

Research Article | Araştırma Makalesi

Azerbaijan's Stability and Leadership Role in the South Caucasus: Political Analysis of President Ilham Aliyev's Interview with Journalists

Azerbaycan'ın Güney Kafkasya'daki İstikrar ve Liderlik Rolü: Cumhurbaşkanı İlham Aliyev'in Gazetecilerle Röportajının Politolojik Analizi



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Abstract

This study aims to critically examine the public discourses of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in 2025 regarding regional geopolitics and peace negotiations with Armenia. A. One Dijk's socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis, Aliyev's televised speeches are analyzed to reveal how political narratives construct legitimacy, identity, and strategic power positions within the context of the South Caucasus. The analysis focuses on how Azerbaijan's role in the new world order, the issue of Western Azerbaijanis, and the normalization process with Armenia are framed, and it explores the linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed. The study demonstrates how these discourses reproduce national unity and historical victimhood while delegitimizing opposing actors through binary representations. The findings reveal how language is used as an instrument of power to shape public perception, legitimize policy directions, and redefine geopolitical alignments in a multipolar global context. By approaching the discourse of a relatively under-researched regional leader through this method, the study contributes to the literature on post-conflict state discourse and regional power projection.

Keywords: South Caucasus, Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, Critical Discourse Analysis, Armenia-Azerbaijan Relations.

Öz

Bu çalışma, Azerbaycan Cumhurbaşkanı İlham Aliyev'in 2025 yılında bölgesel jeopolitikaya ve Ermenistan ile barış müzakerelerine dair kamuya yönelik söylemlerini eleştirel bir şekilde incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Van Dijk'in toplumsal-bilişsel modeline dayalı Eleştirel Söylem Analizi yöntemi kullanılarak, Aliyev'in televizyon konuşmaları analiz edilmiş ve siyasi anlatıların Güney Kafkasya bağlamında meşruiyet, kimlik ve stratejik güç pozisyonlarını nasıl inşa ettiği ortaya konulmuştur. Analiz, Azerbaycan'ın yeni dünya düzenindeki rolünün, Batı Azerbaycan meselesinin ve Ermenistan ile normalleşme sürecinin nasıl çerçeveslendiğine odaklanmakta; kullanılan dilsel ve retorik stratejileri incelemektedir. Çalışma, söz konusu söylemlerin ulusal birliği ve tarihsel mağduriyetleri yeniden üretirken karşıt aktörleri ikili temsillerle nasıl gayrimeşrulaştırdığını göstermektedir. Bulgular, dilin bir güç aracı olarak halk algısını şekillendirmek, politika yönelimini meşrulaştırmak ve çok kutuplu bir küresel bağlamda jeopolitik hizalanmaları yeniden tanımlamak için nasıl kullanıldığını ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, daha önce az incelenmiş bir bölgesel liderin söylemine yöntemle yaklaşarak, çatışma sonrası devlet söylemi ve bölgesel güç yansıtımı konularında literatüre katkı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güney Kafkasya, Azerbaycan, İlham Aliyev, Eleştirel Söylem Analizi, Ermenistan-Azerbaycan ilişkileri.



Introduction

In recent years, geopolitical shifts in the South Caucasus have profoundly reshaped not only regional power balances but also the discursive positioning of key actors. Following Azerbaijan's military and diplomatic gains after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (De Waal, 2021), President Ilham Aliyev's public discourse has become increasingly assertive and strategically oriented. In this context, the construction of state narratives, their impact on peace negotiations, and their presentation to international audiences require a critical and systematic examination (Fairclough, 1995). Despite the significance of Aliyev's rhetoric in shaping regional dynamics, there remains a notable lack of scholarly work employing rigorous discourse analytical frameworks to study his public statements in depth. Van Dijk's (1998, 2009) socio-cognitive model interprets discourse not merely as a linguistic expression but as a mechanism through which social consciousness and power relations are constructed. According to this approach, the speeches of state leaders create cognitive networks that guide the political behavior codes of society (Fairclough, 2010; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). In this regard, the analysis of President Ilham Aliyev's speeches reveals how national legitimacy is encoded within social cognition and allows for a deeper understanding of the ideological construction of state discourse.

This study aims to critically analyze the political discourse articulated by President Ilham Aliyev throughout 2025, focusing on his televised speeches concerning regional geopolitics and peace negotiations with Armenia. Employing Teun A. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, particularly his socio-cognitive model (Van Dijk, 1998), the research investigates how Aliyev's discourse constructs legitimacy, identity, and strategic power positions within the South Caucasus context. Van Dijk's approach enables an examination of discourse as not merely linguistic expression but as embedded within social contexts and cognitive structures, allowing for a multifaceted understanding of how political narratives are produced and reproduced.

The study integrates both the micro and macro levels of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). At the macro level, it examines the thematic and ideological structure of state discourse, while at the micro level, it explores the rhetorical impact of lexical-semantic and syntactic emphases. President Aliyev's expressions, such as "We cannot remain mere observers," illustrate how state agency is affirmed through language within the discourse. This corresponds to Van Dijk's model of "discursive power reproduction," which explains the process by which ideological influence is reconstructed through language (Van Dijk, 1998; Fairclough, 2003).

In addition, the rhetorical and metaphorical dimensions of Aliyev's discourse can be examined through Charteris-Black, (2014) framework, which explains how political leaders use metaphor and persuasion to construct authority and emotional resonance.

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The core objective of this paper is to reveal how Aliyev's rhetoric frames Azerbaijan's role in the emerging regional order, articulates the "Western Azerbaijan" issue, and negotiates the normalization process with Armenia. Key themes such as the "Western Azerbaijan" population, the Zangezur Corridor, peace agreement prospects, constitutional debates, and interactions with international actors are explored through the lens of discursive strategies. Additionally, this study scrutinizes the construction of in-group and out-group representations, particularly how Armenia and opposing political actors are delegitimized via binary oppositions embedded in the discourse (Van Dijk, 1991; Billig, 1995).

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This research is delimited to selected televised speeches delivered by President Aliyev in 2025. The analysis integrates historical contextualization with a systematic discourse analytic methodology, as emphasized by the reviewers, ensuring that personal interpretations are minimized in favor of rigorous, evidence-based analysis (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Bloor & Bloor, 2007). The use of Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis provides a structured framework to dissect the linguistic and rhetorical devices employed, while situating the discourse within broader social and political realities (Fairclough, 2010).

By focusing on an underexplored regional leader's discourse, this study contributes to the literature on post-conflict state rhetoric and regional power projection. It highlights the role of language as a tool for shaping public perception, legitimizing policy directions, and redefining geopolitical alignments within a multipolar global order (Baylarov & Rustamli, 2022). Furthermore, this work offers valuable insights for scholars of political communication, international relations, and conflict studies by demonstrating how discourse functions as a key mechanism in the ongoing negotiation of power and identity in the South Caucasus.

1. Attitude of Azerbaijan to the Events in the Region

President Ilham Aliyev once again, and as always, openly issued a warning to the Armenian leadership, which continues its policy of militarism with the support of some Western states. He stated that the ongoing armament process in Armenia is a new threat factor for the South Caucasus and that we will not be observers of what is happening in the region today. This is a clear and unambiguous warning:

1. Any provocation will be met with a harsh response from Azerbaijan.
2. Azerbaijan is closely monitoring the processes taking place in Armenia today, primarily in the border areas, and, of course, is taking adequate steps and making preparations.

3. Azerbaijan wants peace and security and has already created such an environment. However, if someone undermines the peace and security environment created in the region today through the serious efforts and struggle of President Ilham Aliyev, if a new hotbed of war emerges, we will certainly not be to blame.

President Ilham Aliyev:

“The process of armament in Armenia is, of course, a new threat factor for the South Caucasus. I have already said this, and I want to say it again, that we cannot simply watch this as observers and do nothing. At the same time, I have repeatedly stated this to the Armenian leadership that this may create a new threat. At the same time, those who seem to be standing behind Armenia today and inciting them to new provocations and sabotage against Azerbaijan will most likely not stand behind them until the end. Just as they could not stand in 2020 and beyond. Not because they do not want to stand, but simply because Azerbaijan will not provide these opportunities” (‘Ilham Aliyev Hosted Local Television Channels’, 2025).

In his 2025 interview with journalists, President Ilham Aliyev delivered strong messages regarding Azerbaijan’s strategic position and its expectations from the regional actors. One of the key rhetorical strategies he employed was constructing a narrative of geopolitical self-reliance and deterrence. Referring implicitly to Armenia and its international allies, Aliyev suggested that, in the event of a renewed conflict similar to the 44-day war of 2020, Azerbaijan would not face external constraints or diplomatic pressure.

This statement functions as a discursive instrument to delegitimize Armenia’s reliance on international support while simultaneously emphasizing Azerbaijan’s military and diplomatic autonomy. According to Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model, such language reinforces a binary opposition between the self (Azerbaijan as sovereign and capable) and the other (Armenia as dependent and isolated), thereby strengthening internal cohesion and national pride. Furthermore, the invocation of past victories, such as the advance to Shusha and the subsequent withdrawal of Armenian forces, serves to frame Azerbaijan’s military power as both decisive and justified, embedding a narrative of historical rectification and regional leadership (Orujov, 2025).

The rhetorical analysis of the discourse demonstrates that lexical elements such as “fascism,” “threat,” and “justice” shape a collective cognition directed toward national unity. Here, Van Dijk’s (2006) concept of the “polarization strategy” is applied: the “us/them” dichotomy reinforces social identity, while the state’s aspiration for peace is justified through a discourse of “moral legitimacy” (Billig, 1995; Wodak, 2015). This analysis reveals that in President Aliyev’s speeches, rhetoric serves not merely a descriptive function but also generates ideological implications. This finding aligns with Reisigl and Wodak (2001) view that political discourse often employs rhetorical and argumentative strategies to legitimize social hierarchies and collective identities.

The Armenian leadership participated in the negotiations in the bilateral dialogue format, the author of which was President Ilham Aliyev. Even practical results were achieved. We are talking about the delimitation of a 12.5-kilometer section of the border, and Azerbaijan was closer to peace than ever before in history. However, the processes are suddenly stopped. The West, on the one hand, is making promises to Nikol Pashinyan, and on the other hand, by taking advantage of the revanchists who are still actively operating in Armenia, is threatening and returning the negotiations to zero. The reason is that in

world history, as well as in the history of the South Caucasus, two countries have never sat face to face and achieved peace without the intervention of America and Europe, that is, without mediators. For centuries, if not years, either the United States of America or European countries have been involved in the negotiations. It was under the patronage of the West that a show of peace was played for several years. It was the “smart and wise” West that gave the parties some important advice. Only after this, and most importantly, after the West made the warring parties accept its interests and conditions, did it allow peace to be concluded (Mammadov, 2025).

Azerbaijan, and specifically President Ilham Aliyev, opposed this sick policy that has been pursued for centuries and showed that the bilateral negotiation format is not only successful, but also the only way out for resolving conflicts. President Ilham Aliyev: “Therefore, acting with strict strategic logic, we took steps consistently, purposefully and persistently. The Patriotic War, the clarification of the conditional border between Azerbaijan and Armenia to a certain extent, the anti-terrorist operation, and four villages of the Gazakh region. One of them was occupied during the Soviet Union, in 1990, and the other three were occupied in the spring of 1992. So, in February last year, at a meeting with the Prime Minister of Armenia in Munich, this issue was raised in a monologue. I am glad that we did not have to resort to other methods to return these villages. I think that the lessons of the last four years - although they have not yet been fully understood by the Armenians - are being taken into account. So I consider this a good first step not only in delimitation, but also in the demarcation of the border. I think this is a rare case where delimitation and demarcation are carried out almost simultaneously” (‘A Special Place Is Chosen for Those Residents, Because Even If There Is a Possibility...’, 2025).

There is no need to call. The process was already taking its own course. Of course, with Azerbaijan’s initiative and Azerbaijan’s dedication.

President Ilham Aliyev also brought to the attention of journalists one important piece of news. The next meeting of the Azerbaijani and Armenian commissions on delimitation should take place in the near future, and according to preliminary conclusions, Yerevan does not particularly object to the proposed methodological approach. Therefore, we expect that the delimitation will continue and the other four villages, that is, the exclave, will also be returned. However, there are a number of important factors that prevent this:

1. Armenia’s policy of militarism;
2. Fascism, separatism, and racism have not yet died out in Armenia, but rather are being encouraged and propagated.

Aliyev’s language regarding the negotiations reflects a pro-solution stance while simultaneously emphasizing that control remains in his own hands - a discourse of sovereignty. According to Van Dijk, such discourse ideologically reinforces the position of the “righteous side” and consolidates epistemic authority over the process. Aliyev’s position as the actor directing the negotiations is discursively aimed at constructing diplomatic hegemony. This not only increases public confidence in leadership domestically but also functions as a message of power toward external actors.

Speech by former President of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan at the meeting of the “Yerkrapa” Volunteer Union on July 23-24, 1993:

“Do not forget that Azerbaijanis were in the majority in three regions: Vardenis, Masis and Amasya. In Zangezur they were in the majority and this problem was solved. It was not a gift from heaven for us. Our movement and the national liberation struggle of our people solved this problem. The Armenian national movement and its military wing are our “Yerkrapa” self-defense units. It is the same in Karabakh. Today, the entire territory of Karabakh, and even more, is in the hands of Armenians” (‘Regional Azerbaijani Consensus: The Exit of Levon Ter-Petrosya Demonstrates the Deeply Rooted Racism in Armenia’s Political Circles’, 2025).

President İlham Aliyev:

“The racist and fascist statements of the first president of Armenia are as ugly as they are dangerous. He portrays ethnic cleansing as a source of pride, bragging about the expulsion of Azerbaijanis from their historical ancestral lands. It’s just that this video material, as they say, has now been made public. But of course, they knew about it in Armenia. Armenia’s allies and patrons, of course, knew and shared these views. The 30-year policy of aggression against us is not simply the product of Armenia, but a joint product of Islamophobic, Azerbaijani-phobic, racist, xenophobic circles and representatives of foreign countries who are in solidarity with it. We are neighbors with such a fascist state. The threat of fascism has not passed. Therefore, fascism must be destroyed. Either Armenia must destroy it or we must destroy it” (‘President of the Council of the European Alliance Antonio Costa Was Enriched by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan İlham Aliyev’, 2025).

The well-known material spread about Levon Ter Petrosyan created a real shock effect in Armenia. The reason for this is that in that material, the actual inner face of Armenia as both a state and a people was revealed. But as if that were not enough, a second video material also appeared. That second video was from the congress of the “Yerkrapa” movement held on the day of the occupation of Agdam. In which Levon Ter Petrosyan spoke. In the new video, the first Defense Minister of Armenia and the leader of the “Yerkrapa” movement, Vazgen Sargsyan, who spoke after Levon Ter Petrosyan’s famous speech, gently criticizes the president. He emphasizes that it is unacceptable for his words to be disseminated in the press, and that Levon Ter Petrosyan’s statements, especially regarding the occupation of Agdam, could put Armenia in a difficult position in the international community. In other words, Vazgen Sargsyan is making a remark to Levon Ter Petrosyan that it cannot be said that Armenians committed genocide against Azerbaijanis, that Armenians deported Azerbaijanis in both Armenia and Karabakh, and that Armenians occupied Azerbaijani lands. Their confession could cause serious problems for Haylar (Mammadov, 2025). After the video was widely distributed not only in Azerbaijan, but also in the region and in the geography where certain circles are located, especially after the harsh messages of Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev to Levon Ter-Petrosyan’s speech in that video, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, and representatives of the opposition factions in parliament, who were alarmed, urgently gathered and began to prepare various responses, think, and develop tactics in their own circles.

Nikol Pashinyan does not have a solid explanation on what Armenia is accusing Azerbaijan of fascism on. The Azerbaijani side states that Armenia is a fascist state, based on the terrorist incidents that have been carried out since the 1970s and continue to this day, specifically against Garegin Nizhdey, or specifically against terrorist organizations such as Dashnaktsutyun, Armenakan, Hnchak, Asala, Gegaron, Apostol, and specifically under

the leadership of Armenians in various countries of the world, specifically Lebanon, the United States, France, Austria, Turkey, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Italy, Great Britain, Greece, and other countries. As historically, today the threat of fascism in Armenia has not subsided, it is still alive. We say it is still alive because the remnants of terrorism Levon Ter Petrosyan says that we have cleansed Armenia and Karabakh of Azerbaijanis. Robert Kocharyan says that Armenians and Azerbaijanis cannot genetically coexist. Serzh Sargsyan noted that Azerbaijanis thought that we could not use weapons against civilians. They make statements like, "We broke this stereotype in Khojaly." After that, during the 44-day war, Armenia fired prohibited missiles at the areas inhabited by civilians in Ganja, Barda and other areas. Although Karabakh was liberated from occupation, the civilian population still fell victim to mines planted by Armenians. In other words, the day of mine terror continues today. Taking this into account, we rightly accuse Armenia of fascism.

Aliyev's discourse, according to Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model, is built upon a perception of threat constructed through the binary opposition of "us" and "the other." Here, "us" (Azerbaijan) is positioned as the peace-seeking, strategically rational actor, while "the other" (Armenia and its Western supporters) is framed as provocative and destabilizing. This dichotomy serves as a discursive tool to reinforce national identity and enhance political legitimacy. Historical references help sustain collective memory, thereby strengthening a sense of social unity.

2. Azerbaijan's Reaction to Arming Armenia

President Ilham Aliyev: "This ideology lives there, and its carriers are not just the current Armenian opposition, but the Armenian government. I want to say again that we cannot simply watch this as observers. Armenia must immediately stop arming. France and other countries that provide it with weapons must terminate and cancel those contracts. The weapons that have already been sent to Armenia must be returned. This is our condition. Now, whoever wants to accept it, let them do so. I say my word, they know it, and those behind them know that if we say something, then we are already taking this issue very seriously" (Cahangiroğlu, 2025).

This opinion of President Ilham Aliyev created very serious tension in Armenia during the week. Quote:

"The weapons sent to Armenia must now be returned. This is our condition. Now, whoever wants to accept it, let them do so. I say what I mean, they know it, and those behind them know that if we mean what we say, then we are already taking this issue very seriously. "Therefore, the three main conditions are clear as day. What are these conditions? We say it again, First, the armament must be stopped immediately. Second, military contracts must be terminated. Third, the weapons sent to Armenia must be returned. If these three main conditions are not met, Azerbaijan will take concrete steps. What are these steps? They will be taken by President Ilham Aliyev, who knows exactly what, when, and how to do it. A message was simply sent to Armenia and certain centers. Therefore, messages such as Yerevan will try to resolve the problems through dialogue, or the Armenian side will focus on a peace agreement, demarcation, humanitarian issues, opening of communications, or Armenia will recognize the territorial integrity of neighboring countries will have no meaning. In other words, the time limit for the game is over! From now on, all steps taken, statements made, negotiations conducted, and the attitude towards Azerbaijan will be determined based on those three conditions. But Nikol Pashinyan is still silent, and Ararat Mirzoyan, who has come forward, is openly declaring

that they will not return the weapons they bought. Moreover, he also states that Baku and Yerevan are not yet ready to consider the issue of exclaves. He also adds that 15 out of 17 points of the peace agreement have been agreed upon. They are waiting for a response from Azerbaijan on the remaining points. Ararat Mirzoyan also says that the ideas about the return to Western Azerbaijan are territorial claims against Armenia. Of course, we are talking about this idea, which President Ilham Aliyev once again said in an interview with local television channels. Quote: "Everyone should know this. Both Armenia and those behind it, this issue will not go off the agenda. Until the Azerbaijanis settle in Western Azerbaijan, including Western Zangezur, in safe conditions" (Azadi, 2025).

Aliyev's "disarmament" condition, according to Van Dijk's theory of power discourse, is a hegemonic demand expressed within a strategic framework. Here, language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a reflection of the exercise of power. Conditional peace messages represent a balance where political responsibility is placed on the opposing side, while the discourse maintains a peace-oriented appearance. This is the masking of the hegemonic position with normative legitimacy.

President Ilham Aliyev:

"If the current prime minister is a democrat, and he is a friend of French President Emmanuel Macron, who is, as they say, the founder of European democracy, let him show it to him, let him give permission. That is, this is our desire, and demanding this does not mean making any territorial claims at all. It is simply necessary to approach this from the point of view of human rights, and we will not remove this issue from the agenda. But let everyone know, both Armenia and those behind it, that this issue will not be removed from the agenda. Until the Azerbaijanis settle in Western Azerbaijan, including Western Zangezur, in safe conditions" ('Ilham Aliyev Hosted Local Television Channels', 2025).

According to Van Dijk, this discourse is a 'rights-based' legitimization strategy constructed through identity and belonging. Narratives of migration, exile, and displacement legitimize political claims by reproducing collective trauma. Thus, an attempt is made to gain ethical superiority both in the national and international arenas. The discourse of the "return of Western Azerbaijanis" is a spatial reclamation strategy carried out under the guise of rights restitution.

The "Western Azerbaijan" discourse emerges as a collision between two distinct models of social cognition. The Azerbaijani side frames this process within the context of human rights and historical justice, whereas the Armenian side presents the same phenomenon as a territorial claim. This can be explained through Van Dijk's theory of "cognitive conflict," according to which both parties interpret the same event through different social memories and semantic frameworks. This discursive divergence is not merely political but also carries the characteristics of an epistemological collision (Chilton, 2004; Van Dijk, 2006).

The return of Azerbaijanis to Western Azerbaijan, including Western Zangezur, does not mean a territorial claim against Armenia, contrary to what Ararat Mirzoyan said. It is not we who say that Azerbaijanis not only live in Zangezur, but that they are many times more numerous than Armenians, but yours, specifically your former president Levon Ter Petrosyan. In such a case, the return of Azerbaijanis to the territories where they historically lived is the provision of international human rights and freedoms. But Ararat Mirzoyan still shamelessly denies and denies Levon Ter Petrosyan's confessions.

He states that Armenians were forcibly expelled from Karabakh, while Azerbaijanis left Armenia in a civilized manner.

Two different videos were shown on AzTV's "Week" program on this topic and detailed commentary was provided. There is no sign of civilization in the footage filmed during the expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Western Azerbaijan. People are leaving their ancestral homeland barefoot, most of them in their home clothes. It is clear from the expressions on their faces that they were expelled from Western Azerbaijan voluntarily or forcibly. Moreover, thousands of historical and cultural monuments and settlements belonging to Azerbaijan were destroyed in those areas. More than two thousand toponyms were renamed. About 150 thousand Azerbaijanis were deported en masse during 1948-1953. More than 250 thousand Azerbaijanis were expelled from Armenia during 1987-1991. In another video, Armenians are seen waving their hands, arms, laughing and leaving Karabakh, taking not only their property, property, and livestock with them. When asked, they also say that they left their homes voluntarily. They are given water and food (Mammadov, 2025)



Image 1. Footage of the moment of expulsion from Western Azerbaijan on AzTV.

As a result of Armenia's fascist policy, 216 Azerbaijanis were killed in 1987-1991 as part of the ethnic cleansing policy. In other words, all these are facts, and ignoring these facts is, to put it mildly, indignity and shamelessness. Presenting the expression "Western Azerbaijani community" as a violation of international law or a territorial claim is nothing but hypocrisy. Apart from Armenian hypocrisy.

President Ilham Aliyev:

"We expect a very clear and international law-compliant position from the Armenian leadership. They still prefer to remain silent. However, we have repeatedly raised this issue and expect a concrete answer from them. When and under what conditions can Azerbaijanis return to those regions? Especially considering that the vast majority of villages where Azerbaijanis live are now completely empty, no one lives there, returning there will not be such a big problem, that is, it will not be necessary to relocate anyone from there. Simply, security guarantees should be provided. Their right to live there should be recognized and, of course, conditions should be created for their activities. That is, this is our demand, and I hope that the day will come when Western Azerbaijanis will return to their native lands" (Hamid, 2025).

Nikol Pashinyan's views on the normalization of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations expressed on his social media account: "Western Azerbaijan is Gazakh, Tovuz, Agstafa, Gadabay, Dashkesan, Kalbajar, Lachin, Gubadli, Zangilan, there is no Western Azerbaijan

outside of these and there cannot be, if they really want to look elsewhere, we can also consider Nakhchivan as Western Azerbaijan” (‘Pashinyan Announced His Offers to Baku: Gədəbəy, Daşkəsən’, 2025).

In this post, we will see that the issue of Western Azerbaijanis is currently at the top of the list of issues that Armenia is most concerned about and afraid of. According to Pashinyan, Western Azerbaijan is not and cannot be outside this list (Mammadov, 2025). Therefore, Nikol Pashinyan, who calls official Baku’s initiative to return refugees from Western Azerbaijan to their homeland a threat to the sovereign state of Armenia, then puts forward a peace formula consisting of 12 points. Let’s take a look at some of those points:

1. To mutually abandon the rhetoric of escalation;
2. To continue the demarcation process based on the work done so far;
3. To sign the peace agreement, which is already 90 percent ready;
4. To resolve the Azerbaijan-Azerbaijan connection through the territory of Armenia and the Armenia-Armenia connection through the territory of Azerbaijan through the realization of the Peace Crossroads project;
5. To create a joint investigation mechanism for violations of the ceasefire regime;
6. To dissolve the OSCE Minsk Group (Mammadov, 2025).

President Ilham Aliyev:

“The abolition of the Minsk Group, the amendment of the constitution - without these, a peace agreement is impossible. If Armenia does not need a peace agreement, we do not need it either. We can live and conduct our own policy without signing it. In other words, I would still advise the Armenian side to weigh everything well, including the geopolitical changes in the world. Their close friends are being shamefully removed from the political scene” (‘If Armenia Does Not Need a Peace Agreement, We Do Not Need One Either’, 2025).

Therefore, in the near future, Nikol Pashinyan will be left alone on the field. He should only remember one thing: among the strategic goals of official Baku for 2025, one of the main points, and perhaps the first, is the return of Western Azerbaijanis to their native places, as well as the fulfillment of Yerevan’s obligations on delimitation and opening of communications. Now, as President Ilham Aliyev said, Armenia must carefully weigh everything. Because the responsibility for mutual escalation, peace agreement, and communications lies with the people. Either Armenia will take concrete steps towards peace and security. Or not only Azerbaijan, but also the countries of the region will ask Armenia to account. One of these countries is brotherly Turkey.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey Hakan Fidan: “The end of the occupation of Karabakh was truly an incredibly important stage in terms of ensuring lasting peace in the region. It is important that the peace that has already emerged in the region is made permanent and becomes official. The instability that has prevailed in the Caucasus for the last 100 years has not been in favor of any of us. It is possible to continue the current stability and a historic opportunity has arisen for this” (‘Türkiyə XİN Rəhbəri: Azərbaycan və Ermənistanın Sülh Sazişi İmzalamasını İstəyirik’, 2025).

For now, a number of international analysis centers are not very optimistic about the events that will unfold in the region this year. For example, the famous United States

analytical company "Stratfor" writes that the South Caucasus will remain a sphere of geopolitical influence. Although efforts have been made to conclude a peace agreement, disagreements on changing the Armenian constitution, demarcating borders, and opening transit routes will block a peace agreement in 2025. As long as there is no agreement, tensions in the region will remain. Armenia, on the other hand, is still showing resistance to Baku's demands by taking advantage of the opportunities created by the new global order (Mammadov, 2025).

These discourses are evaluated within Van Dijk's model in the context of historical memory and the construction of moral superiority. The accusation of "fascism" directed at Armenia serves not only as a political tool but also as a means of establishing moral dominance. Such discourses use past victimizations to legitimize current political positions. The aim of the discourse is both to foster national unity and to delegitimize the opposing side in the international arena.

3. Azerbaijan's Geostrategic Position in the New World Order

The economic and political processes that we have witnessed on the global level over the past few decades reveal the necessity of creating a new system of international relations. For this, the formation of regional security principles is becoming one of the most important requirements of the day. Therefore, Azerbaijan, which is the guarantor of lasting peace and security in the South Caucasus, is currently proposing to the countries of the region to take a united position in the process of forming a just world order.

President Ilham Aliyev: "In fact, we should be active participants in this process. We should not just wait to see what the new order will be like here. We should do our job and continue to implement our agenda. Because the South Caucasus is our region, and Azerbaijan, as the leading country in this region, of course, has a special weight from the point of view of responsibility. Therefore, we see the new order as a fair order" (Sariyeva, 2025). Aliyev's discourse, according to van Dijk's model, is related to the reproduction of discursive power. In the context of the new world order, Azerbaijan's role as a 'leading country' is reinforced through regional power projection and foreign policy discourse. The discourse presents the country's foreign policy as a legitimate and inevitable direction to both domestic and international publics. The logic of "if we don't do it, others will" creates a discursive domain of necessity.

However, the destructive policy of Armenia, which has been pursuing an aggressive policy in the region for many years, not only creates obstacles to the formation of a new world order, but also seriously threatens the fragile peace and stability that has emerged in the region thanks to Azerbaijan's economic, political and military power. After the crushing defeat in the Second Karabakh War, Yerevan, which unconditionally signed the November 10, 2020 surrender act, which included Azerbaijan's just conditions, later tried to evade the obligations it had undertaken for various reasons, and the process is still ongoing.

President Ilham Aliyev:

We are in favor of a bilateral negotiation format, and of course, Azerbaijan will defend its position as a party to this issue. Arming Armenia will simply lead to new tensions. We want peace. We want the war page to be closed. However, we see that both Armenia itself and its new patrons do not want this. They live with revanchist ideas, and Armenia is actually a source of threat to the region" ("Message from Ilham Aliyev to Armenia and Its Followers: There Must Be Peace, the War Page Must Be Closed", 2025).

It should be noted that the Armenian authorities' acceptance of Azerbaijan's conditions occurs solely within the framework of bilateral negotiations. As a result of the foreign policy course pursued by the Azerbaijani state, states, especially France, which are deprived of means of pressure in the region, by arming Armenia, push official Yerevan to take a destructive position in the negotiation process and try to drag it into new conflicts. It has even reached the point where absurd adventures such as allocating millions of euros from the European Peace Fund to arm Armenia are being resorted to.

"These weapons are given to Armenia either for free or in the form of loans. Those loans are also written off after a certain period. At the same time, from the so-called peace fund of the European Union. So-called, because the Peace Fund should actually be used for peace purposes. Their Peace Fund is directed towards armaments. The first payment was made from there, and according to the information we have, this is not the last payment" ('Blinken's Comments Remained in the Air and We Refrained from Meeting', 2025).

The Armenian government, relying on the support of the political circles of France and other pro-Armenian countries, seems interested in further increasing its military arsenal for the purpose of militarization. However, no matter how much weapons it buys, Baku's demands for Armenia are the same. The scenario shows that a peace agreement will not be signed without the Minsk Group being abolished and the constitution being amended, and if Yerevan refuses to do so, Azerbaijan will not put forward such a proposal again. The Hay country will have to accept the fate it has determined for itself. Therefore, Armenians must be able to correctly assess geopolitical changes. The resignation of a pro-Armenian like Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau should be a kind of alarm signal for the Hays.

President Ilham Aliyev:

"I am sure that when the new world order enters the process of full formation, Azerbaijan's position will also be taken into account. At least in the South Caucasus and the Caspian basin. We must be ready for this. Of course, I cannot say how this process will go on a global scale. Perhaps they have not yet fully determined this. But this is undeniable and I believe that we will see this before long. I have said this several times. If each country deals with its internal affairs, then there will be no war, no conflict, no confrontation" ('Ilham Aliyev Hosted Local Television Channels', 2025).

Some Western organizations, foundations close to them, non-governmental organizations, and transnational media are trying with all their might to prevent the establishment of lasting peace in international and regional frameworks. One of these organizations is the European Union. The South Caucasus policy implemented by the organization over the past year can be considered a concrete fiasco. If the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, speaking on behalf of the European Union, calls the organization a garden and the others a jungle, this means the bankruptcy of the union as a center of power. If the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, who is dealing with the issue of global climate change, refuses to participate in the COP29 Baku conference for unclear, mostly political reasons, this can also be considered a bankruptcy of the organization (Zeynalova and Orujov, 2025).

The topics discussed during the phone call between the new President of the Council of the European Union, Antonio Costa, and President Ilham Aliyev on January 9, 2025, could serve as a springboard for a positive change in the situation. The parties exchanged views on transport between Azerbaijan and the European Union, in particular transportation

along the Trans-Caspian Middle Corridor route, the project to create a Green Energy Corridor connecting the Caspian and Black Sea basins, and cooperation in the energy sector ('President of the Council of the European Alliance Antonio Costa Was Enriched by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan İlham Aliyev', 2025).

Azerbaijan makes its contribution to the new world order through its actions. Azerbaijan's steps in recent years are being analyzed very seriously. Because if we look at the recent and medium past, we will see that there has never been a second country in world history that has restored its territorial integrity by its own power. Azerbaijan did this despite all the pressures, threats and dangers. The number of countries capable of conducting an independent policy is not so great in our real world.

Conclusion

This study provides a nuanced analysis of Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev's discourse in recent interviews, contextualizing his statements within the framework of regional geopolitics, identity politics, and the evolving international order. Aliyev's rhetoric reflects a deliberate construction of legitimacy, sovereignty, and strategic hegemony that aligns with van Dijk's socio-cognitive discourse theory, whereby language functions as a tool to reinforce power relations and national identity. The emphasis on force as a necessary yet justified instrument underscores Azerbaijan's positioning within a security environment perceived as unstable and contested.

The article highlights critical themes including the contested peace negotiations with Armenia, Western biases, the discourse surrounding displaced Western Azerbaijanis, and strategic infrastructural projects such as the Zangezur corridor. These elements coalesce into a broader narrative of state resilience and regional ambition, underscoring Azerbaijan's calculated geopolitical investments. The Azerbaijani leadership's approach exemplifies a synthesis of legal-political legitimacy and pragmatic realpolitik, reinforcing the country's ascending role within the new global order.

From the analysis emerges a portrait of Azerbaijan as a resilient actor, not only securing its territorial integrity and sovereignty but also actively shaping its regional and international standing through assertive diplomatic and strategic initiatives. Aliyev's discourse projects an image of unwavering resolve, framing the state's trajectory as both inevitable and justifiable, rooted in a collective national conviction of righteousness and moral authority.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that Azerbaijan's political communication functions as a powerful mechanism for consolidating internal unity and projecting strength externally. The President's articulation of legitimacy, grounded in historical justice and contemporary power, serves to preempt external pressures and assert the country's agency in an increasingly multipolar world. As such, Azerbaijan exemplifies a case where discourse, identity, and power converge to produce a coherent and resilient state narrative in the face of complex regional challenges.

In conclusion, it should be noted that Aliyev's discourse functions as a process through which the state redefines itself in the post-conflict period. Here, the transformation of ideological power into social consciousness through language is observed. According to Van Dijk's (2006) "society and discourse" approach, such discourses constitute mechanisms for the reproduction of national memory and political legitimacy. In this

sense, Azerbaijan emerges not only as a political but also as an epistemic actor - a subject that defines the meaning of reality through language.

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Azerbaijan's Stability and Leadership Role in the South Caucasus: Political Analysis of President Ilham Aliyev's Interview with Journalists

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Extended Abstract

The article analyzes significant events in Azerbaijan, the region, and the world, as discussed by President Ilham Aliyev in his January 7, 2025, interview with local television channels. The three-hour interview reflects his strategic vision regarding domestic and foreign policy. The questions addressed were grouped under critical topics, particularly the current situation in the South Caucasus, the normalization of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations, and the concrete steps taken in this process.

As President Aliyev highlighted, Armenia's ongoing militarization poses a new threat to the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan cannot remain a passive observer in the face of this development. Those seemingly backing Armenia and provoking it into new provocations against Azerbaijan will likely not support it indefinitely just as they failed to do so in 2020 and thereafter. Azerbaijan's budget allocation prioritizes military and security issues, with 8.4 billion manats dedicated to defense compared to 4 billion manats for the reconstruction of Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur. Armenia's arms race forces Azerbaijan to allocate significant financial resources to military matters, yet it is clear that Armenia cannot compete with Azerbaijan in this domain.

The article places special emphasis on Armenia's rapid militarization, emphasizing that this process will only lead to further tensions. Azerbaijan does not desire this; it seeks peace and wishes to close the chapter on war. However, Armenia and its new patrons seem unwilling to do so, as they continue to harbor revanchist ambitions, making Armenia a direct source of regional threats.

The article further asserts that Armenia is one of the few countries in the world operating under a fascist regime, an already established fact. Armenia and its patrons' actions are closely monitored, and Azerbaijan will not always remain an observer. The so-called independent Armenian state is, in reality, a fascist state, shaped over nearly three decades by leaders who embraced extremist ideology. The 30-year occupation of Azerbaijani lands was not solely an Armenian endeavor but a collective effort of Islamophobic, anti-Azerbaijani, racist, and xenophobic circles in various countries. Azerbaijan remains vigilant against the continued threat of fascism from its neighbor. If Armenia cannot overcome its internal fascism, Azerbaijan may have to intervene.

The article also discusses the peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia, highlighting it as a top regional priority. It points out that the delay in signing the agreement for four years results from Armenia's reliance on external guidance, which negatively impacts the process. Armenia has never pursued an independent policy and has consistently acted as a pawn in the interests of external powers. The time has come for Armenia to make serious decisions. The dissolution of the OSCE Minsk Group and constitutional reforms in Armenia are essential conditions for moving forward. If Armenia does not require a peace

agreement, then Azerbaijan does not either. Azerbaijan can continue its policies and development without such an agreement. The article emphasizes the need for Armenia to carefully assess geopolitical changes, as its closest allies are rapidly losing influence on the global stage.

Additionally, the article provides an overview of Azerbaijan's position and role in regional and global politics, underscoring the country's significant influence in the South Caucasus. It asserts that Azerbaijan possesses the leading economy, military power, and political clout in the region. The country is an active participant in shaping the new global order, which it envisions as a just system based on sovereignty, independence, and non-interference in the internal affairs of states. Azerbaijan has successfully redrawn the transport and energy map of the South Caucasus. With access to Central Asia via the Caspian Sea and connections to Europe, Azerbaijan has become an indispensable geopolitical actor. Merely glancing at a map illustrates its strategic importance. Azerbaijan contributes to the emerging world order through its actions. Looking at recent history, no other country has restored its territorial integrity entirely by its own means. Additionally, only a few states in the world can conduct fully independent foreign policies.

The article also covers Azerbaijan's post-war reconstruction efforts and future plans. It details the extensive rehabilitation and redevelopment activities in Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur, their current status, and future prospects. The fact that these initiatives are carried out solely through Azerbaijan's internal resources, without foreign aid, is a source of national pride. The independent and principled foreign policy of Azerbaijan and its prioritization of regional and international relations were key discussion points in President Aliyev's interview. The article also highlights the risks posed by Armenia's revanchist tendencies and continued armament efforts, which threaten regional stability and force Azerbaijan to enhance its defense capabilities.

Every statement made by President Aliyev in his interview was forward-looking. A particularly noteworthy global message from the interview was Azerbaijan's call for countries to focus on their own domestic affairs. This principle, if followed, would prevent wars, conflicts, and confrontations. Each nation should mind its own affairs within its borders and avoid interfering in the internal matters of other countries. While this may seem like an idealistic vision, history has shown that imperialist powers have long operated under the "divide and rule" strategy, exploiting colonies and plundering their resources. Such nefarious practices must come to an end. Sovereignty must be inviolable and respected; no country should meddle in the affairs of another. Azerbaijan has successfully upheld this principle, and its contributions to shaping the new world order will be significant.

President Ilham Aliyev's January 7 interview reaffirmed Azerbaijan's independent and resolute stance on the global stage. The messages conveyed in the interview instill pride and confidence among Azerbaijani citizens while urging the international community to acknowledge the new geopolitical realities. This interview exemplifies Azerbaijan's strategic vision, reflecting its adherence to statehood traditions and contemporary challenges.

Keywords: South Caucasus, Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, Critical Discourse Analysis, Armenia-Azerbaijan Relations.

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