portion of the population, have faced ethnic-based suppression. Despite Azerbaijani Turks in Iran had begun gaining some rights in the 1990s, these were revoked under Ahmadinejad’s administration in the 2000s. Consequently, some analysts argued that the crisis could act as a spark for Azerbaijan’s national movement because the protests extended beyond the cartoon issue. Although every aspect of the events from May 2006 remains unclear, reports indicate that the swiftly suppressed demonstrations resulted in fatalities.¹⁰⁴¹

However, during and after this crisis, the Republic of Azerbaijan did not issue any official statements. The primary reason for this was the country’s reluctance, under President Aliyev’s administration, to directly confront Iran. Meanwhile, during visit of Ahmadinejad, on August 21, 2007, activists accusing the Tehran administration of suppressing the national and cultural rights of millions of Azerbaijani Turks living in Southern Azerbaijan planned a protest in front of Iran embassy in Baku. One of the activists, Agri Qaradagli, a member of the Southern Azerbaijan National Awakening Movement (SANAM), stated that they would demand the release of Southern

¹⁰⁴¹ Jean-Christophe Peuch, “Iran: Cartoon protests point to growing frustration among Azeris,” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, May 31, 2006, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1068797.html>.

Azerbaijani political prisoners in Iran. The protest, however, was prevented by police, with at least nine individuals attempting to gather in front of the embassy detained, and photojournalists' cameras confiscated.¹⁰⁴²

Although the Ilham Aliyev's administration remained silent on the demands of Southern Azerbaijanis to preserve their identity, it chosen to avoid direct confrontation with Iran as was seen during the Elchibey era. However, the continued activities of SANAM in Baku and the recognition of Turks in Iran as part of the Azerbaijani people suggested a potential shift in state policies in the future. For instance, in an interview with the French newspaper *Le Figaro* on January 29, 2007, Ilham Aliyev stated that Azerbaijan would not open its airspace for a Western intervention against Iran, citing the presence of nearly 30 million Azerbaijanis living there.¹⁰⁴³ This statement in 2007 demonstrated that the Azerbaijani government had started to consider the Azerbaijanis in Southern Iran within its sphere of interest.

The other incident occurred during the summer of 2008. The arrest of activist Vedud Asadi shortly after his wedding brought renewed attention to Iran's pressures on Azerbaijani Turks. Asadi, known for advocating the rights of Southern Azerbaijanis, was detained by secret police on July 22, 2008, following his wedding. For Asadi's family, use of the Azerbaijani flag on wedding cake's and the event's following of Azerbaijani customs were the main causes of his arrest. His sister, Sumayya Asadi, said that during the police search of their home, they specifically demanded the wedding recording and confiscated his computer. This event once again showed how Turks being oppressed in Southern Azerbaijan and how they being struggled for their mother tongue rights.¹⁰⁴⁴

However, the Azerbaijani government did not make any official statement or take any action regarding Vedud Asadi's arrest. Furthermore, two key incidents happened

¹⁰⁴² "Iranian President wraps up visit to Azerbaijan."

¹⁰⁴³ "Azərbaycan Prezidenti İlham Əliyevin Fransanın "Fiqaro" qəzetinə müsahibəsi," *AZƏRTAC*, January 29, 2007, <https://azertag.az/print/367250>.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Khadija Ismayilova, "Traditional Azeri wedding leads to groom's arrest in Iran," *Radio Free Europe* / *Radio Liberty*, July 25, 2008, https://www.rferl.org/a/Traditional_Azeri_Wedding_Leads_To_Arrest_In_Iran/1186350.html.

in 2010 that may have strained relations between two states. In the first instance, the Azerbaijani government made a decision to remove religious symbols from public institutions. This decision came after a clash on February 13, 2010 in Baku between police and a group of Islamist activists. Members of the outlawed Azerbaijan Islamic Party (AIP), which supports Iran, coordinated the rally. It has been suggested that the protests are linked to Iran's attempts to increase its religious influence over Azerbaijan. However, Azerbaijani government officials have refrained from openly criticizing Iran regarding the protests, emphasizing the importance of good relations with Iran and advocating for more constructive approach should be taken in this matter.¹⁰⁴⁵

In the second instance, the flood disaster that occurred in southeastern Azerbaijan in May 2010, has become a new source of tension. As a result of the Kura River overflowing, 12 villages were evacuated, and settlements like Sabirabad faced a significant flood threat. Azerbaijani officials have cited Iran's manipulations of dams on the Araz River at the border as the reasons for this. An Azerbaijani official claimed that Iran has been releasing excessive water from the Hudafarin Dam, located in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, into the Araz River. An Azerbaijani MP has claimed that Iran aims to create tension against Azerbaijan with this move. However, the Iranian embassy in Baku denied this kind of claim, describing them as "baseless and irresponsible." And it stated that the amount of water in the Hudafarin Dam had been reduced, resulting in less water being released into the Araz River.¹⁰⁴⁶

Another event that strained the relationship between the two states during this period was the protests that erupted over the drying up of Lake Urmia. While the majority of the lake is located in the provinces of East and West Azerbaijan regions of IRI, Azerbaijanis living in these regions participated in the protests with both environmental and political demands. The most well-known of these protests, which

¹⁰⁴⁵ Abbasov, Shahin, "Report: Azerbaijan bans Koran, Islamic symbols in government offices," *Eurasianet*, February 25, 2010, <https://eurasianet.org/report-azerbaijan-bans-koran-islamic-symbols-in-government-offices>.

¹⁰⁴⁶ "Azerbaijani officials blame Iran for flooding," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, May 11, 2010. [https://www.rferl.org/a/Azerbaijani Officials Blame Iran For Flooding/2039136.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/Azerbaijani%20Officials%20Blame%20Iran%20For%20Flooding/2039136.html).

transformed from environmental crisis protests to anti-government protests, erupted on August 27, 2011, after the Iranian Parliament rejected a proposed project to increase the lake's water level. These protests have also affected on Iran's relations with the Azerbaijan. Baku had been voicing its concerns regarding the cultural and political rights of the large Azerbaijani population in Iran for some time. In this context, the mistreatment of this population has continued to emerge as a significant source of tension in the relations between the two states.¹⁰⁴⁷

Despite all these tensions, in 2011, thousands of Azerbaijanis turned to Iran to meet their basic needs due to the rapidly rising food prices in Azerbaijan. Especially low-income citizens preferred to shop in Iran at more affordable prices in the face of high food prices in Azerbaijan. The crowding experienced in the border city of Astara has been considered a reflection of the rising food prices in Azerbaijan. This situation, while increasing border trade, has been seen more as an event affecting mutual economic dependence rather than creating a structural change in the relations.¹⁰⁴⁸

The tension between the two countries continued in the cultural field in 2013. The addition of a traditional sport called *chovgan*, played with short Karabakh horses, to UNESCO's "intangible cultural heritage" list has provoked a reaction from Iran. While Azerbaijan has emphasized the role of the state in the preservation and promotion of this sport, Iran has recognized this game, known as *chogan*, as a Persian heritage and accuses Azerbaijan of registering this cultural heritage in its own name. Iran has stated that this sport is also played in the northern provinces of Iran, which Azerbaijan defines as South Azerbaijan, and has claimed that Azerbaijan shows these regions as part of the Republic of Azerbaijan.¹⁰⁴⁹

¹⁰⁴⁷ Golnaz Esfandiari, "Dying lake gives new life to Iran's antigovernment protests," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, September 1, 2011, https://www.rferl.org/a/dying_lake_revives_iran_protests/24314925.html.

¹⁰⁴⁸ "As food prices spike, Azerbaijanis endure border chaos to shop in Iran," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, March 14, 2011, https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan_food_prices_rise_iran_border/2337812.html.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Andy Heil, "Iran claims to thwart Azerbaijani cultural imperialism at UNESCO," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, December 5, 2013, <https://www.rferl.org/a/unesco-azerbaijan-iran-dispute-polo/25191067.html>.

9.7. Conclusion

This chapter has carefully unveiled the complex fabric of the relations between Azerbaijan and Iran and their fluctuating course over time. The ties between the two neighboring countries have been shaped not only by their deep historical and cultural heritage but also by geopolitical dynamics, ethnic sensitivities, and differing state understandings. At the heart of the relations lies the presence of millions of Azerbaijani Turks living in Iran. This situation has occasionally triggered Iran's internal security concerns since the early years of Azerbaijan's independence, leading to tensions in mutual rhetoric. The fundamental differences between Azerbaijan's secular state structure and Iran's theocratic regime, the influence of religious groups, and foreign policy orientations have created a constant area of sensitivity in their relations.

Diplomatic initiatives and high-level visits, while bringing periods of thawing and a search for cooperation in relations, have not always been able to create a lasting atmosphere of trust. The failure of steps such as visa exemptions to find a response or the diplomatic crises experienced through cultural events have shown how fragile relationships can be. However, the recent joint exercises and the rapprochement between leaders indicate a new period where mutual interests and regional stability have taken precedence. The security dimension constitutes a critical axis in Azerbaijan-Iran relations. The irreconcilable disputes over the status of the Caspian Sea and Iran's display of military power have been a situation requiring constant attention for Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's military cooperation with Western countries and Israel, especially in the field of defense technologies, has provoked strong reactions from Iran. Military exercises conducted at the border and differing approaches to regional transportation projects have occasionally laid the groundwork for rising military tensions between the two countries. However, these situations can also be seen as a reflection of Azerbaijan's efforts to maintain regional security balance.

In the economic field, energy and transportation projects have formed the basis of cooperation. Issues such as meeting Nakhchivan's energy needs and developing

regional transportation networks have emerged as areas of mutual benefit. However, political tensions have been a factor preventing economic relations from reaching their full potential. Although socio-cultural ties reflect the deep common heritage between the two peoples, issues of ethnic identity and cultural belonging have sometimes turned into political debates. Issues such as the rights of Azerbaijani Turks in Iran and the appropriation of cultural heritage have created societal sensitivities. Claims about Iran's influence over religious groups in Azerbaijan have raised concerns that cultural and religious ties could be used for political purposes.

In conclusion, Azerbaijan-Iran relations represent a continuous search for balance within the inevitable interaction brought about by historical proximity and geographical adjacency. The fluctuations in the relations reflect different state ideologies, regional power struggles, and internal political sensitivities. Both states, despite occasional tensions, have avoided completely severing their relations due to the need to maintain mutual dependence and regional stability. In the future, it is expected that these relations will continue by maintaining cooperation in areas of mutual interest and managing potential tensions within regional dynamics and global power balances.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

This doctoral thesis examines Azerbaijan's foreign policy during the presidency of Ilham Aliyev. The factors influencing the foreign policy formed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the restoration of independence were the main focus of this thesis. In addition to the relationships established with regional and international organizations, as can be understood from the thesis title, the relationships with Azerbaijan's five neighboring states in particular constituted a significant part of this thesis.

The main objective of this thesis was to understand the fundamental dynamics and motivations of the foreign policy pursued by the Republic of Azerbaijan under the leadership of Ilham Aliyev. In this regard, Azerbaijan's relations with Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Turkey, and Iran have been examined in detail. Moreover, the impact of these relationships on regional and worldwide balances has been demonstrated.

The main limitation of the study was that it covered the period from the day President Ilham Aliyev took office on October 31, 2003, to the present. While this thesis provides a historical background starting from ancient history and tracing the path to the formation of the modern Azerbaijani state for a better understanding of this period, it primarily focuses on developments in the 21st century. In this period, Azerbaijan's relations with its five neighboring states (Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Türkiye, and Iran) have been analyzed under four subheadings (diplomacy, security, economy, and socio-culture). Thus, it has been demonstrated how Azerbaijan's foreign policy varies in different aspects of its relations with its neighbors. Overall, the primary objective of this thesis was to gain a deep understanding of the regional

and international role of Azerbaijan's foreign policy under the ongoing Ilham Aliyev administration. Particularly, the study attempts to explain the reasons for Azerbaijan's diverse and complex foreign policy in its relations with neighboring states.

In doing so, the constructivist approach within the discipline of International Relations was primarily used to better explain Azerbaijan's foreign policy processes. According to the constructivist approach, since the influence of identities, norms, and social structures on the behavior of states is significant, constructivism has provided a suitable framework for explaining Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors, especially in a region like the South Caucasus, where historical, ethnic, and religious identities are diverse.

Because the normative emphasis present in Azerbaijan's foreign policy discourse and actions, and especially the importance given to international law and sovereignty norms, has been consistent with the theses of the constructivist approach. Constructivism, which emphasizes the role of Azerbaijani identity and Azerbaijanism, which are of great importance in shaping Azerbaijan's foreign policy, has made a significant contribution to illuminating the discourse and actions that have taken place in its foreign policy and cannot be explained by material elements.

Thus, this thesis will make a significant contribution to the literature. Because the vast majority of existing works in the literature have addressed Azerbaijan's bilateral relations with neighboring states in a fragmented manner or have focused on only a single topic. However, this thesis analyzes Azerbaijan's relations with all its neighbors, including diplomatic, security, economic, and socio-cultural topics, from a holistic perspective.

This integrated analysis not only reveals Azerbaijan's overall foreign policy strategy but also highlights the unique dynamics of its relations with its neighbors. This will not only add a new dimension to field studies and foreign policy analyzes but will also help policymakers and researchers develop a deeper and more contextual understanding of Azerbaijan's foreign policy behavior.

Therefore, the main research question of this thesis is determined as factors and dynamics that shaped Azerbaijan's foreign policy during the Ilham Aliyev period and how they explain the differentiation and complexity of relations with neighboring states from a constructivist perspective. This question has guided all sections of the study.

While seeking an answer to this fundamental question, attempts were also made to address sub-research questions such as how Azerbaijan's foreign policy priorities have evolved since Ilham Aliyev came to power, to what extent energy resources, defense cooperation, the Karabakh issue, and relations with regional/international organizations have determined interactions with neighbors, and what consequences these bilateral policies have had in terms of regional stability and cooperation. By answering these research questions, the main trends in Azerbaijan's relations with neighboring states, areas of conflict and cooperation, and potential future developments have been addressed more comprehensively.

Consequently, this thesis presents some important findings that describe the unique characteristics of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. First of all, this thesis clearly demonstrates that Azerbaijan's national identity, which has developed over the years, particularly the "Azerbaijanism" ideology and its Turkist infrastructure, is the main determinant in the making of foreign policy decisions.

This national identity shapes the perceptions of decision-makers and influences strategic choices towards each neighboring state. Therefore, it provides a more detailed explanation in understanding the complexity of bilateral relations observed with its neighbors, compared to traditional power-centric or economic model views.

Second, Azerbaijan has successfully demonstrated strategic flexibility and adaptability in decision-making within the variable regional geopolitical landscape. Despite historical disputes and external pressures, Baku, especially in the last twenty years, has avoided unilateral gambits that could jeopardize its sovereignty or security. It has skillfully maintained balanced relations with regional and worldwide powers that are many times larger than itself. Having such a skill is evident in its

careful handling of simultaneous interactions with Western institutions as well as its relations with Russia and Iran.

Third, the Karabakh issue had been the most decisive issue in Azerbaijan's foreign policy for three decades. The successful military resolution of this issue between 2020 and 2023 not only reinforced Azerbaijan's territorial integrity but also deeply shaped regional power dynamics. Thus, for years, concepts such as "diplomatic solution" and "normalization" have been replaced by concepts like "border delineation," "transport corridors," and "refugee returns."

Fourth, when the state's rich hydrocarbon reserves have increased its geopolitical power and facilitated economic development, energy diplomacy has not been the sole determinant of its foreign policy; it has continued to serve as a strategic tool for causes like Karabakh. The energy strategy, on one hand, has enabled multifaceted diplomacy for Azerbaijan, while on the other hand, when official Baku perceived Western support as insufficient regarding security concerns, it actively diversified its foreign policy tools.

Fifth, Azerbaijan's interaction with international and regional organizations exhibits a selective and interest-based approach. Azerbaijan actively participates in organizations like the UN and the OIC for international recognition and support, while avoiding integration into international organizations like CSTO that could harm autonomy in Karabakh or, worse, territorial integrity. This pragmatic multilateralism aimed to both enhance diplomatic influence and secure national interests without compromising strategic independence.

Sixth, continuous and significant investments aimed at developing a strong domestic defense industry and establishing strategic defense collaborations (especially with Türkiye and Israel) are a critical finding. Due to the existence of regional threats, this proactive security approach has significantly increased Azerbaijan's military capabilities and reduced its dependence on a single foreign supplier. The main argument of this thesis, which examines Azerbaijan's foreign policy during the Aliyev period, is that the factors shaping relations with neighboring states are not

limited to geopolitical and economic interests alone but are also deeply influenced by Azerbaijan's constantly evolving national identity and the ideology of "Azerbaijanism." The thesis argues that the perception and policies of this identity and ideology toward neighboring states are interpreted differently, and that this is the fundamental explanatory force behind the observed complex and diverse dynamics.

It has been argued that foreign policy decision-makers are influenced not only by material factors but also by structural factors such as norms imposed by national identity, historical narratives, and collective memory. In this context, it has been argued that the differentiation in neighborly relations cannot be fully understood solely through traditional variables such as power balances or economic dependencies, and that a unique interpretation of the historical and identity-based relationship with each neighbor is a key determinant. This holistic and constructivist approach has made a significant contribution to the field by addressing gaps in the existing literature.

In this context, identity has served as a central mechanism determining the nature of the relationship with each neighbor. For example, the emphasis on historical Soviet legacy and sovereignty norms in relations with Russia has influenced security and energy policies. In relations with Georgia, regional cooperation developing around energy corridors and common interests is dominant, while the identity status of ethnic minorities has occasionally influenced the dynamics. In relations with Armenia, the painful collective memory and perception of national victimhood surrounding the Karabakh issue have complicated normalization processes.

On the other hand, the shared Turkic identity and the "one nation, two states" rhetoric have strengthened diplomatic and security cooperation in relations with Turkey. Finally, the presence of the Azerbaijani population in South Azerbaijan has created both cultural ties and potential sensitivities in relations with Iran. Therefore, the thesis argues that the differentiation in neighborhood relations is not solely due to traditional variables such as power dynamics or economic dependencies, but that the primary determinant is the unique interpretation of the historical and identity-based relationship with each neighbor.

To better understand this argument, it is helpful to describe the conclusions reached in each chapter of case. For example, relations between Azerbaijan and Russia have a complex and multi-layered structure that has been developing for over two states. Most importantly, relations with Russia have developed moderately during the Ilham Aliyev period, influenced by events of past years. The fundamental reason for this is the lack of trust in Russia. With the restoration in 1991, a pro-Russian president like Mutalibov initially came to power, but in subsequent years, both Abulfaz Elchibey and Heydar Aliyev and Ilham Aliyev adopted a stance that was distanced from Russia.

For example, in the new era, in 2004, relations continued with the "Moscow Declaration," but due to the perception of Russia's support for Armenia and Armenians, they were not considered worthy of development by either the public or the state. Therefore, fearing that Russia would once again side with Armenia, Azerbaijan was forced to postpone its plan to resolve the Karabakh conflict militarily in both 2008 and 2016. So much so that Azerbaijan took the risk of taking action on this issue in 2020 after an anti-Moscow government came to power in Armenia through a revolution in 2018.

Even the existence of schools in Azerbaijan providing education in Russian, with student numbers reaching hundreds of thousands, and the formation of a large and economically powerful Azerbaijani diaspora in Russia have not been able to establish trust in relations between the two states. The underlying reason for this is not that Russia is a great power, but rather the perspective developed in Azerbaijani statehood against Moscow. Azerbaijani statehood, which has viewed Russia as a threat to be managed for the past two centuries, continues to set its policies accordingly even during the more stable Ilham Aliyev period.

Unlike Russia, relations with Georgia, which are shaped more by a sense of shared history and future in the Caucasus than by a historical perception of threat, are different. These relations, which were the same during the Soviet period, continued in the same way after the restoration of independence. The approach to Georgia has also developed based on identity. The fact that Azerbaijanis living in Georgia, as an

autochthonous people, did not face the genocide that Azerbaijanis living in Armenia during the dissolution of the Union, allowed relations to continue on a normal course.

Within this balance of trust, the strategic partnership established between Azerbaijan and Georgia during the Ilham Aliyev period has become one of the main pillars of stability and development in the South Caucasus. While energy and transportation projects stand out as both the driving force and the tangible outcome of this relationship, meetings and actions in the fields of diplomacy and security, with Türkiye's participation, have played a critical role in finding joint solutions to regional problems and providing mutual support on the international stage. Especially in the security field, the shared threat perception developed by both states against Russia has fostered close military cooperation and joint exercises. Nevertheless, bilateral relations can be easily damaged by a sudden identity crisis.

Regarding relations with Armenia, as is known, there is a deep-seated animosity between the two peoples that has existed for centuries. Although this hostility surfaced at different points in every period, it exploded in Karabakh after the re-independence in 1991. Thus, with an environment of trust and cooperation established from the outset, both states could move toward joint action against Russia, which they might perceive as a threat. In fact, both states, which are located on natural resource and trade transit routes, could embark on a joint development initiative with the rational policies proposed by realists and liberals.

The gangrene-like nature of the Karabakh issue, which has persisted for nearly thirty years, and Moscow's policy of using this issue to remain in the South Caucasus have delayed the development of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia by at least three decades. Although small conflicts continued afterward, the discourse on normalization between the two countries began after the 44-Day War in 2020, which resulted in Azerbaijan regaining its territorial integrity. While the resolution of the Karabakh issue is an important step toward normalizing relations, there are serious problems facing both states.

When we look at Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations, it is evident that the main reason for the development of these relations is their shared identity. Both states, which share the same ethnic majority (Oghuz), have developed strong relations around this common identity from day one.

This bond, created under the slogan "One nation, two states," has resulted in both states forming deep connections with each other. Therefore, looking at the relationship between the two states solely through the lens of common interests and gains will be insufficient for understanding bilateral relations.

Otherwise, as some anti-Azerbaijani individuals in Türkiye frequently express, the reality that Türkiye, which shares a 328 km border with Armenia, is experiencing hostility with Armenia, while Azerbaijan, which has an 18 km border, is considered a "brotherly" country, will not be understandable from a *Realpolitik* perspective. Although these relations were shaken by a short-lived, identity-based crisis that occurred during the İlham Aliyev period, they improved quickly due to the deep ties between the two states.

However, interestingly, this shared identity with Türkiye, which stems from "brotherhood," does not manifest in relations with Iran, which should be stronger with different shared identities. Iran's theocratic regime and its exclusionary attitude toward Azerbaijanis, who are considered indigenous people by Iran, hinder the development of Azerbaijan's trust in Iran. Similarly, the existence of Azerbaijani nationalism within the Azerbaijani people and state causes concern in Iran that it will fuel separatist ideas within its own borders.

Identity-based insecurity in both states remains a major issue in shaping their foreign policies and establishing bilateral relations. Along with this insecurity, Iran's actions have led to the development of relations with Armenia, a country Azerbaijan has been at war within the region, while also causing Azerbaijan to pursue policies that could be seen as a threat by Iran, even if not directly. In conclusion, the most important finding of this thesis is the unique nature of Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors. The source of this uniqueness is related to the degree of harmony between

the identities of Azerbaijan and its neighbors. Finally, it should be stated that although this thesis aims to examine Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbors, it was not possible to delve into the topic in more detail due to its breadth, despite being at the doctoral level. This thesis, which could be a separate dissertation for each chapter, is worth revisiting in a fragmented and more detailed manner in subsequent years.



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APPENDICES

A. CURRICULUM VITAE

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Surname, Name:

Nationality:

Date and Place of Birth:

Marital Status:

Phone:

email:

EDUCATION

Degree	Institution	Year of Graduation
MS	TOBB ETU International Relations	2017
BS	METU Global and International Affairs	2014
High School	Kars Anadolu High School	2008

WORK EXPERIENCE

Year	Place	Enrollment
2023- Present	Turkish National Police Academy	Research Assistant
2018 November	Middle East Technical University	Research Assistant
2018 March	Kafkas University	Research Assistant

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English (Advance)

B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TRKE ZET

Azerbaycan Cumhurbaşkanı İlham Aliyev'in 2003 yılında göreve gelmesinden bu yana Azerbaycan'ın dış politikası, özellikle komşularıyla olan ilişkiler bağlamında yeni bir ivme kazanmıştır. Bu dönemde dış politika, ülkenin ulusal çıkarlarını koruma ve bölgesel konumunu güçlendirme üzerine inşa edilmiştir. Azerbaycan, bir yandan Rusya ile dengeli bir ilişki sürdürürken, diğer yandan Türkiye ile stratejik ortaklığını derinleştirmiştir. Aynı zamanda, Gürcistan ile enerji ve ulaşım koridorları üzerinde iş birliği yapmış, İran ile ise Hazar Denizi'nin statüsü ve bölgesel nüfuz mücadelesi gibi konularda karmaşık bir denge politikası izlemiştir. Ermenistan ile olan ilişkilerde ise, Dağlık Karabağ sorunu ana belirleyici unsur olmaya devam etmiştir. Bu çok yönlü ve dinamik dış politika, ülkenin enerji kaynaklarından gelen ekonomik gücünü bir araç olarak kullanarak, bölgesel ve uluslararası alanda etkin bir aktör olma hedefini yansıtmaktadır. Bu tezin incelemesi, tam olarak bu çok yönlü dinamiklerin analizine odaklanmaktadır.

Böylelikle bu doktora tezi, Azerbaycan'ın bağımsızlığını yeniden kazanmasından bu yana dış politika oluşumunu etkileyen faktörlere odaklanmaktadır. Özellikle, komşu devletlerle olan ilişkiler tezin ana inceleme alanını oluşturmaktadır. Tez, İlham Aliyev liderliğinde uygulanan politikaların temel dinamiklerini ve bu politikaların arkasındaki motivasyonları araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Azerbaycan'ın Rusya, Gürcistan, Ermenistan, Türkiye ve İran ile olan ilişkileri ayrıntılı bir şekilde incelenmekte ve bu ilişkilerin bölgesel denge üzerindeki etkisi ortaya konulmaktadır.

Tezin temel amacı, İlham Aliyev döneminde Azerbaycan dış politikasının bölgesel ve uluslararası sistemdeki rolünü derinlemesine anlamaktır. Araştırma, Azerbaycan'ın komşu ülkelerle olan ilişkilerinin neden farklı ve karmaşık dinamiklere sahip olduğunu açıklamayı hedeflemektedir. Bu karmaşıklık, bölgesel

güvenlik endişeleri, enerji kaynaklarının stratejik önemi, ilişkilerin tarihsel mirası ve kültürel bağlar gibi çeşitli faktörlerin birleşiminden kaynaklanmaktadır.

Tezde, Azerbaycan'ın dış politika süreçlerini anlamak için teorik çerçeve olarak Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplininin İnşacılık (constructivism) yaklaşımı kullanılmaktadır. Kimlikler, normlar ve sosyal yapılara odaklanan İnşacılık, özellikle Güney Kafkas gibi tarihi, etnik ve dini kimliklerin çeşitli olduğu bir bölgede, Azerbaycan'ın komşularıyla olan ilişkilerini açıklamak için uygun bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Azerbaycan dış politika söylemi ve eylemlerindeki normatif vurgu, özellikle uluslararası hukuk ve egemenlik normlarına verilen önem, İnşacılık yaklaşımının uygunluğunu desteklemektedir.

Tezin ana araştırma sorusu, İlham Aliyev döneminde Azerbaycan dış politikasını şekillendiren temel faktörler ve dinamiklerin neler olduğunu ve bu dinamiklerin, ülkenin komşu devletlerle olan ilişkilerindeki farklılaşmayı ve karmaşıklığı İnşacı bir bakış açısıyla nasıl açıkladığını anlamaktır. Bu çerçevede, dış politika önceliklerinin nasıl evrildiği, enerji kaynakları ve Karabağ sorunu gibi konuların ilişkileri nasıl etkilediği ve ikili politikaların bölgesel istikrara ne gibi sonuçlar doğurduğu incelenmektedir.

Tezin ilk bölümü olan Giriş bölümü, araştırmanın genel çerçevesini sunmaktadır. Burada, tez çalışmasının kapsamı, ana hedefleri, birincil araştırma sorusu ve benimsenen metodoloji hakkında okuyucuyla ayrıntılı bilgiler paylaşılmaktadır. Tezin kavramsal temelini oluşturan "Teorik Çerçeve" başlıklı ikinci bölüm, uluslararası ilişkiler disiplindeki realist, liberal ve özellikle de konstrüktivist yaklaşımları derinlemesine incelemektedir. Bu bölümde, bu teorik yaklaşımların Azerbaycan'ın dış politikasını anlama ve analiz etme potansiyeli tartışılmaktadır. Ayrıca, Azerbaycan dış politikasının şekillenmesindeki temel ideoloji olan Azerbaycancılık'ın gelişim süreci anlatılmaktadır.

Üçüncü bölüm olan Tarihi Arka Plan, Azerbaycan'ın tarihini başlangıç noktası olarak kullanarak Azerbaycan'ın dış ilişkilerinin evrimini tarihi bir perspektiften incelemektedir. Bu bölüm, Azerbaycan Demokratik Cumhuriyeti'nin bağımsızlık

öncesi dönemine, eski Sovyetler Birliği'nin yönetimi altındaki döneme ve bağımsızlığın yeniden kazanılması sürecine odaklanmaktadır. Dördüncü bölüm, Dış Yönler, mevcut dönemin dış politika stratejisinin ana sütunlarını ele almaktadır. Bu bölümde, Karabağ sorununun dış politikadaki merkezi rolü, enerji diplomasisinin stratejik önemi, savunma işbirlikleri ve Azerbaycan'ın uluslararası ve bölgesel kuruluşlarla çok taraflı etkileşimleri ayrıntılı bir analize tabi tutulmaktadır.

Tezin ampirik analizinin kalbini beşinci, altıncı, yedinci, sekizinci ve dokuzuncu bölümler oluşturmakta ve sırasıyla Azerbaycan'ın Rusya, Gürcistan, Ermenistan, Türkiye ve İran ile ikili ilişkilerine odaklanmaktadır. Diplomatik ilişkilerin gelişimi, güvenlik işbirlikleri ve zorlukları, ekonomik bağların derinliği ve sosyo-kültürel etkileşimler, her ülke için ayrı alt başlıklar altında kapsamlı bir şekilde incelenmektedir. Bu bölümlerde, her komşuyla ilişkilerin benzersiz dinamikleri, tarihi mirasları ve kimlik boyutları ayrıntılı olarak açıklanarak dış politika kararlarının arkasındaki karmaşık motivasyonlar ortaya konmaktadır.

Çalışmanın son bölümü olan Sonuç, araştırma boyunca elde edilen temel bulguları özetlemekte, tezdeki ana argümanı yeniden değerlendirmekte ve Azerbaycan'ın dış politikasının olası gelecekteki yönelimlerine ilişkin analitik çıkarımlar sunmaktadır. Tez, kullanılan tüm akademik ve resmi kaynakların tam bir listesini içeren bir Kaynakça bölümüyle sona ermektedir.

Tezin ikinci bölümü olan "Teorik Çerçeve" başlığı, tezin genel argümanını desteklemek için Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplindeki temel teorileri derinlemesine incelemektedir. Bu bölüm, her bir alt başlık altında tezin metodolojik ve kavramsal yaklaşımını adım adım açıklamaktadır.

Tez, Realizm teorisini, devletlerarası güç mücadelesini ve uluslararası sistemin anarşik yapısını analiz etmek için kullanır. Bu teoriye göre, devletlerin temel amacı hayatta kalmaktır ve bu amaç uğruna güç için rekabet ederler. Tez, bu rekabetin devletler arasında bir denge mekanizması yarattığını ve bu durumun "güvenlik ikilemi" olarak bilinen bir duruma yol açabileceğini belirtir. Realizm, uluslararası sistemdeki kutupluluk yapısı (çok kutuplu, çift kutuplu, tek kutuplu) üzerine yapılan

tartışmalara da değinerek, bu yapının savaş olasılığını nasıl etkilediği konusunu inceler. Ancak, tezin ana argümanı, Azerbaycan'ın dış politikasını sadece maddi güç unsurlarıyla açıklamanın yetersiz kalmasıdır.

Tez liberal görüşü de ele alır. Liberalizm, insanın akıl yoluyla sürekli olarak kendini geliştirebileceği ve bu yüzden savaşların militarist ve antidemokratik rejimler tarafından yaratıldığına inanır. Bu yaklaşım, ekonomik bağımlılığın, demokratik yönetimlerin ve uluslararası kurumların devletlerarası iş birliğini teşvik ederek barışı desteklediğini savunur. Liberal kurumsalcılar, anarşik sistemde bile uluslararası antlaşmalar ve örgütler aracılığıyla iş birliğinin sağlanabileceğini ve bu durumun uluslararası ilişkilerde öngörülebilirliği artırdığını iddia eder.

Üçüncü ve sonuncu olarak tez de İnşacılık yaklaşımı ele alınır. İnşacılık, Uluslararası İlişkilerdeki geleneksel yaklaşımların aksine, devlet davranışlarını kimlikler, normlar ve sosyal yapılar üzerinden açıklamayı amaçlar. İnşacılık, uluslararası sistemin sadece maddi güçten ibaret olmadığını, aynı zamanda devletlerin eylemlerini şekillendiren sosyal bir yapı olduğunu savunur. Bu yaklaşım, uluslararası hukuk ve egemenlik gibi normların devletlerin statülerini ve kimliklerini nasıl doğrudan etkilediğini vurgular. İnşacılığın yükselişi, Soğuk Savaş'ın barışçıl sonu gibi rasyonel teorilerle açıklanamayan olaylar ve yeni nesil akademisyenlerin ortaya çıkışı gibi faktörlerle ilişkilendirilir.

Bu ikinci bölümün devamında, yukarıda ele alınan üç temel teorik yaklaşımın Azerbaycan'ın dış politikasına nasıl uygulandığı gösterilmektedir. Tez, özellikle İnşacılık yaklaşımının Karabağ sorunu gibi kimlik odaklı meseleleri açıklamakta ne kadar uygun bir çerçeve sunduğunu belirtir. Azerbaycan'ın 44 Gün Savaşında yürüttüğü politikada, mücadelesini uluslararası hukuka ve egemenlik normlarına dayalı meşru bir mücadele olarak göstermesi, İnşacı yaklaşımın önemini desteklemektedir. Bu durum, dış politikadaki söylemlerin ve eylemlerin maddi unsurlarla açıklanamayan yönlerini aydınlatmaya yardımcı olmaktadır.

Tezin ana argümanı, Azerbaycan'ın komşu ülkelerle olan ilişkilerini şekillendiren faktörlerin yalnızca jeopolitik ve ekonomik çıkarlarla sınırlı olmadığı, aynı zamanda

ülkenin sürekli gelişen ulusal kimliği ve "Azerbaycancılık" ideolojisinden derinlemesine etkilendiğidir. Bu kimlik ve ideolojinin komşulara yönelik algı ve politikaları farklı şekillerde yorumlaması, gözlemlenen karmaşık ve çeşitli dinamiklerin arkasındaki temel açıklayıcı güç olarak sunulmaktadır. Tez, dış politika karar alıcılarının sadece maddi faktörlerden değil, aynı zamanda ulusal kimliğin dayattığı normlar, tarihi anlatılar ve kolektif hafıza gibi yapısal faktörlerden de etkilendiğini savunur.

Bu bölümün sonunda, Azerbaycanlı kimliğinin gelişimini ve Azerbaycancılık ideolojisinin dış politikadaki rolü incelenir. İlham Aliyev döneminde, Türkçülük görüşünün daha bilinçli bir şekilde benimsenmesiyle birlikte, vatandaşlığa dayalı kapsayıcı bir kimliğin inşasına devam edildiği belirtilir. 2020'deki 44 Gün Savaşından sonra yeniden dönüşen Azerbaycan kimliğinin, hem Azerbaycancılık hem de Türkçülük ideolojisinin özelliklerini kapsadığı ve bu iki ideolojinin birbirini tamamladığı ifade edilmektedir. Bu iki ayrılmaz ideoloji, son yirmi yılda hem Azerbaycan'ın küresel dış politikasını hem de komşularıyla olan ilişkilerini şekillendiren ortak bir Azerbaycan kimliği oluşturmuştur.

Tezin üçüncü bölümü olan Tarihsel Arka plan başlığında, Azerbaycan'ın kadim çağlardan itibaren başlayan tarihi gelişimi anlatılmıştır. Azerbaycan'ın tarihi, coğrafi konumu nedeniyle birçok imparatorluğun güç mücadelesi alanı olmuştur. Bu durum, bölgenin Sümer-Akad medeniyetlerinden başlayarak Asurlular ve Urartular gibi antik devletlerin etki alanında yer almasıyla kendini göstermektedir. Daha sonra, Ahameniş İmparatorluğu'nun bir parçası olan Azerbaycan toprakları, Büyük İskender'in fetihlerinden sonra Seleukos İmparatorluğu'nun egemenliğine girmiştir. Bu süreçte, kuzeyde Kafkas Albanyası devleti kurulurken, güneyde ise Atropatena devleti ortaya çıkmıştır. Bölge, sıklıkla doğuda Part İmparatorluğu ile batıda Roma İmparatorluğu arasındaki savaşların odak noktası haline gelmiştir. Bu durum, üçüncü yüzyıldan itibaren Sasaniler ve yine Romalılar arasında yaşanan mücadelelerle devam etmiş, Hazar Kağanlığı'nın da katılımıyla daha da karmaşık bir hal almıştır. Son olarak, yedinci yüzyılda İslam'ın yayılışıyla birlikte, bölge bu kez de Arap fetihlerinin hedefi olmuştur. Arap fetihlerinin başlamasıyla, Magrip'ten Hint Yarımadası'na kadar uzanan alanda yaşayan halkların kaderi önemli ölçüde

değişmiştir. 7. yüzyılda başlayan Müslüman fetihleri, 642'deki Nihavend Savaşı'nda Raşidun Halifeliği'nin Sasani İmparatorluğu'na karşı kazandığı zaferle birlikte, sadece doğuya değil, kuzeye, yani Azerbaycan'a doğru da genişlemiştir. Arap egemenliğinin pekişmesiyle, Kuzey Azerbaycan'da Arap hanedanı tarafından yönetilen Şirvanşahlar Devleti kurulmuş ve bu devlet 668'den 1539'a kadar Kuzey Azerbaycan'ı yönetmiştir. Ancak, Arap fetihlerine karşı direnişler 9. yüzyıla kadar Azerbaycan'ın her yerinde devam etmiştir. Bu direnişler arasında en bilineni, 816-838 yılları arasında Batı Asya'nın çeşitli bölgelerinde etkili olan ve merkezi Azerbaycan olan Hürremî hareketidir.

Müslüman fetihlerinin ardından, Abbasi Halifeliği'nin zayıflamasıyla birlikte Azerbaycan topraklarında çeşitli hanedanlıklar hüküm sürmeye başlamıştır. 9. ve 11. yüzyıllar arasında, Kuzey Azerbaycan'da Şirvanşahlar, Güney Azerbaycan'da ise Sacid, Sallarid, Şeddadid ve Ravvadid gibi hanedanlıklar hakimiyet kurmuştur. 11. yüzyılın başlarında, Azerbaycan toprakları Oğuz Türkleri'nin bölgeye gelmesiyle büyük bir değişim yaşamıştır. Özellikle Tuğrul Bey döneminde, batı İran ve Bağdat'ın ele geçirilmesiyle Azerbaycan, Selçuklu İmparatorluğu'nun etkisi altına girmiş ve bölgenin Türkleşme süreci hızlanmıştır.

12. yüzyıla gelindiğinde ise, Azerbaycan toprakları İlhanlılar'ın kontrolüne geçmiştir. Başkentleri Marağa, Tebriz ve Sultaniye olan bu devlet, bir asırdan fazla bir süre bölgenin sosyo-ekonomik, etnik, dini ve dil yapısını derinden etkilemiştir. İlhanlıların dağılmasından sonra, Azerbaycan'da tekrar güç mücadeleleri başlamış ve bu durum, Altın Orda Devleti'nin saldırılarına neden olmuştur. Bölgenin siyasi olarak boşalmasıyla, önce Celayirîler, ardından da Timur'un seferleriyle Timurlu İmparatorluğu'nun etkisi altına girmiştir. 15. yüzyılda ise, Karabağ merkezli Karakoyunlu ve Akkoyunlu devletleri, Azerbaycan toprakları üzerinde egemenlik kurmuştur. Bu mücadelelerin ardından, 16. yüzyılın başlarında Şah İsmail liderliğindeki Safevi Devleti kurulmuş ve Tebriz merkezli bu devlet, iki yüzyıldan fazla bir süre İran ve Azerbaycan'a hükmetmiştir.

Safevi Devleti'nin iki yüzyılı aşkın süren egemenliğinin ardından, bu hanedanlığın gücü 18. yüzyılın başlarından itibaren zayıflamaya başlamış ve Azerbaycan

toprakları Osmanlı, Rus ve Afgan devletlerinin eline geçmiştir. Bu dönemde ortaya çıkan Nadir Şah Afşar, 1736 yılında kendisini şah ilan etmiş ve ülkedeki yabancı egemenliğini sonlandırarak İran ve Azerbaycan'da yeni bir güç merkezi oluşturmuştur. Ancak onun suikastla öldürülmesinin ardından, Afşar İmparatorluğu dağılmış ve Azerbaycan toprakları üzerindeki siyasi boşluk nedeniyle hem güneyde hem de kuzeyde hanlıklar dönemi başlamıştır. Bu hanlıklar arasında en önemlileri Bakü, Gence, Karabağ, Şirvan, Şeki, Kuba, Revan, Nahçıvan ve Talış hanlıklarıdır. 19. yüzyılın başlarından itibaren ise, Rusya İmparatorluğu'nun Güney Kafkas'a ilerlemesiyle bölgenin kaderi değişmiştir. 1804-1813 ve 1826-1828 yılları arasındaki Rus-İran savaşları sonucunda, Azerbaycan toprakları Aras Nehri ile ikiye bölünmüş ve bugünkü Kuzey Azerbaycan, 90 yıl boyunca Rusya'nın egemenliği altına girmiştir. Bu alt bölümün özeti tamamlanmıştır.

20. yüzyıl, Azerbaycan için bağımsızlık ve demokrasi mücadelesi dönemi olmuştur. Rus İmparatorluğu'ndaki 1917 Bolşevik Devrimi'nin ardından ortaya çıkan iç savaş, birçok halkın bağımsızlığını kazanmasına olanak sağlamıştır. Bu halklardan biri olan Azerbaycan halkı, 1918 yılında Türk dünyasının ilk cumhuriyetini, Azerbaycan Demokratik Cumhuriyeti'ni (ADC) ilan etmiştir. Ancak 1920 yılında Bolşeviklerin ülkeyi işgal etmesiyle, cumhuriyetin devlet yapısı tamamen ortadan kaldırılmış ve Kuzey Azerbaycan toprakları, Moskova'dan atanan Merkez Komitesi üyeleri tarafından yönetilmeye başlanmıştır. Yönetimin ilk yıllarında bazı Azerbaycanlı üyeler olsa da 1920'lerin ikinci yarısından itibaren Merkez Komitesi'nin yapısı ağırlıklı olarak Rus ve Ermeni üyelerden oluşmuştur. Bu dönem, Azerbaycan'ın modern tarihindeki bağımsızlık arayışlarının önemli bir aşamasını temsil etmektedir.

Azerbaycan Demokratik Cumhuriyeti'nin 1920'de Bolşevikler tarafından işgal edilmesinden sonra, Azerbaycan Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyeti (AzSSC) kurulmuştur. 1922 yılına kadar süren bu dönem, Azerbaycan için sosyal, ekonomik ve siyasi ilişkilerde bir belirsizlik ve çelişkiler dönemi olmuştur. Moskova'nın yönergeleriyle belirlenen bu yeni kimlik, Azerbaycan'ın sözde bağımsızlığını yitirmesine neden olmuştur. Sovyet döneminde Azerbaycan, uluslararası hukukun bir öznesi değildi. Uluslararası ilişkilerini ancak Moskova aracılığıyla yürütebiliyordu. Moskova, Azerbaycan'ın yabancı devletlerle doğrudan siyasi ve ticari-ekonomik

ilişkiler kurmasına izin vermemiştir. Bu dönem, 1980'lerin sonlarında, Azerbaycan Halk Cephesi (AHC) gibi milliyetçi ve İslamcı muhalif grupların oluşturduğu bir koalisyonun, Azerbaycan Yüksek Sovyeti'ne karşı bir muhalefet başlatmasıyla değişim sinyalleri vermiştir. Bu hareketler, Azerbaycan'ın bağımsızlık ruhunu yeniden canlandırmış ve ülkeyi 1991'deki bağımsızlık sürecine taşıyan adımları başlatmıştır.

1991 yılında Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasıyla Azerbaycan bağımsızlığını yeniden kazanmıştır. Bu dönem, ülkede büyük bir siyasi boşluk ve karmaşa yaratmıştır. Bağımsızlığın ilk yıllarında, ülkede istikrarsızlık hâkim olmuş ve iktidara gelen Ebulfez Elçibey ve Ayaz Mutalibov gibi liderler, bu sorunları aşmakta zorlanmışlardır. 1993 yılında Haydar Aliyev'in iktidara gelmesiyle birlikte, Azerbaycan'ın dış politikasında istikrar ve yeni bir strateji dönemi başlamıştır. Haydar Aliyev dönemi, ülkenin yeni kazanılan bağımsızlığını güçlendirme, bölgesel ve uluslararası alanda konumunu sağlamlaştırma ve toprak bütünlüğünü yeniden kazanma hedefleriyle kapsamlı bir yaklaşım sergilemiştir. Bu süreçte, denge politikası izlenmiş, komşularla ilişkilerde karşılıklı çıkarlara dayalı rasyonel bir yaklaşım benimsenmiş ve Batı ülkeleriyle işbirliği arayışları hız kazanmıştır. Özellikle Hazar Denizi'ndeki enerji kaynaklarının uluslararası piyasalara güvenli ve çeşitlendirilmiş bir şekilde taşınması, dış politikanın ana eksenini oluşturmuştur.

Dördüncü bölüm, İlham Aliyev dönemindeki Azerbaycan dış politikasının temel unsurlarına odaklanmaktadır. Bu bölümde, Azerbaycan'ın dış politikasını şekillendiren başlıca dört ana alan ele alınmaktadır: Karabağ sorunu, enerji diplomasisi, çok taraflı ilişkiler ve savunma işbirliği.

Azerbaycan dış politikasının en merkezi ve önemli konusu otuz yıldır Karabağ sorunu olmuştur. Karabağ sorunu, Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasıyla yükselen milliyetçilikle birlikte alevlenmiştir. 1991 yılında, çoğunlukta oldukları dağlık bölgelerde kontrolü ele geçiren Ermeni ayrılıkçıları, 26 Şubat 1992'de stratejik öneme sahip Hocalı şehrini işgal ederek Türk sivillere karşı bir etnik temizlik suçu işlemişlerdir. Kelbecer'in Nisan 1993'te işgal edilmesinin ardından Türkiye, Ermenistan ile olan tüm sınır kapılarını kapatma kararı almıştır. Bu süreçte

Azerbaycan'da yaşanan siyasi istikrarsızlık ve hükümet değişiklikleri, Ermenistan'ın daha geniş bir coğrafyada işgaller yapmasına zemin hazırlamıştır. 1987-1988'de başlayan savaş, 5 Mayıs 1994'te Bişkek Protokolü'nün imzalanmasıyla geçici olarak durmuş ve işlevsiz bir ateşkesle sonuçlanmıştır.

1990'lar ve 2000'lerde Karabağ sorununun çözümü için çeşitli barış planları önerilmiştir. Bu planlar arasında "paket anlaşması", "adım adım anlaşma", Madrid İlkeleri ve Kazan Planı bulunmaktadır. Ancak, tarafların uzlaşmaz tutumları ve bölgesel güçlerin karmaşık etkisi nedeniyle bu girişimler kalıcı bir çözüme ulaşamamıştır. Özellikle Rusya'nın arabuluculuk rolü, Azerbaycan tarafında güvensizlik yaratmış ve süreci daha da karmaşık hale getirmiştir. 2016'daki Dört Günlük Savaş'ın ardından yükselen askeri gerilimler, müzakerelerdeki çıkmazın askeri bir çözüme yol açacağını göstermiştir.

2020-2023 yılları arasında sorunun askeri yollarla başarılı bir şekilde çözülmesi, Azerbaycan'ın toprak bütünlüğünü pekiştirmiş ve bölgesel güç dengelerini derinden etkilemiştir. Bu gelişme sonrasında, yıllarca kullanılan "diplomatik çözüm" ve "normalleşme" gibi kavramlar, yerini "sınır belirleme", "ulaştırma koridorları" ve "mültecilerin geri dönüşü" gibi yeni kavramlara bırakmıştır. Bu dönemde Azerbaycan, Ermenistan'dan etnik temizliğe uğrayan vatandaşlarının haklarını geri alma ve atalarının topraklarına geri dönmelerini sağlama kararlılığını açıkça ortaya koymuştur. Bu süreç, sadece Azerbaycan ile Ermenistan arasındaki ilişkilerin normalleşmesine katkı sağlamakla kalmayacak, aynı zamanda Güney Kafkas genelinde daha geniş bir barış ve istikrar ortamını teşvik edecektir. Bu hedefe ulaşmak için hem Azerbaycan hem de Ermenistan'ın yanı sıra komşu devletlerin ve uluslararası toplumun kararlı ve koordineli çabaları gerekmektedir. Mültecilerin güvenli ve onurlu bir şekilde geri dönüşünü sağlamak için uluslararası hukuka ve insan haklarına bağlılık esastır.

Enerji diplomasisi, Azerbaycan'ın dış politikasının bir diğer bileşenlerinden biridir. Zengin hidrokarbon rezervleri sayesinde, Azerbaycan son otuz yılda önemli bir enerji ihracatçısı ve transit aktörü konumuna gelmiştir. Bu diplomasiğin temel amacı, ekonomik kalkınmayı desteklemek ve uluslararası alanda siyasi etkiyi artırmaktır. Bu

politikanın temelleri, 1994 yılında imzalanan ve "Asrın Anlaşması" olarak adlandırılan petrol anlaşmasıyla atılmıştır. Bu anlaşma, Hazar Denizi'ndeki kaynakların uluslararası piyasalara güvenli bir şekilde ulaştırılmasının ilk adımı olmuştur. Anlaşmayı takip eden projeler arasında, petrolü Türkiye üzerinden taşıyan Bakü-Tiflis-Ceyhan (BTC) boru hattı ve doğal gazı yine Türkiye üzerinden Avrupa'ya ulaştıracak olan Bakü-Tiflis-Erzurum (BTE) boru hattı bulunmaktadır. Bu strateji, Azerbaycan'ın enerji kaynaklarını bir jeopolitik araç olarak kullanmasını sağlamıştır. Özellikle 2011'de Avrupa Komisyonu ile imzalanan "Güney Gaz Koridoru Ortak Deklarasyonu", ülkenin Avrupa'nın enerji güvenliği için kilit bir ortak haline gelmesinde önemli bir dönüm noktası olmuştur.

Çok taraflı ilişkiler, İlham Aliyev dönemindeki Azerbaycan dış politikasının en önemli bileşenlerinden biridir. Ülke, jeopolitik konumu nedeniyle hem Batı hem de Rusya arasında bir denge politikası izlemektedir. Bu denge, çok boyutlu diplomasi yürütülmesini ve uluslararası alanda bağışmazlık ilkesine sadık kalınmasını sağlamaktadır. Azerbaycan bir yandan Rusya ile güçlü bağlarını korurken, diğer yandan NATO ve Avrupa Birliği gibi Batılı kurumlarla da iş birliğini artırmaktadır. Bu strateji, ülkenin bölgesel ve küresel çıkarlarını maksimize etmesine olanak tanımaktadır. Örneğin, enerji güvenliği ve ulaştırma koridorları gibi alanlarda Batı ile derinleşen iş birlikleri, Azerbaycan'ın uluslararası konumunu güçlendirmiştir. Aynı zamanda, Rusya ile de askeri ve ekonomik alanlardaki ilişkilerini sürdürerek bölgesel istikrarı korumaya çalışmaktadır. Ülke, enerji ihracatından elde ettiği gelirleri, ekonomisini güçlendirmenin yanı sıra savunma kapasitesini modernleştirmek ve bölgesel güç dengesini kendi lehine çevirmek için kullanmaktadır. Bu durum, çok taraflı ilişkilerdeki etkinliğini artıran önemli bir faktördür. Özetle, Azerbaycan, çıkarlarını en üst düzeyde korumak için esnek ve dinamik bir dış politika izlemektedir.

Savunma iş birliği, İlham Aliyev dönemindeki Azerbaycan dış politikasının en kritik yönlerinden biridir. Ülke, zengin enerji gelirlerini, sadece ekonomik kalkınma için değil, aynı zamanda savunma kapasitesini artırmak ve bölgesel jeopolitikada etkin bir rol oynamak için kullanmaktadır. Bu stratejik yatırım, ordunun modernizasyonunu sağlamış ve özellikle Dağlık Karabağ sorununun çözümünde

belirleyici olmuştur. Azerbaycan'ın askeri modernizasyon stratejisi, sadece yerli savunma sanayisinin geliştirilmesiyle sınırlı kalmamış, aynı zamanda başta Türkiye ve İsrail olmak üzere uluslararası ortaklarla da güçlü savunma anlaşmaları yapılmıştır. Bu anlaşmalar, ordunun teknolojik olarak gelişmesini sağlamış ve insansız hava araçları (İHA) gibi modern savaş teknolojilerini kullanma becerisini artırmıştır.

Bu askeri modernizasyonun sonuçları, 2020'deki 44 Gün Savaşı ve 2023'teki Anti-Terör Operasyonu gibi kritik olaylarda somut olarak görülmüştür. Bu operasyonlar, Azerbaycan'ın modernleşen ordusunun etkinliğini ve askeri alandaki kararlılığını uluslararası topluma kanıtlamıştır. Bu başarılar, ülkenin bölgesel politikadaki gücünü ve kararlılığını somut bir şekilde ortaya koymuştur. Örnek olarak, 2025 yılında Pakistan ile 40 adet JF-17 Thunder savaş uçağının satışı için imzalanan 4.6 milyar dolarlık büyük bir savunma anlaşması, Azerbaycan'ın savunma sanayisini geliştirmeye verdiği önemi ve askeri kapasitesini artırma hedefini ortaya koymaktadır.

Bununla birlikte, tezin odak noktası Azerbaycan'ın komşularıyla olan ilişkileridir. Beşinci bölüm, Azerbaycan ile Rusya arasındaki ilişkilerin gelişimini ve seyrini anlatmaktadır. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasının ardından Azerbaycan ve Rusya arasındaki ilişkiler, tarihi, diplomatik, güvenlik, ekonomik ve sosyo-kültürel boyutları kapsayan karmaşık bir yapı sergilemiştir. Azerbaycan ve Rusya arasındaki ilişkiler, 19. yüzyılın başlarında, Azerbaycan topraklarının Aras Nehri ile ikiye ayrılarak bugünkü Kuzey Azerbaycan'ın Rus İmparatorluğu'nun egemenliği altına girmesiyle başlamıştır. Sovyetler Birliği döneminde ise bu ilişkiler, Moskova'dan atanan komiteler aracılığıyla merkezi olarak yönetilmiştir.

1991'de bağımsızlığın yeniden kazanılmasının ardından, Ebulfaz Elçibey liderliğindeki Azerbaycan Halk Cephesi (AHC) hükümeti, Rus birliklerinin Azerbaycan'dan çekilmesini hızlandırmış ve Bağımsız Devletler Topluluğu (BDT) üyeliğini reddederek Rusya'nın etkisini azaltmaya çalışmıştır. Ancak 1993'te Haydar Aliyev'in iktidara gelmesiyle, Azerbaycan Rusya ile daha uzlaşmacı ve pragmatik bir ilişki kurarken, bağımsızlık iradesini de korumayı hedeflemiştir. Bu dönem, Rusya'yı

tamamen dışlamak yerine, karşılıklı çıkarlara dayalı bir işbirliği stratejisi benimsenmiştir.

İlham Aliyev döneminde Azerbaycan ve Rusya arasındaki ilişkiler, önceki dönemde olduğu gibi ilerlemeye devam etmiştir. Haydar Aliyev'in iç ve dış politikalarını sürdürme kararlılığında olan İlham Aliyev, başta Rusya olmak üzere komşularla ilişkileri geliştirme eğilimini korumuştur. Bu ilişkilerin gelişiminde, Haydar Aliyev döneminde kurulan iyi ve dengeli komşuluk politikalarının devam ettirilmesi ve Aliyev'in Moskova yönetimiyle kurduğu güçlü bağların etkisi olmuştur.

Azerbaycan ve Rusya ilişkilerini şekillendiren en önemli konulardan biri, bağımsızlığın yeniden kazanılmasından bu yana devam eden Karabağ sorunu olmuştur. Bu sorun, iki devlet arasında zaman zaman diplomatik gerilimlere yol açmıştır. Moskova hem Ermenistan hem de Azerbaycan ile ilişkilerini sürdürerek arabuluculuk rolü üstlenmiştir. Ancak Azerbaycan, 2008'deki Rusya-Gürcistan Savaşı gibi bölgesel olayların etkisiyle, bu sorunun askeri yollarla çözümüne yönelik hazırlıklarını artırmıştır. 2016'daki Dört Günlük Savaş, Azerbaycan'ın askeri yeteneklerini test etme ve Rusya'nın tutumunu ölçme fırsatı sunmuştur. Bu savaş, Rusya'nın çatışmaya kayıtsız kalmasıyla, Ermenistan'da Rusya karşıtı duyguları artırmış ve 2018'deki Ermeni Devrimi'ne giden yolu açmıştır.

2018'de Nikol Paşinyan'ın başbakan olmasıyla, Ermenistan'ın Batı'ya yönelme çabaları, Rusya ile ilişkilerini zayıflatmış ve bu durum, Azerbaycan için bir fırsat yaratmıştır. 2020'de başlayan 44 Gün Savaşı, Azerbaycan'ın askeri başarısı ve Rusya'nın müdahale kapasitesinin sınırlı kalmasıyla sonuçlanmıştır. Bu savaşın ardından bölgeye Rus Barış Gücü yerleştirilmiş, ancak 2024 yılında bu gücün çekilmesiyle ilişkilerde yeni bir dönem başlamıştır.

2022'de başlayan Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı, Azerbaycan'ın dış politikasının dengesini yeniden test etmiştir. Azerbaycan, bir yandan Ukrayna'nın toprak bütünlüğünü desteklerken, diğer yandan Rusya ile olan ilişkilerini bozmamaya özen göstermiştir. Bu süreç, Azerbaycan'ın Karabağ'daki Anti-Terör Operasyonu'nu başarıyla sonuçlandırmasına olanak sağlamıştır.

İlişkilerde son zamanlarda yaşanan en önemli olaylardan biri, 25 Aralık 2024'te Kazakistan üzerinde bir Azerbaycan Hava Yolları (AZAL) uçağının düşürülmesidir. Rus hava savunma sistemleri tarafından düşürülen uçağın, Rusya'nın Ukrayna İHA'larına karşı kullandığı elektronik harp sistemlerinin etkisi altında kaldığı iddia edilmiştir. Bu olay, Azerbaycan ile Rusya arasında önemli bir gerilime neden olmuştur. Özellikle, İlham Aliyev'in olayın ardından Rusya'ya gitmemesi, iki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerdeki soğukluğun devam ettiğinin bir göstergesi olarak yorumlanmıştır.

İlham Aliyev döneminde, iki ülke Güney Kafkas'ın güvenliği ve terörle mücadele gibi konularda yeni ve ciddi bağlar kurmuştur. Bu iş birliğinin amacı, ortaya çıkan geleneksel ve yeni güvenlik tehditlerine karşı ortak önleyici tedbirler almaktır. Çeçenistan meselesi, ikili ilişkilerin seyrini etkileyen önemli bir faktör olarak tezde yer bulmaktadır. Azerbaycan, başlangıçta bu konuda tutarsız bir politika izlemiş olsa da 2001 sonrası dönemde Rusya ile ortak hareket etme kararı almıştır.

Bununla birlikte, Azerbaycan, Rusya'nın güvenlik şemsiyesi altına girme girişimlerine karşı da direncini korumuştur. 2014 yılında Rusya Savunma Bakanı'nın Hazar Denizi'nde "toplu güvenlik" sistemi kurma teklifi, Bakü tarafından temkinle karşılanmıştır. Bu direncin en somut örneği, 2012 yılında kirası dolan Gebele radar istasyonunun kira sözleşmesinin yenilenmemesidir. Azerbaycan'ın talep ettiği yüksek kira bedeli, bu radar istasyonunu topraklarında istemediğinin açık bir göstergesi olmuştur. Son yıllarda ise, güvenlik ilişkilerinin dinamiklerini Karabağ sorunu ve Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı şekillendirmiştir. 2020 ve 2023 yıllarındaki askeri operasyonlarla Azerbaycan'ın toprak bütünlüğünü sağlaması, dış politikasında daha bağımsız adımlar atmasına olanak tanımıştır.

İkili ilişkilerin sosyo-kültürel boyutu, büyük ölçüde eğitim alanındaki iş birliğine odaklanmaktadır. Azerbaycan'da Rusça eğitim veren okulların varlığı, bu ilişkilerin anahtarı konumundadır. Bağımsızlığın yeniden kazanılmasından sonra, Rusça eğitim veren okullara olan ilgi bir dönem azalmış, ancak sonraki yıllarda yeniden artış göstermiştir. Günümüzde Azerbaycan'da 340 civarında Rusça eğitim veren okulda 140.000'den fazla öğrenci bulunmaktadır. Bu sayı, özellikle Gürcistan ve Ermenistan

gibi diğer post-Sovyet cumhuriyetleriyle karşılaştırıldığında oldukça yüksektir. Bu durum, hem Azerbaycan'ın denge politikasının bir sonucu hem de Rusya'nın bu okullara sağladığı özel desteklerin bir yansıması olarak görülmektedir. Ayrıca, Azerbaycan'ın Rusya'daki diasporası, iki ülke ilişkilerinde önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. 2010 yılındaki nüfus sayımına göre Rusya'da 600 bin Azerbaycanlı yaşamaktadır, ancak bazı tahminler bu sayının 1.5 milyonu bulduğunu öne sürmektedir. Bu nüfusun büyük bir kısmı, ticaret sektöründe yer almakta ve Rusya'daki perakende ticaretin önemli bir kısmını oluşturmaktadır. Bu durum, post-Sovyet dönemdeki göç ağlarının bir sonucu olarak değerlendirilmektedir.

Tezin bir diğer bölümünü oluşturan ülke Gürcistan'dır. Azerbaycan ve Gürcistan arasındaki modern ilişkiler, 1918-1920 yılları arasındaki ilk bağımsızlık dönemlerine dayanmaktadır. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasının ardından, her iki devlet de iç istikrarsızlık ve çatışmalarla (Azerbaycan'da Karabağ, Gürcistan'da Abhazya ve Güney Osetya) dolu kaotik bir döneme girmiştir. Bu süreçte, deneyimsiz liderler olan Zviad Gamsakhurdia ve Ebulfez Elçibey'in yerini, Sovyet döneminden gelen tecrübeli politikacılar Eduard Şevardnadze ve Haydar Aliyev almıştır.

İlham Aliyev döneminde Azerbaycan ve Gürcistan arasındaki diplomatik ilişkiler, özellikle 2003'teki Gül Devrimi ile birlikte yeni bir ivme kazanmıştır. Gürcistan'da Mihail Saakaşvili'nin iktidara gelmesi, her iki ülkenin de Batı'ya yönelik dış politika eğilimlerini güçlendirmiş ve ilişkilerin temelini sağlamlaştırmıştır. İlişkiler üç temel unsur üzerine inşa edilmiştir: Batı'ya uyumlu dış politika, Rusya ve Ermenistan'dan gelen ortak tehdit algısı ve Azerbaycan'ın enerji kaynaklarını uluslararası pazarlara ulaştırmasında Gürcistan'ın stratejik önemi.

Bu süreçte, 2008'deki Rusya-Gürcistan Savaşı, iki ülke arasındaki diplomatik bağları daha da güçlendirmiştir. Azerbaycan, Gürcistan'a uygulanan Rus yaptırımlarına karşı çıkarak Gürcü mallarını satın almış ve doğal gaz ihracatını artırmıştır. Bu duruşuyla bölgede güvenilir bir partner olduğunu kanıtlamıştır. Diplomatik iş birliği, Türkiye'nin de katılımıyla üçlü formatlara taşınmıştır. 2012'de Trabzon'da imzalanan "Trabzon Deklarasyonu" ile başlayan süreç, düzenli bakanlar düzeyinde toplantılarla devam etmiştir. Bu format, üç ülkenin uluslararası örgütlerdeki karşılıklı destek ve ortak enerji projeleri gibi alanlardaki iş birliğini derinleştirmiştir.

Ancak ilişkiler, 2019'da iki önemli olayla sınanmıştır. Birincisi, Birinci Karabağ Savaşı'nda Azerbaycan'a karşı savaşıyan Ermeni terörist Mihail Avagyan'ın Gürcistan'da heykelinin dikilmesi, ikincisi ise Keşikçıdağ (Davit Gareja) manastır kompleksinde yaşanan gerilimdir. Her iki olayın da dış güçlerin ilişkileri bozma girişimi olarak kurgulandığı düşünülmüştür. Son dönemde, 2020 İkinci Karabağ Savaşı sonrasında Türkiye ve Azerbaycan'ın öncülüğünde "3+3" (Türkiye, Rusya, İran + Azerbaycan, Gürcistan, Ermenistan) adlı bölgesel iş birliği platformu oluşturulmuş, ancak Gürcistan, Rusya'nın katılımı nedeniyle bu girişimi boykot etmiştir. En güncel diplomatik gelişme ise, Gürcistan Cumhurbaşkanı Mikheil Kavelashvili'nin 2025 yılında ilk yurt dışı ziyaretini Azerbaycan'a yapmasıdır. Bu, Bakü ile stratejik ilişkilerin Gürcistan'ın dış politikasındaki önceliğini açıkça göstermektedir.

İlham Aliyev döneminde Azerbaycan ve Gürcistan arasındaki güvenlik ilişkileri, özellikle bölgesel tehditlere karşı ortak bir duruş sergileme ve askeri kapasiteleri artırma amacıyla gelişmiştir. Bu stratejik iş birliği, öncelikle Türkiye'nin de katılımıyla üçlü bir savunma mekanizması üzerinden yürütülmektedir. İki ülke arasındaki güvenlik iş birliğinin temelleri, 1997 yılında kurulan ve Rusya'nın etkisine karşı bir denge unsuru olarak görülen GUAM (Gürcistan, Ukrayna, Azerbaycan, Moldova) örgütüyle atılmıştır.

Ancak kapsamlı askeri iş birliği, 2002'deki terörle mücadele anlaşması ve 2003'teki enerji koridorunun güvenliğini sağlamaya yönelik protokollerle somutlaşmıştır. Bu süreç, 2008'deki Rusya-Gürcistan Savaşı'nın ardından hız kazanmıştır. Savaş sonrasında Gürcistan'ın Rusya ile bağlarını koparması, Azerbaycan'ı Gürcistan için önemli bir savunma sanayi partneri haline getirmiştir. Azerbaycan, Gürcistan ve Türkiye arasında tesis edilen üçlü savunma iş birliği formatı, ilişkilerin en önemli boyutunu oluşturmaktadır.

2014 yılında Nahçıvan'da yapılan ilk üçlü savunma bakanları toplantısı, ortak askeri tatbikatlar düzenleme taahhüdüyle bu iş birliğinin resmi başlangıcı olmuştur. Bu kapsamda, "Kafkas Kartalı" (Caucasus Eagle) gibi ortak askeri tatbikatlar düzenlenmektedir. Bu tatbikatlar, üç ülkenin özel kuvvet birimlerinin katılımıyla

hedef imha, rehinelerin kurtarılması ve tahliyesi gibi görevleri içermektedir. Bu format, neredeyse her yıl düzenlenen toplantılarla ve imzalanan memorandumlarla sürekli olarak pekiştirilmektedir.

İlham Aliyev döneminde Azerbaycan ve Gürcistan arasındaki ekonomik ilişkiler, karşılıklı bağımlılık ve ortak bölgesel vizyona dayalı stratejik bir ortaklığa dönüşmüştür. Bu süreçte, Azerbaycan'ın enerji kaynaklarını Batı pazarlarına ulaştırma hedefi, Gürcistan'ın stratejik coğrafi konumuyla birleşmiştir. Gürcistan, Hazar hidrokarbonlarını Batı'ya taşıyan bir transit merkezi olarak başarılı bir rol oynamıştır. Bu rol, Bakü-Tiflis-Ceyhan (BTC) gibi projelerle pekiştirilmiştir. Ancak, 2020 İkinci Karabağ Savaşı sonrasında gündeme gelen yeni ticaret yolları, özellikle Zengezur Koridoru, Gürcistan'ın transit rolünün zayıflayabileceği yönünde tartışmalara neden olmuştur. Ancak, bazı uzmanlar yeni güzergahların Gürcistan'daki mevcut rotalarla rekabet etmeyeceğini savunmaktadır.

Son dönemde, 9 Haziran 2025'te Gürcistan'ın Poti kentinde açılan "Poti TransTerminal" adlı konteyner terminali, bölgesel lojistik ve Orta Koridor (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route - TITR) için önemli bir kilometre taşı olmuştur. Kazakistan, Gürcistan ve Azerbaycan tarafından finanse edilen ve Çin tarafından inşa edilen bu terminal, Orta Koridor'un sürdürülebilirliğini ve istikrarını önemli ölçüde artırmıştır. Bu proje, Azerbaycan'ın uluslararası arenadaki konumunu daha da sağlamlaştırmaktadır.

İki ülke arasındaki sosyo-kültürel bağları etkileyen en önemli konu, Gürcistan'daki Azerbaycanlı Türk azınlığıdır. 2014 nüfus sayımına göre, 233.000 kişiyle toplam nüfusun %6.3'ünü oluşturan Azerbaycanlılar, Gürcistan'daki en büyük etnik azınlık konumundadır. Bu azınlık, Gürcistan, Ermenistan ve Azerbaycan sınırlarının kesiştiği noktada yer alan ve Azerbaycan Türkleri tarafından Borçalı olarak adlandırılan bölgede yaşamaktadır.

Tezin bir sonraki bölümünde Azerbaycan-Ermenistan ilişkileri ele alınmaktadır. İki ülke arasındaki düşmanlık, Güney Kafkas'ın tehlikeli ve istikrarsız olmasına neden olmuştur. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasının ardından Rusya, eski Birlik

topraklarında "barış ve istikrarın garantörü" rolünü üstlenerek Güney Kafkas'taki nüfuzunu korumayı amaçlamıştır.

Bu süreçte, 1994'te imzalanan Bişkek Protokolü ile ateşkes sağlansa da sonraki dönemlerde Paket Anlaşması, Adım Adım Anlaşma ve Ortak Devlet Anlaşması gibi barış planları, tarafların uzlaşmaz tutumları nedeniyle başarısız olmuştur. İlham Aliyev döneminde devam eden Prag Süreci, Madrid İlkeleri, Kazan Planı ve Lavrov Planı gibi girişimler de somut bir ilerleme sağlayamamıştır. Bu diplomatik başarısızlık, Azerbaycan yönetiminde Karabağ sorununun askeri yollarla çözülebileceği inancını pekiştirmiştir.

Savunma bütçesinin önemli ölçüde artırılması, bu stratejik değişikliğin en belirgin göstergesi olmuştur. Bu askeri hazırlık, 2016'da patlak veren Dört Gün Savaşları'nda somut bir zaferle sonuçlanmış ve Azerbaycan'ın ilk kez topraklarını geri almasını sağlamıştır. Bu gelişme, Ermenistan'da ise Rusya'nın yetersiz desteği nedeniyle bir hayal kırıklığı yaratmıştır. Sonuç olarak, Azerbaycan-Ermenistan ilişkileri, Rusya'nın arabuluculuk çabalarına rağmen diplomatik yollarla bir çözüme ulaşamamış, bu durum da Azerbaycan'ı askeri bir çözüme yöneltmiştir.

44 Gün Savaşı (2020) ve sonrasında yaşananlar, Azerbaycan'ın Karabağ sorununu diplomatik yollarla çözmeye çabalarının başarısızlıkla sonuçlanması üzerine askeri yöntemlere yönelmesinin bir sonucudur. Avrupa Güvenlik ve İşbirliği Teşkilatı (AGİT) Minsk Grubu'nun Madrid İlkeleri gibi barış planlarının uygulanamaması, bölgedeki gerilimi artırmıştır. 2016'daki Dört Gün Savaşları ve 2020'deki Tovuz saldırıları gibi olaylar, Azerbaycan'ın askeri müdahale için kamuoyu desteğini artırmasına yol açmıştır.

27 Eylül 2020'de Azerbaycan, Ermeni saldırılarına yanıt olarak "Demir Yumruk Operasyonu"nu başlatmıştır. Bu harekât, özellikle Bayraktar insansız savaş hava araçlarının (SİHA'lar) etkin kullanımı sayesinde Ermeni güçlerine karşı hızlı ve düşük kayıplarla başarı sağlamıştır. Türkiye'nin Azerbaycan'a verdiği askeri ve diplomatik destek, savaşın seyrini önemli ölçüde etkilemiştir. Savaş boyunca uluslararası arabuluculukla yapılan ateşkes girişimleri, Gence'ye düzenlenen füze

saldırısı gibi olaylar nedeniyle başarısız olmuştur. 8 Kasım 2020'de Şuşa'nın kurtarılması, Azerbaycan için stratejik ve moral bir dönüm noktası olmuştur.

Savaş, 9-10 Kasım 2020 gecesi Rusya, Azerbaycan ve Ermenistan arasında imzalanan 10 Kasım Anlaşması ile sona ermiştir. Savaş sonrası dönemde, Azerbaycan ve Türkiye arasındaki ilişkiler daha da derinleşmiştir. Aralık 2020'de Bakü'de düzenlenen Zafer Geçit Töreni'nde Türkiye'den üst düzey katılım gerçekleşmiş ve Haziran 2021'de imzalanan Şuşa Beyannamesi ile iki ülke arasındaki müttefiklik ve stratejik iş birliği resmileştirilmiştir.

Ancak, 10 Kasım Anlaşması'na tam olarak uyulmaması, 2022'deki sınır çatışmaları gibi olaylara yol açmıştır. Azerbaycan, nihai olarak 19-20 Eylül 2023 tarihlerinde başlattığı antiterör operasyonu ile Karabağ'daki tüm ayrılıkçı güçleri etkisiz hale getirmiş ve bölgenin tam kontrolünü sağlamıştır. Bu operasyon, 35 yıllık Karabağ ihtilafının askeri olarak sona ermesine neden olmuş ve 15 Ekim 2023'te İlham Aliyev'in Hankendi'de Azerbaycan bayrağını dalgalandırmasıyla bölgenin Azerbaycan'a tam entegrasyonu simgelenmiştir.

Karabağ'da güvenliğin sağlanmasının ardından Azerbaycan hükümeti, bölgenin yeniden imarı ve iskanı için kapsamlı bir strateji başlatmıştır. Bu strateji kapsamında, geri dönen halkın güvenliği ve refahı için çeşitli destek programları uygulanmakta ve eğitim, sağlık gibi sosyal hizmetlere önemli yatırımlar yapılmaktadır. Ekonomik kalkınmayı desteklemek amacıyla da tarım, sanayi ve ticaret alanında yeni projeler hayata geçirilmektedir. Örneğin, Zengilan'da inşa edilen "Akıllı köy" Ağalı'ya 66 ailenin yerleştirilmesi bu projelerin somut bir örneğidir.

Bölgedeki bir diğer önemli sorun, her iki devletin kontrolü altında bulunan toprak parçaları ve sınırların belirlenmesidir. Azerbaycan'ın sekiz köyü Ermenistan işgali altında iken, Ermenistan'ın da Artsvaşen adlı bir köyü Azerbaycan toprakları içinde yer almaktadır. Sınır belirleme sürecinde, Ermenistan Başbakanı Nikol Paşinyan, Azerbaycan'ın 86.600 km²'lik toprak bütünlüğünü tanıdığını belirtse de iki ülke arasında sınır çizimi için hangi haritaların esas alınacağı konusunda henüz bir uzlaş sağlanamamıştır.

Ulaşım koridorları konusu da taraflar arasında tartışmalıdır. Azerbaycan, 10 Kasım Anlaşması'nın 9. maddesi uyarınca Zengezur Koridoru'nun kesintisiz ve gümrüksüz olmasını talep ederken, Ermenistan "Barış Kavşağı" projesi ile güzergâhın kendi gümrük kontrolünde olmasını önermektedir. Azerbaycan, Nahçıvan ile ana karası arasındaki bu koridorun Rusya'nın iç istihbarat servisi FSB tarafından kontrol edilmesini talep ederken, Ermenistan Rusya'nın kendi sınır ve gümrüklerinden uzaklaşmasını istediğinden bu projeyi kendi kontrolünde tutmak istemektedir.

Bölgede kalıcı barışın sağlanması için en hayati konulardan biri, mültecilerin geri dönüşüdür. Sovyetler Birliği'nin son döneminde başlayan ve 1991'e kadar devam eden süreçte yaklaşık 600.000 kişi iki ülke arasında yerinden edilmiştir. Buna ek olarak, Karabağ ve çevresinden 650.000'den fazla Azerbaycanlı Türk de göçe zorlanmıştır. Azerbaycan, Batı Azerbaycan İcması gibi kuruluşlarla, Ermenistan topraklarından zorla göç ettirilen vatandaşlarının barışçıl yollarla atalarının topraklarına geri dönmesini hedeflemektedir. Bu amaçla, Azerbaycan Devlet Başkanı İlham Aliyev, "Zengezur'a tanklarla değil, araçlarla döneceğiz" diyerek diplomatik çözüm arayışını vurgulamıştır.

Tezin diğer bir bölümü de Azerbaycan ile Türkiye arasındaki ilişkiler üzerinedir. Türkiye ile Azerbaycan ilişkileri, tarihi, kültürel ve stratejik bağlar nedeniyle her iki devlet için de özel bir öneme sahiptir. Türkiye, 18 Ekim 1991'de bağımsızlığını yeniden kazanan Azerbaycan'ı ilk tanıyan ülke olmuştur. Türkiye'nin başlangıç politikası, Azerbaycan'ın bağımsızlığını ve Karabağ üzerinden toprak bütünlüğünü korumaya odaklanmış, hatta o dönemdeki Komünist Parti yöneticileriyle bile ilişki kurmaktan çekinmemiştir. Ebulfez Elçibey'in iktidara gelmesiyle dış politikada önemli bir değişim yaşanmış, Türkiye stratejik bir ortak olarak konumlandırılmıştır. Sonrasında göreve gelen Haydar Aliyev ise, pragmatizm, denge ve "Azerbaycancılık" ilkelerine dayalı bir dış politika benimsemiştir.

Özellikle dönemin Türkiye Cumhurbaşkanı Süleyman Demirel ile olan dostluğu, ilişkilerin gelişmesinde kilit bir rol oynamıştır. Bu politika, ideolojik olmaktan ziyade bölgesel güç dengesini koruma, ekonomik ablukayı kırma ve Gürcistan'ı da dahil ederek üçlü ilişkiler geliştirme gibi somut hedeflere hizmet etmiştir. Haydar

Aliyev'in vefatından sonra Cumhurbaşkanı olan İlham Aliyev de bu dengeli politikayı sürdürmüş, Türkiye'nin Azerbaycan dış politikasındaki özel konumunu korumuştur.

Türkiye ve Azerbaycan arasındaki diplomatik ilişkiler, İlham Aliyev'in 2003'te göreve başlamasıyla birlikte derinleşmeye başlamıştır. Bu dönemde Türkiye'nin Karabağ meselesindeki duruşu ve Azerbaycan'ın enerji kaynaklarının Batı'ya ulaştırılmasındaki rolü, ilişkileri daha da stratejik bir konuma taşımıştır. İki ülke arasındaki bağ, 2009 yılında Türkiye'nin Ermenistan'la başlattığı normalleşme süreci olarak bilinen "Ermeni Açılımı" ile kısa süreli bir krize girmiştir. Bu süreçte Azerbaycan'a yönelik terör saldırısı iddiaları, Zürih'te imzalanan protokoller ve Bursa'daki futbol maçı sırasında Azerbaycan bayraklarının stada alınmaması gibi olaylar yaşanmıştır. Kars'taki "İnsanlık Anıtı" da Azerbaycan yanlısı kamuoyunun baskısıyla yıkılmıştır.

2009'daki gerilimin ardından ilişkiler hızla düzelmiştir. 2010'da imzalanan "Stratejik Ortaklık ve Karşılıklı Yardım Anlaşması" ve ardından kurulan Yüksek Düzeyli Stratejik İşbirliği Konseyi (YDSK) ile ilişkiler yeni bir boyut kazanmıştır. Bu işbirliği platformu, enerji, ticaret, savunma ve ulaştırma gibi birçok alanda onlarca anlaşmanın imzalanmasını sağlamıştır. Bu süreçte en önemli projelerden biri, Bakü-Tiflis-Kars demiryolu ve enerji hatlarıdır.

2020 yılındaki 44 Gün Savaşında Türkiye'nin diplomatik ve askeri desteği, bu ittifakın en önemli göstergesi olmuştur. Savaşın ardından, 15 Haziran 2021'de Karabağ'ın sembol şehri Şuşa'da imzalanan Şuşa Beyannamesi ile ilişkiler resmi olarak müttefiklik seviyesine çıkarılmıştır. Bu beyanname, her iki ülkenin Türk Dünyası'nın entegrasyonunda lokomotif bir rol üstlenmesini de teyit etmiştir.

İkili ilişkiler, sadece diplomatik işbirliğiyle sınırlı kalmamıştır. Azerbaycan, 2015'teki Rus uçağı krizi sırasında arabuluculuk rolü üstlenmiş, 2016'daki darbe girişiminin ardından da FETÖ'ye bağlı eğitim kurumlarını kapatarak Türkiye'ye desteğini göstermiştir. Karşılıklı olarak kimlikle seyahat imkânının sağlanması ve e-devlet sistemlerinin entegrasyonu da bağları güçlendirmiştir.

2020 sonrası dönemde, Türkiye kamuoyunda Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti'nin (KKTC) tanınmaması ve İsrail'le olan ilişkiler gibi konular üzerinden bazı eleştiriler gündeme gelmiştir. Ancak Azerbaycan, KKTC'nin Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı'na gözlemci üye olmasında rol oynamış ve İsrail-Filistin meselesinde Türkiye-İsrail arasında arabuluculuk yaparak dengeli bir diplomasi sergilemiştir. Ayrıca Azerbaycan'ın bölgedeki 3+3 platformu girişimini desteklemesi, bölgedeki dış aktörleri dışlamayı amaçlayan ortak vizyonun bir parçasıdır.

Azerbaycan ve Türkiye arasındaki güvenlik işbirliğinin temelleri, Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Kafkas İslam Ordusu'nun Bakü'yü kurtarmasıyla atılmıştır. Modern dönemde ise, 1991'deki bağımsızlık sonrası süreçte stratejik bir ortaklığa dönüşen ilişkiler, askeri anlaşmalar ve eğitim işbirlikleriyle sağlamlaştırılmıştır. 1992'de imzalanan "Askeri Eğitim İşbirliği Anlaşması" ile Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri (TSK), Azerbaycan Silahlı Kuvvetleri'nin (ASV) yeniden inşasına ve eğitimine katkıda bulunmuştur.

Bu süreçte binlerce Azerbaycanlı asker ve subay Türkiye'deki askeri okullarda yetiştirilmiştir. Bu eğitimler, "Rus askeri ekolüne" karşı bir denge unsuru oluşturmuş ve 2020 44 Gün Savaşı'nda Azerbaycan ordusunun başarısında önemli bir rol oynamıştır. İki ülke, TAKM (Askeri Statülü Avrasya Kolluk Kuvvetleri Teşkilatı) gibi çok uluslu oluşumlar ve TurAz Kartalı, Sarsılmaz Kardeşlik gibi düzenli ortak tatbikatlarla askeri koordinasyonu en üst seviyeye çıkarmıştır.

Türkiye, 2010 yılında imzalanan "Stratejik Ortaklık ve Karşılıklı Yardım Anlaşması" ile Azerbaycan'ın savunma ihtiyaçlarını karşılamaya başlamıştır. Bu anlaşmanın 2. maddesi, bir tarafa yönelik silahlı saldırının diğerine yapılmış sayılacağını ve askeri yardım da dahil olmak üzere her türlü desteğin verileceğini belirtmektedir.

Türkiye tarafından sağlanan Bayraktar TB2 İHA'ları, T-155 Fırtına obüsleri ve Roketsan füze sistemleri gibi modern silahlar, Azerbaycan'ın askeri gücünü önemli ölçüde artırmıştır. 2020 savaşında, Türkiye'nin Gence Havalimanı'na konuşlandığı F-16'lar ve İran'a karşı sergilediği diplomatik duruş, Azerbaycan'ın savaşta zafer kazanmasını sağlayan dolaylı askeri-diplomatik destekler olarak öne çıkmıştır.

Savaş sonrası en önemli gelişme, 15 Haziran 2021'de imzalanan Şuşa Beyannamesi'dir. Bu beyanname ile ilişkiler "stratejik ortaklıktan" "müttefikliğe" yükseltilmiş ve NATO'nun 5. maddesine benzer şekilde, taraflardan birine yapılacak saldırının diğerine yapılmış sayılacağı resmen teyit edilmiştir. Aynı zamanda, Karabağ'daki ateşkesin uygulanmasını denetlemek amacıyla kurulan Ortak Türk-Rus Gözlem Merkezi, iki müttefikin bölgedeki ortak hareket etme kabiliyetini de simgelemiştir.

Tezin sonuncu temel bölümü de Azerbaycan ve İran arasındaki ilişkileri içeren bölümdür. Azerbaycan ve İran arasındaki ilişkiler, bağımsızlık sonrası ilk yıllarda, İran'daki milyonlarca Azerbaycan Türkü'nün varlığı ve bu durumun yol açtığı gerginlikler nedeniyle oldukça karmaşık bir seyir izlemiştir. Özellikle 31 Aralık 1989'daki olaylarda, Aras Nehri üzerindeki sınırın hiçe sayılması ve nehrin iki yakasındaki Azerbaycanlılar arasında bir "birleşme" arzusunun varlığı ilişkilerin kötü başlamasına sebep olmuştur.

Azerbaycan Halk Cephesi lideri Ebulfaz Elçibey'in iktidarında, "Bütün Azerbaycan" idealini sıkça dile getirmesi, İran'ın rahatsız olmasına yol açmış ve diplomatik ilişkilerin beklenen seviyeye ulaşmasını engellemiştir. Sonrasında iktidara gelen Haydar Aliyev, İran ile daha dengeli ve güvenli bir ilişki kurma çabalarına rağmen, Tahran yönetiminin agresif politikaları nedeniyle Azerbaycan'ın güney komşusunu bir tehdit olarak algılamasına neden olmuştur. Ancak bugün, zaman zaman yaşanan gerilimlere rağmen, iki ülke ilişkilerini ekonomik ve siyasi alanda stratejik bir işbirliğine doğru evriltmeye çalışmaktadır.

İlham Aliyev'in 2003'te göreve gelmesiyle, Azerbaycan ve İran arasındaki diplomatik ilişkiler, önceki döneme göre daha temkinli ve dengeli bir hal almıştır. Aliyev'in görev süresinin ilk yıllarında, iki ülke arasında karşılıklı üst düzey ziyaretler gerçekleştirilmiş, ticari ve enerji alanında işbirlikleri ele alınmıştır.

İlişkiler, 2004 yılında İran Cumhurbaşkanı Muhammed Hatemi'nin Bakü ziyaretiyle resmîyet kazanmıştır. Bu ziyaret sonucunda, aralarındaki tarihi gerginliklerin bir simgesi olarak yıllarca ertelenen Tebriz'deki Azerbaycan Konsolosluğu açılmıştır.

Ancak, bu olumlu atmosfere rağmen, ilişkiler 2009-2013 yılları arasında çeşitli krizlerle sınanmıştır. Bu krizlerin başında, Azerbaycan'ın İsrail ile artan yakınlaşması, İran'ın Eurovision Şarkı Yarışması'nı bahane ederek Azerbaycan'ı hedef alması ve İran'daki bazı milletvekillerinin Azerbaycan'ın güney bölgelerini ilhak etme çağrıları gelmektedir. Bu dönemde, Azerbaycan, İran'ın istihbarat faaliyetleri ve dini radikalizmi desteklemesinden dolayı İran vatandaşları için vize serbestisini uygulamaya koymamıştır.

2013'te İran'da Hasan Ruhani'nin cumhurbaşkanı seçilmesiyle ilişkilerde bir normalleşme dönemi başlamıştır. Bu süreçte Türkiye, üçlü diplomatik toplantılarla arabuluculuk rolü üstlenmiştir. Karşılıklı üst düzey ziyaretler yeniden başlamış, ticari ve ekonomik işbirlikleri hız kazanmıştır. Ancak, 2020 44 Gün Savaşı sırasında İran'ın Ermenistan'a yardım ettiği iddiaları, ilişkileri yeniden germiştir.

Bu gerilim, 2022'de İran'ın Azerbaycan sınırında gerçekleştirdiği ve Aras Nehri'ni geçme provası yaptığı "Mighty Iran" askeri tatbikatıyla zirveye ulaşmıştır. Azerbaycan, buna karşılık Türkiye ile "Kardeş Yumruğu" tatbikatını düzenlemiştir. 2023 yılında Azerbaycan'ın Tahran Büyükelçiliği'ne yapılan silahlı saldırı, ilişkilerdeki hassas dengenin kırılma noktası olmuştur. Son olarak, 2024'te İran Cumhurbaşkanı İbrahim Reisi'nin trajik ölümü öncesinde iki liderin ortak baraj açılışına katılması, ilişkilerin yeniden normalleşme yoluna girdiğinin bir işareti olarak yorumlanmıştır. Ayrıca, 2024 ve 2025 yıllarında iki ülkenin ortak askeri tatbikatlar düzenlemesi, diplomatik ilişkilerin son dönemde askeri işbirliğine doğru ilerlediğini göstermektedir.

Azerbaycan ile İran arasındaki güvenlik ilişkileri, özellikle İlham Aliyev döneminde hem iş birliği hem de derin bir güvensizlik ekseninde şekillenmiştir. Bu ilişkiler, Hazar Denizi'nin statüsü, İran'ın nükleer programı, dini gruplar ve askeri işbirliği gibi birçok hassas konuyu kapsamaktadır.

İki ülke arasındaki güvenlik konularından biri olan Hazar Denizi'nin hukuki statüsü, uzun yıllar boyunca çözülemeyen temel bir sorun olarak kalmıştır. İran'ın %20'lik pay talebine karşın, 2007'deki zirvede, Hazar'ın sadece beş kıyı devletine ait olduğu

ve hiçbirinin, diğetine karşı yabancı güçlerin topraklarını kullanmasına izin vermeyeceği gibi önemli prensipler kabul edilmiştir. İlham Aliyev, bu prensibe uygun olarak, ABD'ye karşı İran'a yönelik olası askeri operasyonlar için Azerbaycan topraklarının kullanılmayacağını açıkça belirtmiştir.

2011-2013 yılları arasında, ilişkiler, gerginliklerin en üst seviyeye çıktığı bir döneme girmiştir. Azerbaycan, İran tarafından finanse edildiği iddia edilen Azerbaycan İslam Partisi (AİP) ve Müslüman Birliği Hareketi (MBH) gibi dini gruplara karşı operasyonlar düzenlemiştir. Bu dönemde en büyük krize neden olan olaylar, İsrail'in Azerbaycan'ı İran'a karşı istihbarat faaliyetleri ve olası bir hava saldırısı için bir üs olarak kullandığına dair çıkan iddialar olmuştur. Azerbaycan bu iddiaları kesin bir dille reddetse de İsrail'den 1.6 milyar dolar değerinde insansız hava aracı (İHA) ve füze sistemleri satın alması, İran'ın şüphelerini artırmıştır. Bu durum, iki ülke arasındaki güvensizliği derinleştirirken, bazı analistler bu gerginliklerin hem Bakü hem de Tahran'daki siyasi elitlerin iç ve dış politikadaki çıkarlarına hizmet ettiğini öne sürmüştür.

2015 yılından itibaren, iki ülke arasında askeri işbirliği yönünde adımlar atılmıştır. Askeri İşbirliği Ortak Çalışma Grubu kurulmuş, Azerbaycan donanma gemileri ilk kez İran'ı ziyaret etmiştir. Bu olumlu adımlara rağmen, İran'ın Azerbaycan'ın iç işlerine müdahale ettiği yönündeki iddialar devam etmiştir. İran'la yaşanan tüm bu güvenlik sorunlarına rağmen, iki ülkenin askeri yetkilileri arasındaki temasların artması hem potansiyel çatışmaları önleme hem de bölgesel istikrarı koruma çabasının bir göstergesi olarak değerlendirilebilir.

İlham Aliyev döneminde Azerbaycan ve İran arasındaki ekonomik ilişkiler, özellikle enerji ve ulaştırma alanlarında çeşitli iş birliği anlaşmalarıyla gelişmiştir. İki ülke arasındaki ekonomik ilişkilerin temelini enerji ve ulaştırma projeleri oluşturur. 2005 yılında, İran'dan Azerbaycan'a bağlı Nahçıvan Özerk Cumhuriyeti'ne doğal gaz tedarikinin başlaması, bu alandaki iş birliğinin en somut örneği olmuştur. 2009 ve 2010 yıllarında imzalanan anlaşmalarla enerji, ulaşım, ticaret, telekomünikasyon ve tarım gibi çeşitli alanlarda iş birliğini geliştirmek hedeflenmiştir. Bu anlaşmalar,

özellikle hidroelektrik santrallerin ortak inşası, elektrik hatlarının entegrasyonu ve doğal gaz ticareti gibi konulara odaklanmıştır.

Son yıllarda iki ülke arasındaki ekonomik ilişkilerde önemli gelişmeler yaşanmıştır. 2024 yılında, İran Ulaştırma Bakanlığı'na göre, iki ülke arasındaki ticaret hacmi %20 artarak 580 milyon dolara ulaşmıştır. Bu artış, yeni altyapı projeleriyle de desteklenmektedir. Astara'daki yeni sınır köprüsünün açılması ve Ağbend'deki yeni köprü'nün inşaatının tamamlanmak üzere olması, iki ülke arasındaki ticareti kolaylaştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca, iki ülkeyi kara ve demir yoluyla bağlayacak Aras Koridoru'nun inşaatı devam etmektedir.

İlginç bir detay olarak, İran'ın Tebriz gibi illerindeki yetkililer, Azerbaycan'la iş birliğini geliştirmek için bölgelerindeki zengin kaynakları ve uygun koşulları vurgulamaktadır. Temmuz 2025'te Hankendi'de gerçekleşen Ekonomik İşbirliği Teşkilatı (EİT) zirvesi gibi uluslararası platformlar da iki ülkenin ekonomik bağlarını daha da güçlendirme amacını taşımaktadır. Tüm bu gelişmeler, Azerbaycan ve İran'ın, son dönemdeki siyasi ve güvenlik gerilimlerine rağmen ekonomik alanda stratejik işbirliklerini sürdürmeye kararlı olduğunu göstermektedir.

Azerbaycan ve İran arasındaki sosyo-kültürel ilişkiler, İran'daki Azerbaycan Türklerinin kimlik ve kültürel hakları etrafında şekillenmektedir. Bu durum, zaman zaman diplomatik gerilimlere ve iki ülke arasındaki güvensizliğe yol açan olaylara neden olmuştur.

İran, 1945-1946 yıllarında kısa süreliğine var olan Azerbaycan Halk Hükümeti'nden bu yana, ülkenin kuzeybatısındaki Azerbaycanlı Türklerin kültürel haklarını kısıtladığı iddialarıyla karşı karşıyadır. Bu durum, 2006'daki bir gazetede yayımlanan hakaret içeren karikatürün yol açtığı ve İran'ın çeşitli şehirlerine yayılan büyük protestolarla doruk noktasına ulaşmıştır. Protestocular, sadece karikatürü değil, aynı zamanda anadilde eğitim ve kültürel hak taleplerini de dile getirmiştir.

Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti, bu olaylar sırasında resmî olarak sessiz kalmayı tercih etmiştir. Ancak, İlham Aliyev'in 2007'de bir Fransız gazetesine verdiği röportajda,

İran'da yaşayan yaklaşık 30 milyon Azerbaycanlıya atıfta bulunarak, Batı'nın İran'a yönelik bir müdahalesine izin vermeyeceğini belirtmesi, bu konunun Azerbaycan için de önemli bir mesele olmaya başladığını göstermiştir.

Elçibey dönemindeki gibi olmasa da Azerbaycan devleti İran dahil olmak üzere komşu ülkelerdeki Azerbaycanlıların haklarını gözetmeyi birincil hedef olarak belirlemiştir. Elçibey döneminden farklı olarak ise bunu daha rasyonel ve pragmatik dış politika hamleleriyle yapmaya çalışmaktadır.



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