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The Evolution of the Conceptual Basis of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Abstract

Modern Azerbaijan is a nation that has been striving for independence since the early 20th century and achieved it in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Throughout this process, Azerbaijan underwent substantial cultural and political transformations, which contributed to the formation of a new national identity. Following its independence, Azerbaijan faced numerous economic and political challenges. The country aimed to transition from the Soviet economic model to a market economy, while concurrently grappling with internal and external political instability that threatened its stability. In recent years, however, Azerbaijan has made notable economic progress and has gained increased prominence on the global stage. The exploitation of energy resources has significantly bolstered the country's economic development. Additionally, Azerbaijan's adept foreign policy has played a crucial role in enhancing its international reputation. In conclusion, modern Azerbaijan has experienced considerable advancement since gaining independence, achieving a higher standing in the international arena.

Keywords: Modern Azerbaijan, struggle for independence, energy resources, status on the international stage, foreign policy

Azərbaycan Cumhuriyyəti Dış Politikasının Kavramsal Temellerinin Gelişimi

Öz

Modern Azərbaycan, yirminci yüzylın başından beri bağımsızlık mücadelesi veren ve Sovyetler Birliđi'nin dağılmasının ardından 1991 yılında bağımsızlığını kazanan bir



ülkedir. Bu süreçte Azerbaycan önemli kültürel ve siyasi değişimler geçirerek yeni bir ulusal kimlik yarattı. Modern Azerbaycan bağımsızlıktan sonra ekonomik ve siyasi zorluklarla karşı karşıya kaldı. Ülke, Sovyet ekonomik yapısından kurtulmaya ve piyasa ekonomisine geçmeye çalıştı. Aynı zamanda ülke içinde ve çevresinde yaşanan siyasi çalkantılar da Azerbaycan'ın istikrarını tehdit ediyordu. Ancak son yıllarda Azerbaycan ekonomik açıdan önemli atılımlar gerçekleştirerek uluslararası sahnede daha büyük bir statü kazanmaya başladı. Özellikle enerji kaynaklarının kullanımının ülkenin ekonomik kalkınmasına önemli etkisi olmuştur. Ayrıca Azerbaycan'ın uluslararası alanda etkili bir dış politika izlemesi, ülkenin itibarının uluslararası alanda daha iyi tanınmasına olanak sağlamıştır. Sonuç olarak, modern Azerbaycan bağımsızlıktan sonra önemli bir gelişme yaşadı ve uluslararası sahnede daha büyük statü kazanmaya başladı.

Anahtar kelimeler: Modern Azerbaycan, bağımsızlık mücadelesi, enerji kaynakları, uluslararası alanda statü, dış politika

Introduction

One of the main tasks of any sovereign state is to protect its national interests. In the modern world, in the context of globalization, states are forced to make every effort to develop a foreign policy that takes into account both their national interests and the interests of the international community. In the 21st century, in the era of rapid global processes and dynamic changes, the main task of each country is to strengthen its position in the global world and protect national interests. Today, issues of innovation and the use of innovative technologies occupy a central place in the activities of the political and economic management sector of countries around the world. Analysis shows that the most successful countries were those that were able to unite and reconcile the traditions of their national state with the innovative values required by the modern era. Thanks to these indicators, the Republic of Azerbaijan is making significant progress. In particular, the steps taken by the Azerbaijani state in the field of innovative development policy over the past ten years and the projects implemented by it not only create the opportunity to achieve success in this direction, but also determine the objectification of this policy direction from a scientific and theoretical point of view. National leader Heydar Aliyev, who attached great importance to these issues, emphasized:

"In our internal policy, we aim to ensure that the construction of the state, the formation of society and the economic growth of Azerbaijan are based on world experience, which will allow our Republic to worthily take its place in the world arena." (Əliyev, 1997, p 136).

Azerbaijan has traditionally played an important role in world politics as a trade route and a center of civilization, culture and religion. Azerbaijan's geopolitical importance is based on its strategic location. Azerbaijan is the only country in the South Caucasus that borders Iran and

Russia, has access to the Caspian Sea and through it to Central Asia, and also borders Georgia, which has access to the Black Sea. Due to its strategic location, Azerbaijan today is an important logistics center, where traditional and new communication, transport and energy corridors pass through the Eurasian region, connecting the east and west, north and south (Ziyadov, 2012, p 219). The Republic of Azerbaijan, having joined the ranks of members of the international community, consistently solved the most difficult tasks of the stage of formation and consistent strengthening of its statehood. Foreign policy has always been one of the main areas where within the framework of the course laid down by the actual founding father of present-day Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, under the leadership of President Ilham Aliyev the country has achieved significant success. Azerbaijan's diplomacy has become one of the key elements ensuring the progressive development of the country and strengthening its role and place in the region and the world as a whole. In most eastern countries of the world, the head of state plays a special role in the development of foreign policy, who becomes not just a ruler but a "leader of the nation." This is due to the fact that he fastens himself in the history of the country as the person who is the most influential in the extensive system of interstate and international relations. One of these leaders was the current President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev. According to Professor S. Chernyavsky, "*Azerbaijan's foreign policy course during the presidency of I. Aliyev is distinguished by its systematicity and strategic accuracy of the decisions made, pragmatism and balance*" (Azerbaijan is oasis of stability in South Caucasus, 2019).

1.The Main Concepts and Vectors of the Country's Foreign Policy

Modern Azerbaijan plays an important geopolitical and security role not only in the regional perspective of the South Caucasus but also as a widely recognized post-Soviet region. It is known that "for centuries, the Caucasus has attracted the attention of the "great powers", being the focus, one of the sensitive nodes of not only regional but also world politics." (Contemporary Azerbaijan in Social and Political Dimension, 2016, p. 9).

"Our foreign policy is a continuation of our internal policy. Today, Azerbaijan's foreign policy is distinguished by its principles and independence. The main reason for this is, of course, the presence of strong political will. Because without strong political will no country can pursue an independent policy. This political will exists. This political will manifests itself both inside the country and abroad, in matters of foreign policy." (Rech' Il'khama Aliyeva na pyatom soveshchanii rukovoditeley organov diplomaticheskoy sluzhby Azerbaydzhana).

The concept of the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan is a system of views on the content and main directions of foreign policy activities of Azerbaijan. The most important feature of the country's foreign policy is balance, consistency and predictability. The predictability of the state, and therefore the trust in it from international structures, depends on the logic of steps in the foreign policy activities of the state.

As a result of significant changes that took place in the 1990s, the new political circumstances focused attention on the need to develop and implement a new foreign policy strategy that would be consistent with the principles of national statehood. Azerbaijan, due to its advantageous geographical location and significant economic potential, has all the prerequisites for creating a solid foundation in this regard. The main directions of the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan were the protection of the national interests of the country in the international arena, maintaining the sovereignty and integrity of the state, ensuring national security, overcoming aggression from Armenia and integration into the European community. When Heydar Aliyev came to power, the first thing he did was restore relations with Russia and Iran: Azerbaijan restored its membership in the CIS, and also abandoned unconstructive rhetoric towards its neighbors, making official visits to Moscow and Tehran. Thanks to his experience in public administration, Heydar Aliyev managed to develop a unique foreign policy strategy that effectively met the national interests of Azerbaijan in the shortest possible time and contributed to its successful integration into the international community.

It should be noted that this foreign policy concept is based on the following basic principles:

- Building good-neighborly relations with the countries of the region on the basis of mutually beneficial cooperation.
- Forming a close cooperation in all areas with Turkic-speaking countries.
- Developing especially close relations with the United States.
- Pursuing a policy of close integration with the EU countries.
- Establishing relations with international and regional organizations and active participation in their work, etc.

The recognition of Azerbaijan in late 1991-early 1992 and establishment of diplomatic relations opened up new opportunities for integration into the world community. The balanced foreign policy pursued by the President at the global level has brought Azerbaijan into the ranks of one of the developed democratic countries. The balance and pragmatism are the cornerstones

in the republic's foreign policy (Azerbaijan moving toward more diversified, resilient, and inclusive development, 2020).

After gaining its independence, Azerbaijan generally maintained relations with the international community and international organizations. Establishing relations with international and regional organizations and resolving its problems peacefully became a priority of our country's foreign policy after gaining independence. For this purpose, the relevant foreign policy directions were defined. Azerbaijan, seeking support in the international community after the collapse of the USSR, generally sought to get closer to Western countries, former CIS countries and Turkey. The main reasons for this were the economic crisis for several years and the continuation of the conflict with Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh. In order to overcome these problems and ensure stability, Azerbaijan pursued a policy of getting closer to Western organizations and countries (*Model' stabil'nosti i bezopasnosti Azerbaydzhana*). Azerbaijan's active foreign policy is not based on competition, but on cooperation, mutual activity and support. Azerbaijan takes a constructive position in global processes. This attitude draws attention to the formation of a world order that will ensure common well-being. Continuing an active foreign policy allows Azerbaijan to play an important role in international organizations (Almond, 1988). The main principles of the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan are described in the Basic Law of the country. Article 10 of the Constitution, adopted on November 12, 1995, emphasizes the main principle of the foreign policy. It states that the Republic of Azerbaijan establishes relations with other countries based on the interests of the country in accordance with the basic principles and principles of the international law (*Azərbaycan Respublikasının Konstitusiyası*, 2019, p. 93). The foreign policy concept formulated by Heydar Aliyev included the effective use of Azerbaijan's rich natural resources, especially energy resources, to protect national interests and ensure the country's security. To attract Western countries to partnership, on September 20, 1994, an agreement was signed in Baku, which later became known as the "Contract of the Century." For Azerbaijan, the agreement, along with economic benefits, was largely a geopolitical project: later energy cooperation expanded to other areas.

This historic agreement, known as the "Contract of the Century", was a 400-page document translated into four languages. The "Contract of the Century" involved 13 companies, including Amoco, BP, McDermott, Unocal, GNKAR, LUKoil, Statoil, Exxon, Türkiye Petrolleri, Pennzoil, Itochu, Ramco and Delta, representing eight countries: Azerbaijan, the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, Turkey, Norway, Japan and Saudi Arabia. This

agreement was a successful start to the implementation of the "New Oil Strategy" and doctrine (Kontrakt veka).

"Our experts point out the importance of the "Contract of the Century", saying that despite various internal and external resistances, an agreement on the exploitation and division of the Azeri, Chirag and Guneshli fields in the deep-water section of the Caspian Sea was signed between the state oil company and 11 leading transnational oil companies of the world on September 20, 1994, establishing the basis for the international cooperation in the Caspian Sea. This agreement, known as the "Contract of the Century", not only provided the world market with high-quality oil, but also contributed to the macroeconomic revival of our country and the South Caucasus as a whole. In this sense, the "Contract of the Century" should be considered the cornerstone of the socio-economic rise of Azerbaijan, which has already gained great influence in the international world and is well known in the world as a leading country in the region." (Abdullayev, 2012).

In particular, it should be noted that after the conclusion of the "Contract of the Century", other oil and gas and transport-mainline projects, which Azerbaijan joined, significantly accelerated the integration of the country into the world community. Signing the international oil agreements has created a solid foundation for the development of an effective and mutually beneficial cooperation with other countries participating in these agreements.

The Azerbaijani state oil company SOCAR is the largest investor in Turkey and Georgia. Thanks to the construction of the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP), which runs through the entire territory of Turkey, and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), passing through Greece, Albania and Italy with a branch to Bulgaria, Azerbaijan gained access to the markets of South-Eastern Europe. The end of 2020 for Azerbaijan was marked by the beginning of natural gas exports via the TAP gas pipeline (TANAP is ready to deliver natural gas to Europe). The implementation of regional energy and transport projects helps to increase the potential of Azerbaijan and guarantees the diversification of foreign policy relations. Under the leadership of Heydar Aliyev and continued by President Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan's energy policy has been designed to protect the country's national interests. This strategy has enabled Azerbaijan to take a prominent role in numerous regional and global projects. Presently, Azerbaijan is a reliable ally in energy security and contributes significantly to ensuring the energy security of European nations (EU Reporter: Azerbaijan - a key player in Europe's energy security, 2024).

After its independence, Azerbaijan began to actively establish relations with its neighbors and extra-regional states. Following its economic and political independence, Azerbaijan was

given the chance to engage in free cooperation with other nations around the world. Thus, the process of the integration into the international economy has accelerated, and relations with the world market have expanded. The attempt to dominate the South Caucasus is also significant and it is performed primarily through the use of its interaction with Turkey as well as through friendly relations with Moscow (Neset, Aydin, Ergun et.al., 2023). Now, Azerbaijan is recognized as a democratic, independent and free state. The main directions of the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan were the protection of the country's national interests in the international arena, maintaining the sovereignty and integrity of the state, ensuring national security, overcoming aggression from Armenia and integration into the European community. The foreign policy activities of the Republic of Azerbaijan are based on the basis of peaceful coexistence and good neighborliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, mutually beneficial cooperation in all areas. Azerbaijan's conceptualization of the balance of power includes two factors: attracting the maximum possible attention of great powers to the region and Azerbaijan in particular, as well as maintaining equidistance in relation to all these countries. Azerbaijan as a country that won the 44-day war and liberated its ancestral lands became the object of economic and energy policy. In this war, Azerbaijan has received support from countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, Israel, Ukraine, Afghanistan, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and others which sided with Azerbaijan in restoring its historical territory. During the Second Karabakh War political and economic stability was achieved and the unity of the people and government was demonstrated at the highest level.

2.The Implementation of Global Priorities of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy at the Present Stage

The priorities of Azerbaijan's foreign policy are based on the maximum consideration of the interests of the state and the peculiarities of the modern geopolitical situation. Great leader Heydar Aliyev defined the priorities of the country's foreign policy, taking into account even the most delicate moments. The main national interests of Azerbaijan are the issues of sovereignty, territorial integrity and national security of the country. In this regard, it is important to have a detailed understanding of the national interests of the Republic of Azerbaijan in order to better understand and analyze the principles of its foreign policy. Because in any democratic system, heads of state or government try to find a balance between national interests and the demands of the people when making decisions (Aliyev, 1998). In modern conditions, Azerbaijan, as a state of fundamental importance in the South Caucasus, pursues an independent foreign policy in complex and multifaceted geopolitical conditions. At present,

Azerbaijan is the only country in the region that simultaneously develops its internal and foreign policies, improves its economic system and consistently and systematically takes steps to ensure regional security. Unlike the states of the region, Azerbaijan demonstrates its commitment to its multi-vector foreign policy and regulates relations with countries of the world as an equal partner. Azerbaijan has managed to maintain stable relations with the former Soviet republics, NATO countries and member states of the Non-Aligned Movement. It is as a result of such an independent foreign policy that Azerbaijan has gained great trust, and countries of the world are interested in expanding relations with our country. Of course, where there is an atmosphere of trust, there are promising opportunities in various areas. Since 2003, including the last year, great strides have been made in the field of foreign policy. In particular, it should be noted that the number of countries wishing to cooperate with Azerbaijan has increased. With the exception of the aggressor Armenia, Azerbaijan has managed to establish constructive cooperation relations with almost all countries in the world.

In general, the priorities of Azerbaijan's foreign policy are known. Much attention is paid to the bilateral relations. Along with this, a great importance is attached to strengthening diplomatic activity in the international organizations. Minister Jeyhun Bayramov said at the final press conference at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "The main priorities for Azerbaijan are to ensure sustainable development and peace. The priority is to develop a strong cooperation with important partners. Azerbaijan will continue to be active on the international platforms. The main priorities for us are to ensure the establishment of a sustainable development and peace. It is hoped that the other side will turn to peace. The development of transport communications and the signing of a peace treaty are anticipated (Azərbaycanın 2023-cü il üçün xarici siyasət prioritetləri). Azerbaijan's relations with the international organizations are at a high level. As a member of the international organizations, Azerbaijan has the right to vote in the UN, PACE, EU and OSCE. However, it continues to cooperate with all of the international organizations on the terms of equal partnership. Being a major transport corridor connecting North and South, East and West, Azerbaijan is very important for Europe as the leading state of the South Caucasus. In this regard, Azerbaijan today occupies a special place and role in the energy security of Europe. All this has played an important role in the development of our country's relations with such an influential institution as the European Union. The relations between Azerbaijan and the European Union are developing in an upward trend. The energy factor in the development of this cooperation should be especially noted. Azerbaijan has always been valued internationally as a leading force in regional development and a guarantor of global

energy security. Azerbaijan's relations with the European Union were established in 1991. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed in 1996, which entered into force in 1999, concerned cooperation in the fields of political dialogue, trade, investment, legislation, science and culture. This agreement constitutes the legal basis for Azerbaijan-EU relations. But this does not mean that Azerbaijan-EU relations began in 1999. Until now, relations with the EU have been developing within the framework of TACIS, the "Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia" (TRACECA), the "Interstate Program for Oil and Gas Transportation to Europe" (INOGATE), "Humanitarian Aid" (ECHO) and other programs. In 2011, the Joint Declaration between Azerbaijan and the European Union on the Southern Gas Corridor demonstrated the importance of the country for Europe. Let us look at the steps that guided the development of relations between Azerbaijan and the institution before this document. Azerbaijan has been cooperating with the European Union since 1996 within the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, then since 2004 within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy and finally since 2009 within the framework of the Eastern Partnership program.

Azerbaijan, which prioritizes energy and transport security and economic progress, has successfully implemented the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, which connects Asia and Europe and provides a new transport link between the two continents, despite all the obstacles and difficulties. As President Ilham Aliyev stated, Azerbaijan is interested in developing relations with the European Union and considers this a priority of the state policy:

"Today, Azerbaijan is a country located between Asia and Europe, with deep roots in our region, strong ties with Europe and sharing European values. We are grateful for the support we receive from European organizations. I am confident that cooperation between Azerbaijan and the European Union will successfully continue in the coming years." (Azərbaycan regionun və Avropanın enerji xəritəsini zənginləşdirir).

The "European neighborhood policy" was adopted by the European Commission in 2004. The document entitled "Country Strategy and Reports" aimed to establish cooperative relations with neighboring countries in the fields of politics, security, economy and culture (Zeynalova, 2022). The document also states that the primary objective of EU-Azerbaijan cooperation is to achieve a high level of collaboration, which involves building strong ties for gradual integration in economy and political cooperation. Additionally, there is twinning focused on enhancing the modern standardization and technical regulation system in Azerbaijan, assisting in the training

related to European Union matters in the civil service of Azerbaijan, establishing a center for EU issues, and supporting access to justice for children in Azerbaijan.

Projects, such as providing a 20 million US dollar loan to Access Bank, supporting rural tourism, evaluating the national transparency system, empowering women, and strengthening civil society's role in promoting gender equality and women's rights, are currently underway to assist small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Məmmədov, Vəliyev & Məmmədov, 2017). The Eastern Partnership project, which was launched following the European Neighborhood Policy of the EU, is also highly significant. According to this project that was given adopted in 2008, the aim was for the integration process with 6 states - Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and Armenia to be developed (Məmmədov, Vəliyev & Məmmədov, 2017). In 2013, within the framework of this program, the Agreement on simplification of the visa regime was signed between the EU and Azerbaijan. In addition, the document on Partnership for Flexibility and the Readmission Agreement were signed in 2014 (Zeynalova, 2022). One of the important decisions for Azerbaijan within the Eastern Partnership was adopted in November 2017. The document once again supported Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty according to the Global Strategy of Foreign Policy and Security of the EU. Azerbaijan-EU economic relations progressed through the signing of the "Memorandum on mutual understanding on strategic partnership in the field of energy between the European Union and the Republic of Azerbaijan" in 2006. The advancement of collaboration in the energy sector was highly crucial for both parties. Therefore, Azerbaijan is focused on securing steady exports to the EU, as well as broadening its imports from the European Union. This memo highlights how Azerbaijan's gas supply to the EU paves the way for establishing lasting economic cooperation with a very beneficial and trustworthy consumer. Additionally, the implementation of this document will help further integrate Azerbaijan into the European Union's energy market (Məmmədov, Vəliyev & Məmmədov, 2017). After the Russia-Ukraine war, the European Union is already showing interest in Azerbaijan. In July 2022, within the framework of the official visit of the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen to Azerbaijan, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. The latest deal plans to double the yearly amount of gas brought in from Azerbaijan via the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) by 2027 (Azərbaycan–Avropa İttifaqı münasibətləri 18 iyul 2022). Ms. Ursula von der Leyen also said that the European Union wants to deepen relations with Azerbaijan and stressed that this document is primarily based on the results of the excellent work done by representatives of both sides. It specifically mentions reliable partnerships in the energy sector,

as well as renewable energy issues in the medium and long term. One of the key components of the deal is to boost the yearly amount of blue fuel sent to Europe through the Southern Gas Corridor to 20 billion cubic meters (Azərbaycan–Avropa İttifaqı münasibətləri 18 iyul 2022 <https://brussels.mfa.gov.az/az/content/38/azerbaycan-avropa-ittifaqi>).

Conclusion

The article examines how Azerbaijan is transformed into a regional actor and how the country successfully altered the previously disadvantageous status quo. During the initial three decades of its independence, Azerbaijan focused on addressing the challenges inherited from the Soviet Union. Over 30 years, Azerbaijan has emerged as a proactive leader in various energy and transportation projects. It has effectively bridged the countries of the Adriatic and Black Sea basins with the South Caucasus. The Trans-Caspian transport corridor is actively involving Central Asian countries in collaboration. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that Azerbaijan's status as a "middle power" extends beyond the realm of geo-economics. Azerbaijan's success in modifying the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is a significant event that underpins this assertion. At the present stage, the opportunities, role and responsibility of the Republic of Azerbaijan in international affairs are constantly increasing. A stable national consensus has formed around the policies of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. Thanks to effective public administration, the President of Azerbaijan is confidently leading the country along the path of the gradual development and consistent solution to the problems of the new century. Today, Azerbaijan is actively involved in the most significant economic, political, and cultural events and processes in the region and worldwide, expressing its position and defending its interests. The democratic reforms and economic transformations carried out in the republic, as well as an active foreign policy, attracted the attention of the most powerful states, authoritative organizations and organizations of the world to Azerbaijan, creating fertile conditions for mutual creation and development. On February 2, 2021, Azerbaijan introduced a new state program titled "National Priorities for Social and Economic Development: Azerbaijan – 2030." This program outlines the following key areas of focus: fostering a competitive economy that is sustainable, establishing a dynamic, inclusive, and socially equitable society, enhancing human capital and fostering innovation, facilitating the return of refugees to liberated regions, preserving the environment, and promoting green growth through the utilization of alternative energy sources.

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