

Influence and Norm Entrepreneurship: Azerbaijan's Strategic Deployment of Soft Power

Asgarov SIRUS¹

Abstract

In this article, it is mentioned that Azerbaijan's strategic deployment of soft power across a variety of realms, including economic and public diplomacy, educational initiatives, and humanitarian leadership, is examined. It is clearly understood from this text that Azerbaijan is actively shaping global conversations and ideals, earning it the reputation of being a norm entrepreneur. Situated at the crossroads of cultural, economic, and political trends, the significance of leveraging its considerable energy resources and economic alliances to bolster its international standing is recognized by Azerbaijan. This analysis explores Azerbaijan as a norm entrepreneur and reveals its ability to respond quickly in crisis situations and global cooperation. At the same time, the article analyzes the priority issues that Azerbaijan has set before itself since the 1990s - issues such as the liberation of its lands from occupation, bringing these situations to the attention of the international community, and preventing all kinds of provocations, and the indispensable role of cultural and public diplomacy in this sense are analyzed. While highlighting the country's commitment to global solidarity, the challenges posed by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and the delicate balance required when using energy resources for political leverage are critically examined in the article. A considerable effort towards resolving the intricate connection between economic power and infrastructural improvements is made. Through ambitious projects like the Baku International Sea Trade Port and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, not only is Azerbaijan's economic prowess enhanced but also its significance in ensuring energy stability in Europe is solidified. More than that, this fact is about widening economic exchanges, the importance of a single market, and enhancing Azerbaijan's soft power through more cooperation.

Keywords: Soft Power Strategy, Public Diplomacy, Energy Resources, Humanitarian Leadership, Sports Diplomacy

Etki ve Norm Girişimcilik: Azerbaycan'ın Yumuşak Gücün Stratejik Kullanımı

Asgarov SİRUS¹

Özet

Bu makalede, Azerbaycan'ın ekonomik ve kamu diplomasisi, eğitim girişimleri ve insani liderlik de dahil olmak üzere çeşitli alanlarda stratejik olarak yumuşak güç kullanımı incelenmektedir. Metinden açıkça anlaşıldığı üzere Azerbaycan, küresel konuşmaları ve idealleri etkin bir şekilde şekillendirerek, norm girişimcisi olarak ün kazanmıştır. Kültürel, ekonomik ve siyasi trendlerin kesişiminde bulunan Azerbaycan, önemli enerji kaynaklarını ve ekonomik ittifaklarını uluslararası konumunu güçlendirmek için nasıl kullandığı belirtilmektedir. Bu analiz, Azerbaycan'ı bir norm girişimcisi olarak ele almakta ve kriz durumlarında ve küresel işbirliğinde hızlı bir şekilde yanıt verebilme yeteneğini ortaya koymaktadır. Aynı zamanda, makale Azerbaycan'ın 1990'lardan bu yana kendisine belirlediği öncelikli konuları - topraklarını işgalden kurtarma, bu durumları uluslararası toplumun dikkatine sunma ve tüm türden provokasyonları önleme gibi konuları - analiz etmektedir. Bu bağlamda kültürel ve kamu diplomasisinin vazgeçilmez rolü de incelenmektedir. Ülkenin küresel dayanışma taahhüdünü vurgularken, Nagorno-Karabağ çatışması tarafından ortaya çıkarılan zorluklar ve enerji kaynaklarının siyasi kaldıraç olarak kullanılmasında gereken ince denge makalede ele alınmaktadır. Ekonomik güç ile altyapı iyileştirmeleri arasındaki karmaşık bağlantının çözülmesine yönelik önemli bir çaba sarf edilmektedir. Bakü Uluslararası Deniz Ticaret Limanı ve Bakü-Tiflis-Kars demiryolu gibi iddialı projeler aracılığıyla, sadece Azerbaycan'ın ekonomik gücü artırılmakla kalmamakta, aynı zamanda Avrupa'da enerji istikrarını sağlama konusundaki önemi de pekiştirilmektedir. Dahası, bu gerçek ekonomik alışverişlerin genişletilmesi, tek bir pazarın önemi ve Azerbaycan'ın daha fazla işbirliği yoluyla yumuşak gücünün artırılmasıyla ilgilidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yumuşak Güç Stratejisi, Kamu Diplomasisi, Enerji Kaynakları, İnsani Liderlik, Spor Diplomasisi

INTRODUCTION

Azerbaijan has historically found itself at an intersection of cultural, economic, and political trends due to its advantageous position between Russia and Iran (Makili-Aliyev, 2013). Azerbaijan, an upper-middle-income country (Bank, 2020) with a varied cultural past and a developing economy based primarily on its abundant oil reserves, has been striving to broaden its scope of impact. In the context of influence and norm entrepreneurship, this article examines how Azerbaijan uses its sources of power, given its historical balance between local connections and global aspirations.

The global influence of soft power in international diplomacy has been reevaluated considering Joseph Nye's argument, suggesting the growing importance of this concept (Hall, 2010). Rather than employing coercion or financial resources to sway entities or decision-makers, soft power relies on alternative methods of persuasion. It comprises public diplomacy, humanitarian aid, sports diplomacy, educational initiatives, and economic power. The use of soft power has demonstrated its effectiveness as a tool for middle powers, which are usually situated between major powers, to enhance their worldwide standing (Cooper, 317: 2011). Azerbaijan, as a middle power, comprehends the need to utilize soft power to improve its public image and increase its sway on the global stage ((Sargent, 97: 2020).

The utilization of soft power in contemporary diplomacy has become increasingly significant in the pursuit of global power and the advancement of domestic concerns (Iwabuchi, 419: 2015). Nations aspiring to enhance their global standing and image could greatly benefit from the tactical utilization of soft power mechanisms. The subsequent paragraphs examine the fundamental principles of Azerbaijan's soft power strategy and offer an understanding of the nation's varied methods of international involvement.

Scholars such as Breuning have pointed out that middle powers' ability to serve as norm entrepreneurs is one of their distinguishing features (Breuning, 2007). Norm entrepreneurs are states or actors who actively promote and advocate the adoption and implementation of certain norms, principles, or standards in international relations (Madokoro, 100: 2018). These states support the implementation of particular global benchmarks and engage in diplomatic efforts to convince delegates from other countries to accept these standards. Norm pioneers play a crucial role in moulding the worldwide conversation and directing the global society toward common ideals and standards. The paper focuses on Azerbaijan's historical location, changing soft power scenarios, the strategic approach to soft power by the middle powers, the influence of norm entrepreneurship, and a thorough assessment of Azerbaijan's own soft power program. The results help towards a sophisticated assessment of current global issues and offer possible policy recommendations for politicians, scholars, or practitioners of international affairs.

Research Questions:

1. How does Azerbaijan, as a middle power, act as a norm entrepreneur, actively shaping and advocating the adoption of certain norms, principles, or standards in international relations?
2. What is the comprehensive nature of Azerbaijan's soft power strategy, and how do cultural outreach, public relations projects, educational initiatives, and economic power contribute to its overall approach on the global stage?

The Role of Soft Power in Azerbaijan's Strategy

Located at the crossroads of cultural, economic, and political trends, Azerbaijan strategically uses soft power as the cornerstone of its global participation strategy (Makili-Aliyev, 2013). Azerbaijan's most important contributions to the field of international relations is its role as a norm entrepreneur. The country actively promotes and advocates the adoption of certain norms, principles, or standards in global diplomacy. This different position of Azerbaijan has a significant impact on global negotiations. Azerbaijan is asserting itself as a major player in the evolving landscape of diplomatic discourse, influencing the adoption and implementation of international standards (Breuning, 2007)

First, from an economic perspective, Azerbaijan uses its economic power to strengthen its international presence (Loda,39: 2016). As a major player in the global energy market, the country's energy exporter status contributes significantly to its economic importance (Guliyev, 28: 2023). The oil and gas industry, which constitutes a significant part of Azerbaijan's GDP, forms the basis of its economic power (Jamiloglu, 137: 2021).

On the other hand, Azerbaijan strategically uses online platforms and social media for public diplomacy in the digital field (Loda, 40: 2016). This approach allows the country to spread its narrative globally and engage with different audiences.

Azerbaijan's commitment to humanitarian leadership is emerging as a critical part of its soft power arsenal (Cordies, 108: 2014). The country's rapid response to international crises demonstrates its effective foreign aid and positions it as a key participant in tackling global challenges (Gojayev, 2010). Additionally, Azerbaijan's participation in Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) reflects its pursuit of modernity and European affiliation. Hosting the contest in 2012 led to a diverse encounter with Western culture, influencing Azerbaijani perceptions of identity (Ismayilov, 833: 2012). National identity encompasses the shared communal self-perception and behaviors among citizens of countries. Especially, participation in cultural events such as the ESC can shape and display national identities (Ahlberg, 2023). Hosting Eurovision was part of Azerbaijan's broader strategy to diversify its sources of legitimacy beyond oil revenue, with investments in culture, sport, and cuisine contributing to nation-building efforts (Valiyev, 131: 2016).

At the same time, Azerbaijan successfully organizes international sports events in the field of sports diplomacy and participates in sports exchange programs (Rojo-Labaien, 1101: 2018). Hosting events such as the European Games and Formula 1 races strengthens Azerbaijan's global profile and showcases its cultural heritage.

Furthermore, Nye rightly emphasizes the significance of soft power, arguing that appealing cultural norms and ideologies can naturally attract followers. This influence manifests through various means such as student exchange programs, scholarships for international students, seminars, and media broadcasts (Mozaffari and Akbar, 667: 2023). Especially, when it comes to education, education diplomacy through initiatives such as the Azerbaijan Scholarship Program and academic collaborations is emerging as a powerful tool for global community building (Kondakci and Ergun, 1330: 2021). By promoting intellectual and cultural exchange, Azerbaijan invests in creating a global community of people familiar with its culture and values (Amirbek and Ydyrys, 514: 2014).

Rapid Response to International Crises

Azerbaijan's rapid response to international crises is a critical part of the country's soft power strategy and demonstrates its ability to meet global challenges and contribute meaningfully to humanitarian efforts.¹ Azerbaijan's performance in crisis response reflects its diplomatic agility and proactive engagement in tackling pressing global challenges.²

The efficiency and scale of Azerbaijan's humanitarian efforts contribute significantly to its soft power, strengthening the country's image as a trustworthy and compassionate global actor (Cordies, 109: 2014). The ability to quickly mobilize resources and provide significant help positions Azerbaijan as a key player in international crises. This fact strengthens its diplomatic stance and underlines the practical impact of its humanitarian initiatives on the global stage.

Azerbaijan's foreign aid totaled \$50 million from 2005 to 2018, excluding concessional loans, with \$21 million allocated to multilateral organizations, \$9 million to Asian countries, and significant portions to Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet region, primarily for disaster relief and humanitarian efforts, while Kazakhstan's data remains undisclosed ("New donors on the block: Unpacking the largesse of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan," n.d.).

Azerbaijan's aid lacks conditionality regarding governance, human rights, and democratization, making it attractive to recipient governments. However, there may be economic conditions attached, such as requiring contracts for Azerbaijani companies in projects like the \$370 million road construction and repair loan to Serbia in 2012. Additionally, support for issues like Nagorno-Karabakh influences aid allocation, as seen with an \$8 million public infrastructure grant to Mexico in 2011, and over seven times more emergency relief given to Pakistan (De, 107: 2014). When reaching Pakistan, since 2005, Azerbaijan has been actively engaged in humanitarian projects inside Pakistan, conducted under the

¹ Mammadli, Nargiz (6 February 2023). "Azerbaijan Sends Rescuers, Humanitarian Aid to Quake-Hit Türkiye". caspiannews.com. Archived from the original on 7 February 2023

² Van Gils, E. (2018). Azerbaijan's foreign policy strategies and the European Union: Successful Resistance and pursued influence. *Europe Asia Studies*, 70(5), 738–758. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1479733>

auspices of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation. The construction of a girls' school in Muzaffarabad in 2005 was considered a pilot project, and over the past 12 years the foundation has implemented projects in healthcare, ecology as well as education (Caspian News, 2017). Additionally, when it turns to recent years, between 2019 and 2020, Azerbaijan extended humanitarian assistance to crisis-affected nations in the Middle East, such as Yemen and Lebanon. In response to UN Secretary-General António Guterres's appeal, Azerbaijan provided aid to Yemen through the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, recognizing the urgent situation where 80% of the population requires assistance. Additionally, Azerbaijan allocated \$1 million in financial aid to Lebanon, addressing immediate needs following the tragedy, as directed by Prime Minister Ali Asadov (The official website of AZERTAG, 2019-2020).

Moreover, a notable example of Azerbaijan's rapid response capability is its comprehensive aid package to Ukraine, which is facing a complex humanitarian situation. Azerbaijan's commitment to provide 27.6 million manats (roughly 15 million euros) and 720 tons of aid underline its commitment to ameliorate the suffering of peoples affected by crises (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan No: 190/22). This multidimensional approach, which includes both financial contributions and material supplies, reflects Azerbaijan's nuanced understanding of the different needs in crisis-affected regions. Furthermore, it is essential to highlight Azerbaijan's significant support during the devastating earthquake that struck Turkey in 2023. Azerbaijan dispatched 7 planes and 14 vehicles loaded with humanitarian aid to Turkey, with banks waiving commission fees for direct monetary assistance. Contributions from various sources included 395 trucks, 15 planes, and 25 train cars carrying tents, generators, blankets, food, and medical supplies. Foreign Affairs Minister Ceyhun Bayramov announced 5,300 tons of aid and deposited \$45 million for reconstruction, pledging an additional \$100 million for housing and infrastructure. Furthermore, the Azerbaijan Women Entrepreneurs Association dispatched 5 trucks loaded with clothing, food, and shelters to the affected region (Şehitoğlu and Güner, 1775: 2023).

Azerbaijan's rapid response to international crises serves as a powerful tool in shaping its soft power. Diplomatic agility, efficiency in crisis management and determination to meet various humanitarian needs contribute to Azerbaijan's positive global image (Cordies, 110: 2014) However, careful navigation of regional complexities is vital to maintaining the effectiveness of humanitarian leadership on the international stage.

However, as already given, critics have questioned Azerbaijan's commitment to human rights, especially considering the Nagorno-Karabakh war. Human rights implications of Azerbaijan's activities during the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh have been called into doubt, sparking international alarm. These concerns, it is said by critics, have thrown a shadow over the larger humanitarian efforts of Azerbaijan, which creates a need for the country to confront these problems openly and honestly.

Economic Influence

An important part of a country's ability to project soft power is its financial strength. Azerbaijan has used its considerable energy reserves and commercial alliances to boost its international presence (Jamiloğlu, 137: 2021).

Azerbaijan's status as an energy exporter is crucial to the country's economic significance. Azerbaijan has successfully established itself as a pivotal role in the global energy market as a significant producer and exporter of oil and natural gas. Depending on oil prices, the oil and gas industry in Azerbaijan is responsible for between 30 and 50 percent of the country's GDP. In 2020, natural gas accounted for 68% of Azerbaijan's TES, while oil accounted for 31%³

³ IEA (2022), Implementing a Long-Term Energy Policy Planning Process for Azerbaijan: A Roadmap, Paris, IEA, License: CC BY 4.0: <https://www.iea.org/reports/implementing-a-long-term-energy-policy-planning-process-for-azerbaijan-a-roadmap>

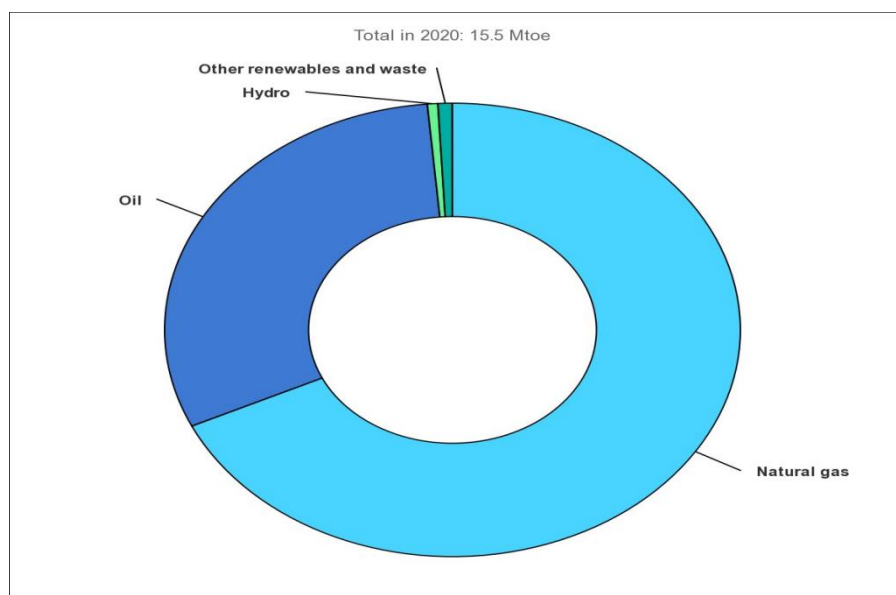


Figure 1: IEA, *Azerbaijan total energy supply, 2020*

The country's involvement in energy initiatives and pipelines, like the Southern Gas Corridor, has not only enhanced its economic power but also reinforced its significance in guaranteeing energy stability in Europe (Prontera, 464: 2018). By putting itself in such a prominent position, Azerbaijan can expand its sphere of influence and strengthen its diplomatic ties with influential countries. Furthermore, Azerbaijan has actively sought economic alliances and agreements on trade with diverse nations and areas. By broadening its economic connections, the country lessens its reliance on a solitary market and enhances its ability to endure financial challenges. Azerbaijan's soft power increases due to the interdependencies and increased collaboration that have been facilitated by its economic connections. Azerbaijan's dedication to the advancement of infrastructure is an additional aspect of its economic influence and soft power approach. The country has started ambitious initiatives that include upgrading its infrastructure and enhancing connectivity within the area. The Baku International Sea Trade Port and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway are two such instances.

Baku International Sea Trade Port on the Caspian Sea has grown into an important transportation and logistics center, strengthening Azerbaijan's role as a trade facilitator in the area. In the year 2022, the port of Baku processed more than 6.3 million tons of cargo⁴. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, which extends through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, is an important link in the supply chain for companies shipping products between Europe and Asia (Idan and Shaffer, 241: 2011). As a result, commerce and economic cooperation have been facilitated throughout its course while transit times and costs have been drastically cut.

Although mostly known for its energy production, Azerbaijan's financial power goes well beyond the oil industry. As part of its effort to diversify its economy, the country has swiftly sought economic alliances and trade agreements with a wide range of nations and areas. This method reduces Azerbaijan's vulnerability to economic disruptions by reducing the country's reliance on a single market. According to statistics published by the World Bank in 2022, Azerbaijan approximately had a GDP of 79 billion US dollars. Azerbaijan contributes just 0.04 percent of the world's GDP through its economic output (Trading Economics, Azerbaijan GDP - 2023 Data - 2024 Forecast).

The main concern is that Azerbaijan could use its energy resources to further its political and foreign policy ambitions, which could endanger the sovereignty of energy-dependent nations (Guliyev, 28: 2023). Because of this, there may be suspicions regarding the sincerity of any concessions or decisions made by these countries that benefit Azerbaijan. These kinds of actions may fail in terms of soft power. Acceptance of a country's values, culture, and policies is essential to the success of its soft power. A country's soft power can be harmed if its energy-based influence is seen as coercive or self-serving.

⁴ Trend News Agency (2023) <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/business/3736529.html>

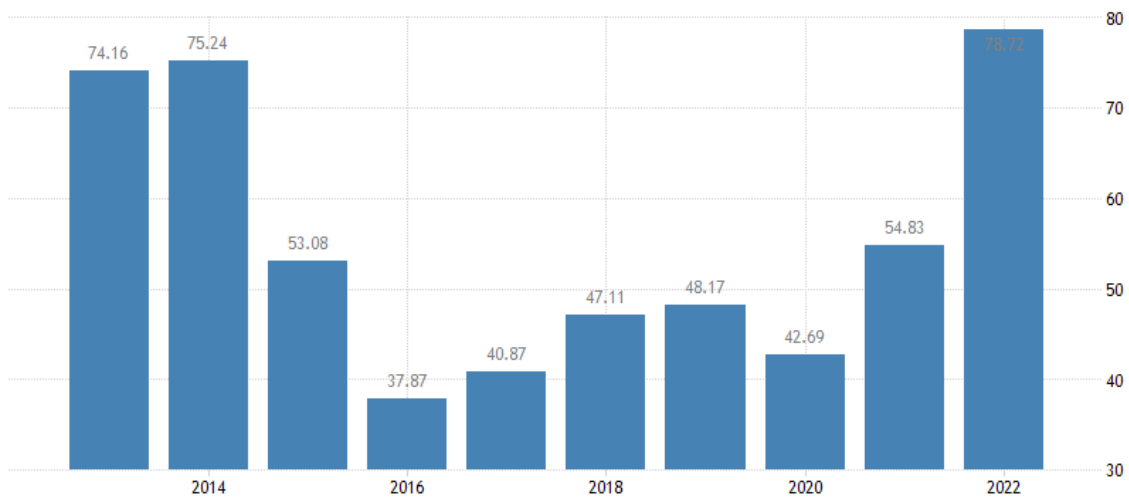


Figure 2: Trading Economics, Azerbaijan GDP between 2014-2022

One of the most important pillars of its macroeconomic strategy that ensured GDP growth and development is Azerbaijan's overreliance on energy exports, particularly oil and gas reserves (Guliyev, 28: 2023). However, critics fairly point out the flaws eminent in such reliance due mainly to the fluid nature of global energy market. Unstable energy costs represent a high risk and may result in budget imbalances, economic unrest while preventing the necessary programs from government to take paths (Khan & Khurshid & Cifuentes-Faura, 50: 2023). In addition to which lingering questions about the accountability and transparency of Azerbaijan's energy sector in the wake of rumours of corruption and poor management have discredited governance integrity thus questioning both investors' confidence and soft power credibility (Grasso, 30: 2019). Correctly handling these challenges is essential in minimizing risks connected to energy dependence, building investor confidence and improving Azerbaijan's soft power image across the world.

Public Diplomacy

The term "public diplomacy" refers to a broad set of initiatives with the overarching goal of influencing foreign audiences' impressions of a country (Szondi, 2008). Azerbaijan has put considerable resources into public diplomacy to promote goodwill and encourage international collaboration. Azerbaijan's interaction with foreign media is crucial to its public diplomacy efforts (Valiyev, 30: 2017). Media campaigns and other forms of strategic communication have been used to spread the word about the country's history, culture, and contributions to the world at large. Azerbaijan has leveraged the reach of social media and online diplomacy to spread its message (Bradshaw & Howard, 34: 2017).

Azerbaijan has utilized digital platforms to distribute its narrative and interact with an international audience during a century dominated by information exchange. By skilfully using social media and other online efforts, Azerbaijan can amplify its voice and present a nuanced picture to the rest of the world (Labarre & Niculescu, 12: 2016). Azerbaijan has effectively used digital diplomacy by developing several web-based initiatives and events to inform an international audience of the nation's long-standing conflict with Armenia over the land that is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's government and related organizations reported on current events (44 days of conflict and Azerbaijan's anti-terror operations), communicated information, and actively impacted public opinion in real-time via well-designed messaging and contact with worldwide communities on platforms like social media. This strategy goes beyond simple broadcasting to actively engaging with online communities to counteract disinformation, highlight national pride, and further Azerbaijan's foreign policy goals. For instance, Azerbaijan's digital diplomacy initiatives were essential in getting the country's position through to the globe and winning international support during the 44-day conflict for the liberation of Karabakh (Altun, 10: 2023)

On the other hand, according to its critics, Azerbaijan's soft power could be damaged by its engagement in the Karabakh conflict (Mammadov, 20: 2022). The pursuit of soft power by Azerbaijan on the world

stage is complex and multifaceted. While the country has had some success with its soft power, it faces a challenge in the form of ethnic and regional conflicts, most notably the Karabakh conflict. Such disputes can overshadow the country's soft power endeavors.

Following the occupation of Azerbaijani territories, the paramount strategic objective became the liberation of these lands, coupled with global awareness efforts utilizing political and soft power channels, while also thwarting any potential provocations in the region. Azerbaijan's prioritization of resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict arises from concerns over the enclave's military alliances and a drive to enhance international standing by utilizing its hydrocarbon resources. Exploiting oil and gas reserves not only attracts Western attention for regional stability but also finances military modernization, potentially facilitating a bid to regain control over Nagorno-Karabakh (Fuller, 15: 2013). It is no coincidence that according to the National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan approved in 2007, the restoration of territorial integrity is a primary policy objective. Article 4.1.1 outlines the settlement basis, which includes the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from occupied Azerbaijani territories, restoration of Azerbaijani sovereign rights, return of displaced Azerbaijanis, establishment of a legal status for Nagorno-Karabakh ensuring peaceful coexistence, and fostering socioeconomic development in the region within the framework of overall national and regional integration processes (National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2007).

After the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Armenian nationalists transitioned from territorial expansion to advocating for self-determination amid global pressure. Nonetheless, Armenia initiated an undeclared conflict with Azerbaijan, seizing Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent territories by 1993. Despite UN Security Council resolutions demanding withdrawal, Armenia evaded direct culpability through semantic interpretations (Shafiyev, 34: 2023). Regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, while several Security Council resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884 before 1994 urged the withdrawal of occupying forces from Azerbaijan, the Council has since refrained from further addressing the issue (Ruys & Silvestre, 2021). Azerbaijan also had perceived the mediation efforts of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs as lacking and endeavors to involve additional international bodies, including the European Council, Islamic Cooperation Council, Non-aligned Movement, UN, and Turkic Council, in addressing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Its primary objective is to increase global understanding of the conflict and gather backing for the restoration of its territorial integrity, as validated by resolutions passed by entities such as the UN Security Council, UN General Assembly, Council of Europe, European Parliament, Organization for Islamic Cooperation, Non-aligned Movement, and International Court of Justice (Valiyev, 29: 2017). Azerbaijan, joining the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1991, consistently garners support from the OIC for Nagorno-Karabakh, advocating for its territorial integrity and condemning Armenian actions. Azerbaijan also sees the Non-Aligned Movement, joined in 2011, as a potential ally for resolving the conflict in alignment with its interests (Fuller, 17: 2013). Azerbaijan chaired the Non-Aligned Movement from 2019 to 2022, starting at the Baku Summit in October 2019. The member states unanimously extended Azerbaijan's chairmanship for another year (The official website of the President of Azerbaijan). On April 4, 2020, the Non-Aligned Movement rejected the "elections" in occupied Azerbaijani territories, emphasizing the illegitimacy of territorial seizure by force. They refused to recognize the "presidential and parliamentary elections" in Nagorno-Karabakh and reiterated support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity within its recognized borders, calling for resolution of the conflict based on UN Security Council Resolutions (The official website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan).

Additionally it would be worthwhile to mention the important role of organizations in Azerbaijan to implement the effective public diplomacy. To take an example, Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry actively promotes its economic agenda through public diplomacy, showcasing its business potential and favorable environment through investment forums and visits by foreign officials. One more organization to be noted is The State Committee for Work with Diaspora that leverages public relations to advance foreign policy, particularly in countries with diplomatic ties. Efforts include forming positive opinions and hosting conferences on Diaspora's role in partnerships, underscoring Azerbaijan's emphasis on public relations in foreign affairs (Aghazada, 20: 2013).

However, there is one organization that should be exclusively mentioned - The Heydar Aliyev Foundation. It holds a unique position in national branding, serving as a form of soft power in cultural diplomacy. The Foundation focuses on fostering intercultural dialogue and preserving global cultural heritage, while promoting a positive image of Azerbaijan internationally. Through collaboration with

foreign partners and engagement with Azerbaijani diaspora communities, led by Mehriban Aliyeva, it strives to strengthen ties with compatriots abroad and organize diaspora efforts for the benefit of Azerbaijan's interests on the global stage (Ibragimov, 143: 2022). Since 2007, the Foundation has been globally campaigning to raise awareness about the Khojaly massacre and the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Its efforts, including screenings, exhibitions, and publications, aim to inform the world community about the truth of these events (Farmanova, 2013). Notably, the "Justice for Khojaly" International Awareness Campaign, initiated in 2008 and led by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, actively works to raise awareness and strengthen Azerbaijan's position for a just settlement in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict (Ibragimov, 143: 2022)..

In July 2009, the OIC Youth Forum and ISESCO agreed to include the Khojaly tragedy in history textbooks of OIC member countries. In January 2010, representatives from 51 countries signed a resolution in Kampala, Uganda, recognizing the tragedy as a "crime against humanity" and endorsing the "Justice for Khojaly" campaign, marking the first international recognition of its kind (Late, 1992). Furthermore, at the 13th session of the Council of the Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States in Abu Dhabi on January 19, 2011, a declaration recognizing the Khojaly tragedy as "a massive crime against humanity" was passed, while at the 7th session of the OIC PU member states in Palembang, Indonesia on January 31, 2012, support for the "Justice for Khojaly" campaign was confirmed. This marked the first international document to term the Khojaly tragedy as an act of genocide, reflecting efforts since 2009 within the "Justice to Khojaly" campaign (Hasanov, 2018). In this sense, President Aliyev asserted that Armenian nationalists have historically committed atrocities, with the Khojaly genocide standing as a stark example, and emphasizes Azerbaijan's ongoing efforts to globally recognize this tragedy, including through the "Justice for Khojaly" campaign, which has garnered international support from various civil society institutions and governmental bodies, highlighting the increasing acknowledgment of Khojaly as a genocide (Goble, 2010).

Azerbaijan's Heydar Aliyev Foundation has bolstered the nation's global reputation through cultural diplomacy, including initiatives like the Gabala International Music Festival and UNESCO recognition of Azerbaijani mugham. Moreover, the Foundation's efforts extend to raising awareness about the Garabagh conflict, exemplified by the presentation of the QARABAĞ XANƏNDƏLƏRİ album at UNESCO Headquarters and the publication of booklets detailing aspects such as the Khojaly genocide. Additionally, in 2007, the Foundation and Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs jointly released "WAR AGAINST AZERBAIJAN: TARGETING CULTURAL HERITAGE," complemented by a multimedia disk and DVD documentary, further advocating for Azerbaijan's position on the global stage.

Additionally, to date, the campaign boasts over 120,000 individuals and 115 organizations globally, operating in numerous countries through effective tools such as social networks, exhibitions, rallies, contests, conferences, and seminars (The official website of "Justice for Khojaly" International Awareness Campaign).

On the other hand, Azerbaijan's public diplomacy also includes reaching out to the Azerbaijani community worldwide through the Azerbaijani diaspora (Loda, 40: 2016). "Diaspora" is a term used to describe a certain group of people who are away from their native country⁵. In this case, an Azerbaijani community living abroad is the Azerbaijani diaspora. Foreign relations with the Azerbaijan diaspora are significant in terms of the international representation and development of images of the country (Loda, 40: 2016). Cultural communication is strategic and in Azerbaijan, to keep ties between diaspora communities and make it feel as home. This approach includes not only recognizing the contributions of the diaspora to host countries but also involving them in the promotion of Azerbaijani culture, values, and diplomatic initiatives. Azerbaijan uses its diaspora as a valuable asset in reaching out to the Azerbaijani community around the world (Loda, 40: 2016). Today, the world is turning towards the diaspora as a way of spreading information, removing misapprehensions, and projecting a good image to the globe. This proactive engagement also fits within the broader framework of public diplomacy where it not only talks to people but with people and communities.

Even more than that, Azerbaijan's public diplomacy has benefited greatly from humanitarian efforts (Gojayevev, 2010). In times of crisis, the country has helped other nations in need (Cordies, 109: 2014).

⁵ Sideri, E. (2008). The diaspora of the term Diaspora: A working-paper of a definition. *Transtext(e)s Transcultures*, (4), 32–47. <https://doi.org/10.4000/transtexts.247>

These actions not only demonstrate Azerbaijan's commitment to global cooperation, but also garner goodwill and positive views from the rest of the world. This approach is consistent with the basic principles of public diplomacy, which uses altruistic actions to build lasting relationships, enhance international cooperation, and shape a positive perception of Azerbaijan around the world (Gojajev, 2010).

Azerbaijan's attention from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has resulted in much international opposition to its human rights record and allegations that it has violated international law (Galstyan, 2021). While trying to provide humanitarian aid to displaced people, the conflict has overshadowed Azerbaijan initiatives leading many watchers in doubt what position Azerbaijan is ready to offer regarding humane rights. The human rights violation accusations were also leveled against the Azerbaijani and Armenian forces, having to share in indiscriminate shelling and targeted civilians (Vantsyan, 75: 2022). The problem of perception, which coincides with the myths about Azerbaijan soft power goals and the challenges that linked to them – presenting such notions as transparency, authenticity, honor existing human rights standards and international law in Baku relations with other countries.

Sports Diplomacy

As one of the powerful tools of international relations, sports diplomacy has been growing popular in increasing relationships and comprehension among countries⁶. Azerbaijan uses sports diplomacy as part of a larger strategy to increase its soft power and improve its international standing.

Rojo-Labaien (2018) points out that the hosting and organization of the European games in Baku is enough to show that Azerbaijan is capable in sports diplomacy. These gatherings not only give Azerbaijan the opportunity to exhibit its illustrious heritage and extend its hospitality to an audience from around the world, but they also serve as a platform for the exchange of cultural ideas and for diplomatic endeavors. Azerbaijan's successful organization and hosting of the European Games in Baku in 2015 is an example of the country's capabilities supported by several key elements. The massive logistics undertaking involved complex planning and execution that reflected Azerbaijan's organizational prowess. Additionally, the event showcased significant investments in infrastructure, demonstrating Azerbaijan's commitment to maintaining high standards in facility development. The European Games has shown Azerbaijan's rich cultural heritage through ceremonies, programs and highlighting of local traditions to a global audience. Thus, hosting the international race in Baku helped to increase Azerbaijan's visibility in the global scene (Huseynzade, 90: 2023). Further reinforce Azerbaijan's dedication to using sports as a means of enhancing international relations, the country's commitment to sports exchange programs. Azerbaijan's dedication to sports exchange programs as a means of further reinforcing the country's commitment to utilizing sports as a means of enhancing international relations. The cooperative training programs that Azerbaijan runs with other countries are evidence of the country's commitment to fostering international cooperation in sports (Mehdiyev, 72: 2019). These programs are examples of international collaborations that make it possible for Azerbaijan to train athletes and coaches from other countries while also facilitating the transfer of information and expertise in both directions.

While the hosting of international sporting events encourages Azerbaijan to become more visible on a global platform, critics assert that such undertakings may represent prestige projects aiming at supporting the legitimacy of the regime instead of any cultural exchange or improvement in interstate relations (Rojo-Labaien, 1102: 2018). It is not only a problem of the perception, though, because there are actual allegations where athletes and workers who organize such events were treated. There are reports of human right violations and labour exploitation shunning Azerbaijan's soft power's reputation, calling into question the ethics and values that drive its sporting diplomacy endeavours (Ramankulova, 90: 2020). Such claims weaken the intended net positive effect of these events and bring to light critical issues which Azerbaijan should address within its sports industry so that the country's soft power initiatives meet global standards of justice, respect, and dignity. Neglecting these issues may result in

⁶ Grix, J., & Houlihan, B. (2013). Sports mega-events as part of a nation's soft power strategy: The cases of Germany (2006) and the UK (2012). *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 16(4), 572–596. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-856x.12017>

harming Azerbaijan's international reputation and credibility, undermining its soft power goals in the future.

Educational Initiatives

Education is an effective tool for exerting soft power, enabling nations to cultivate intellectual and cultural ties with other nations (Amirbek & Ydyrys, 515: 2014). Azerbaijan's tactical utilization of educational programs as soft power instruments showcases its diverse strategy for improving its international position. Education diplomacy also promotes intellectual and cultural interchange.

One of the main components of Azerbaijan's educational diplomacy is the offering of gives and academic interchange initiatives to foreign students (Ergun & Kondakçı, 1330: 2021). The Azerbaijan Scholarship Program is an innovative program that aims to promote academic excellence across borders and is at the forefront of Azerbaijan's educational diplomacy. Students from all over the world are invited to apply to this program so that they can pursue higher education in Azerbaijan (StudyinAzerbaijan.edu.az). Beyond traditional education, this program fosters profound cultural exchange, creating a cohort of individuals who have immersed themselves in Azerbaijani academia, culture, and society. The success of the Azerbaijan Scholarship Program is not limited to the dissemination of information; rather, it represents a long-term investment in building a global community of people who, after having been exposed to Azerbaijani culture and learning personally, will work to promote peace and understanding back home.

Moreover, Azerbaijan engages in cooperation with global universities and educational establishments, promoting research collaborations and faculty interchange (Samadova, 63: 2016). Faculty exchange programs and research partnerships are only two examples of the many ways in which academic institutions throughout the world are working together. For instance, ADA University, Azerbaijan's diplomatic university, has partnered with universities in Europe, Asia, and the United States to promote collaboration on research and exchange programs. Azerbaijani universities will be seen as centers of innovation, intellectual interchange, and the transmission of information to the world as a result of these partnerships⁷. Through active engagement in the global scholarly community, Azerbaijan supports its standing as a country dedicated to the pursuit of wisdom and scholastic distinction.

Language instruction additionally has a crucial part in Azerbaijan's educational diplomacy (Pashayeva, 133:2018). The Azerbaijani government supports Azerbaijani language initiatives in different nations, specifically through Azerbaijani diaspora groups. By advocating for the Azerbaijani language, Azerbaijan not only conserves its cultural legacy but also enhances cultural connections with diaspora communities and promotes a recognition of Azerbaijani culture and principles (Rumyansev, 111: 2010). However, the initiatives that Azerbaijan has been trying to implement to develop education system are under attack by critics since they see those initiatives are not a genuine attempt but simply part of the state propaganda (Akhundov, 2020). The issues that people have raised in the program concern selection criteria and curricula as some claim that such focuses do not justify political bias and ideological agenda, which may impair its ability to create mutual understanding and cooperation. In addition, Azerbaijan's attempts to promote its own language and culture abroad should be seen as a seeking of cultural dominance and linguistic exclusivity, which also raises questions regarding the country's adherence to cultural rights and pluralism (Akyıldız, 45: 2019). Such attitudes have a negative effect on the credibility and effectiveness of Azerbaijan's educational diplomacy, which shows that transparency, inclusivity and respect for academic freedom become important necessities to guide its international education policy. Answering these issues is the foundation of ensuring that Azerbaijani educational initiatives potentially commit to world learning transfer, so contributing to intercultural dialog and cooperation on an international platform.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Azerbaijan's comprehensive soft power strategy effectively positions the nation on the global stage. The country's commitment to becoming a major player on the international stage is demonstrated through its use of economic influence, as evidenced by its exploitation of energy resources, implementation of infrastructure projects, and active engagement in diplomatic alliances.

⁷ ADA University , Go on an Exchange <https://www.ada.edu.az/en/your-future/go-on-an-exchange>

Azerbaijan's rapid and empathetic response to international crises exemplifies its role as a norm entrepreneur and strengthens its reputation as a trustworthy and sensitive global partner.

In response to the first research question, Azerbaijan, as a middle power, effectively acts as a norm entrepreneur by actively promoting and advocating the adoption of certain norms, principles, or standards in international relations. The study highlights Azerbaijan's significant influence on global negotiations and its diplomatic efforts to persuade other nations to accept and implement these standards. Regarding the second research question, the study reveals the comprehensive nature of Azerbaijan's soft power strategy. Cultural support, public relations projects, educational initiatives, and economic strength all contribute to Azerbaijan's multifaceted approach on the global stage. The country's commitment to humanitarian leadership, demonstrated by its rapid response to international crises, adds another layer to its soft power arsenal.

This study emphasizes how Azerbaijan uses the economic power, especially through energy export and infrastructure project, to enhance the international presence. This contribute to shaping the debate in economic power, infrastructure development and soft power tactics. Furthermore, the paper touches upon how Azerbaijan used virtual space for public diplomacy. First, this contributes significantly to the nascent practice of digital diplomacy, and secondly it gives valuable insights to states that seek to mould their narratives online. The soft power of Azerbaijan as a major player in global crises shows that soft power is effective, even in complex geopolitics settings. This helps for better understanding the role of humanitarian initiatives as powerful weapons that countries use to boost their image at the international level. Finally, the sports diplomacy literature is also aided by the study by pointing out Azerbaijan's success in hosting international events and the country's active participation in sport exchange programs. That shows soft power potentiality of sport culture exchange.

The strategy that Azerbaijan applies to increase its influence on the global arena includes a whole set of economic, diplomatic, cultural and educational measures. Nonetheless, these initiatives face considerable challenges and criticisms that call their legitimacy into question. Such counterarguments need to be addressed through honest efforts aimed at improving the transparency, accountability and respect for human rights and diversity in Azerbaijan's policies and actions. Developing more transparency and accountability will help Azerbaijan forge trust and co-operation with the international community, increasing its soft power's validity and efficiency. The adherence to these principles is critical for Azerbaijan to become an esteemed actor that influences world affairs.

REFERENCES

- Aghazada, R. (2013), "Searching for a new foreign policy strategy for Azerbaijan--public diplomacy efforts", *European Scientific Journal*, p.222-233
- Akhundov, J. (2020), "Conflict and militarization of education: Totalitarian institutions in secondary schools and in the system of extracurricular education in Azerbaijan", *Journal of Conflict Transformation*, Issue:1, p. 20-41.
- Akyıldız, S. (2019), *Reflections of nationalism and the role of language policies in national identity formation in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*, Unpublished Graduate Thesis, TR School of Social Sciences
- Ahlberg, M. (2023), *Beyond the music: Exploring the Dynamics of National and European Identity in the Eurovision Song Contest*. Unpublished Bachelour Thesis, Ger Malmö University
- Altun, F. (2023), "The Organisation of Turkic States Digital Communication and Digital Diplomacy Perspective", *Bilig*, Issue:106, p.1-33.
- Amirbek, A., & Ydyrys, K. (2014). "Education and soft power: Analysis as an instrument of foreign policy", *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Issue: 143, p. 514-516.
- AZERTAG. Azerbaijan sends humanitarian aid to Yemen. Retrieved from https://azertag.az/en/xeber/azerbaijan_sends_humanitarian_aid_to_yemen-1279966
- AZERTAG. Azerbaijani PM signs order to provide financial assistance to Lebanon. Retrieved from https://azertag.az/en/xeber/azerbaijani_pm_signs_order_to_provide_financial_assistance_to_lebanon-1554439

- Bradshaw, Samantha and Howard, Philip N., (2019), “The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation”, Copyright, Fair Use, Scholarly Communication, etc.. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/scholcom/207>
- Breuning, M. (2007), *Foreign policy analysis: A comparative introduction*. Springer.
- Caspian News. (2017, August 18). From weapons to humanitarian aid: Azerbaijan, Pakistan seen as reliable partners. Retrieved from <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/from-weapons-to-humanitarian-aid-azerbaijan-pakistan-seen-as-reliable-partners-2017-8-18-29/>
- Cooper, D. A. (2011), “Challenging contemporary notions of middle power influence: implications of the proliferation security initiative for “Middle Power Theory”, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 7(3), p.317-336. <https://academic.oup.com/fpa/article-abstract/7/3/317/1792653>
- Cordies, B. D. (2014), “Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan as Donors of Humanitarian Aid. Has the Diversification of Aid Channels and Donors Reached Southern Eurasia?”, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 15(5), p.107–118.
- De, C. B. (2014), “Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan as donors of humanitarian aid: Has the diversification of aid channels and donors reached Southern Eurasia?” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 15(5), p.107–118.
- Eurasianet. New donors on the block: Unpacking the largesse of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. Retrieved from <https://eurasianet.org/new-donors-on-the-block-unpacking-the-largesse-of-azerbaijan-and-kazakhstan>
- Ergun, A., & Kondakci, Y. (2021), “The internationalization of higher education and identity construction in Azerbaijan. *Europe-Asia Studies*”, 73(7), p.1330-1354. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09668136.2021.1919601>
- Farmanova, A. (2013), MRS. Mehriban Aliyeva’s multifaceted activity serves to expand international reputation of Azerbaijan. *Science and World*, 88.
- Fuller, E. (2013), *Azerbaijan’s Foreign Policy and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*. Universitäts-und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt.
- Galstyan, H. (2021), *Disputed Land, Disputed Lives: Transnational and regional coverage of the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh in the 2020 war*.
- Gojajev, V. (2010), *Resource Nationalism Trends in Azerbaijan. 2004-2009*. Universitäts-und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt.
- Grasso, C. (2019), *The troubled path towards greater transparency as a means to foster good corporate governance and fight against corruption in the energy sector. Handbook of Energy Finance Theories: Practices and Simulations*, World Scientific.
- Grix, J., & Houlihan, B. (2013), “Sports mega-events as part of a nation’s soft power strategy: The cases of Germany (2006) and the UK (2012)”, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 16(4), p.572–596. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-856x.12017>
- Guliyev, F. (2023), “Renewable Energy Targets and Policies in Traditional Oil-Producing Countries: A Comparison of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan”, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 18793665231177720.
- Guliyev, M. (2020, July). Accelerating economic diversification in Azerbaijan: Challenges, shaping prospects. In 56th International Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development–Aveiro.
- Goble, P. (2010), *Azerbaijan In the World*.
- Hall, T. (2010), “An unclear attraction: a critical examination of soft power as an analytical category. *Chinese Journal of International Politics*”, 3(2), p.189-211. <https://academic.oup.com/cjip/article-abstract/3/2/189/344483>
- HASANOV, A. (2018), *Genocide in Khojaly*.

- Huseynzade, B. Evaluation of Mega Sport Events Beyond the Borders of Just Sports Event: Azerbaijani Case Study in Terms of Economic and Political Implications.
- Ibrahimov, Z. S. (2022), The Role of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation in the Development of Foreign and Cultural Relations of Azerbaijan (Doctoral dissertation). Baku State University.
- Ibragimov, Z. S. (2022), “The formation and stages of development of interstate activities of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation”, *SocioEconomic Challenges (SEC)*, 6(3), p148-156.
- Idan, A., & Shaffer, B. (2011), “The foreign policies of post-Soviet landlocked states”, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 27(3), p.241-268. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2747/1060-586X.27.3.241>
- IEA (2022), *Implementing a Long-Term Energy Policy Planning Process for Azerbaijan: A Roadmap*, Paris, IEA, License: CC BY 4.0. <https://www.iea.org/reports/implementing-a-long-term-energy-policy-planning-process-for-azerbaijan-a-roadmap>,
- IEA, Azerbaijan total energy supply, 2020, IEA, Paris, <https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/charts/azerbaijan-total-energy-supply-2020>,
- Ismayilov, M. (2012), “State, identity, and the politics of music: Eurovision and nation-building in Azerbaijan”, *Nationalities Papers*, 40(6), p.833-851.
- Iwabuchi, K. (2015), “Pop-culture diplomacy in Japan: Soft power, nation branding and the question of ‘international cultural exchange’”, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 21(4), p.419-432. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10286632.2015.1042469>
- Jamiloglu, G. A. (2021), “Words of the Leader: Justice Supports the National Idea and Diplomacy”, *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 12(3), p.137-144. https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.10520/ejc-sl_jeteraps_v12_n3_a5
- Justice for Khojaly. About the Campaign. Retrieved from <https://justiceforkhojaly.org/en/about-campaign>
- Khan, K., Khurshid, A., & Cifuentes-Faura, J. (2023), “Investigating the relationship between geopolitical risks and economic security: Empirical evidence from central and Eastern European countries”, *Resources Policy*, 85, 103872.
- Labarre, F., & Niculescu, G. (2016), *The Media Is the Message: Shaping Compromise in the South Caucasus*. In *Regional Stability in the South Caucasus: 12th Workshop of the PFP Consortium Study Group* (pp. 12/2016). Vienna. ISBN 978-3-902944-95-5
- LATE, A. A. A. I. (1992), BEYNƏLXALQ CİNAYƏT. *Washington Post*.
- LOCAL SCHOLARSHIP AND GRANTS. <https://studyinazerbaijan.edu.az/web/local-scholarship-and-grants>
- Loda, C. (2016), “Azerbaijan, Foreign Policy, and Public Diplomacy”, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 27(1), p.39-55. <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/423/article/810227/summary>
- Makili-Aliyev, K. (2013), “Azerbaijan’s Foreign Policy: Between East and West”, *Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep09669.pdf>
- Mammadov, A. (2022), “Analysis Of The Foreign Policy Of Azerbaijan In The Perspective Of Neorealist Theory: In The Example Of The Karabakh Problem”, *Journal Of Eastern European And Central Asian Research*, 9(3).
- Mammadli, Nargiz (6 February 2023), “Azerbaijan Sends Rescuers, Humanitarian Aid to Quake-Hit Türkiye”, caspiannews.com. Archived from the original on 7 February 2023
- Mehdiyev, E. (2019), *Role of International Organizations in Regional Cooperation: Case Study of Azerbaijan in the System of Organization of Islamic Cooperation* (Doctoral dissertation, Marmara Universitesi (Turkey))

- Madokoro, D. (2018), “International Commissions as norm entrepreneurs: Creating the normative idea of the responsibility to protect”, *Review of International Studies*, 45(1), p.100–119. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0260210518000219>
- Mozaffari, A., & Akbar, A. (2023), “Iran’s soft power in Azerbaijan: shifting cultural dynamics in the post-Soviet era”, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 29(6), p.667-685.
- National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2007). Approved by Instruction No. 2198 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 23 May 2007, Article 4.1.1. Retrieved from <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/154917/Azerbaijan2007.pdf>
- Pashayeva, G. (2018), “Language as a soft power resource: The case of Azerbaijan”, *Language Problems and Language Planning*, 42(2), p.132-143. <https://www.jbe-platform.com/content/journals/10.1075/lplp.00016.pas>
- Prontera, A. (2018), “Italian energy security, the Southern Gas Corridor and the new pipeline politics in Western Europe: from the partner state to the catalytic state”, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 21, p.464-494 <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/jird.2015.31>
- Ramankulova, L. (2020), *Nation Branding: An Instrument of Soft Power or Nation-Building? The Case of Kazakhstan*.
- Rojo-Labaien, E. (2018), “The Baku 2015 European Games as a national milestone of post-Soviet Azerbaijan”, *Nationalities Papers*, 46(6), p.1101-1117.
- Rojo-Labaien, E. (2023), “Azerbaijan on the crossroad between Eastern and Western state building: the Baku 2015 European Games and the boundaries of Europe”, *Sport in Society*, 26(4), p.650-670.
- Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <https://mfa.gov.az/en/news/no19022>
- Rumyansev, S. (2010), “Post-Soviet Nation State as a Sponsor of Construction of the Ethno-National Diaspora: Azeri’s Case”, *Revue européenne des migrations Internationales*, 26, p.111-131. <https://doi.org/10.4000/remi.5218>
- Ruys, T., & Silvestre, F. R. (2021). *Military Action to Recover Occupied Land: Lawful Self-defence or Prohibited Use of Force? The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Revisited*.
- Samadova, M. (2016), “Educational reforms and innovations in Azerbaijan”, *The Online Journal of New Horizons in Education*, 6(1), p.62-67 <https://www.tojsat.net/journals/tojned/volumes/tojned-volume06-i01.pdf#page=70>
- Sargent, S. (2020), “Fractured Resemblances”: Contested Multinational Heritage and Soft Power”, *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 27(1), p.97-123. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-cultural-property/article/fractured-resemblances-contested-multinational-heritage-and-soft-power/EE1B724FE4CD6140A788220A172F7294>
- Sideri, E. (2008), “The diaspora of the term Diaspora: A working-paper of a definition”, *Transtext(e)s Transcultures*, (4), p.32–47. <https://doi.org/10.4000/transtexts.247>
- Szondi, G. (2008), *Public diplomacy and nation branding: Conceptual similarities and differences*. Clingendael Institute. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep05374.pdf>
- Shafiyev, F. (2023), “Erosion of Territorial Integrity as a Threat to International Security”, *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, (23), 34-49.
- Şehitoğlu, R., & Güner, O. (2023), “Earthquake Diplomacy: The Efforts of The Members of The Organization of Turkic States After Türkiye Quakes in 2023”, *Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli Üniversitesi SBE Dergisi*, 13(3), p.1775-1792.
- Trading Economics, Azerbaijan GDP - 2023 Data - 2024 Forecast <https://tradingeconomics.com/azerbaijan/gdp>
- Trend News Agency (2023) <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/business/3736529.html>

- Valiyev, A. T. (2017), The Understanding Of Cultural Diplomacy, Its History And Azerbaijan Model. In Сборники конференций НИЦ Социосфера (No. 1, pp. 60-66). Vedecko vydavatel'ske centrum Sociosfera-CZ sro. http://sociosfera.com/files/conference/2017/k-01_15_17.pdf#page=60
- Valiyev, J. (2017), "Foreign policy of Azerbaijan in 25 Years of independence: priorities, principles and achievements", *Caucasus International*, 7(1), p.29-46.
- Valiyev, A. (2016), First European Olympic Games in Baku: New Articulation of Azerbaijani Identity?. *Mega events in post-Soviet Eurasia: Shifting borderlines of inclusion and exclusion*, 131-149.
- Vantsyan, T. (2022), Nagorno-Karabakh: 2020 war and the new geopolitical reality.
- Van Gils, E. (2018), "Azerbaijan's foreign policy strategies and the European Union: Successful Resistance and pursued influence", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70(5), p.738-758. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1479733>
- World Bank (2020), AZERBAIJAN <https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/az/293551524671526045/mpo-aze.pdf>