

BULGARIA AS A RELIABLE STRATEGIC PARTNER OF AZERBAIJAN IN EUROPE: POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC RELATIONS BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES

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Abstract

The content of the strategic partnership relations between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria and the political, economic, cultural and scientific activities and suggestions for further cooperation are analyzed in the article. Based on the studies, as a member of the European Union, Bulgaria's friendly relations with Azerbaijan, as well as joint participation in many projects in which Azerbaijan is one of the key partners of the Southern Gas Corridor, have involved in research. The convergence among different areas has played a major role in strengthening the positions of both countries and has identified directions for future joint cooperation.

Key words: *culture, agreement, delegation, Bulgaria, science.*

The global processes, which are occurred at the end of the 20th century, in particular, the liquidation of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the USSR, caused the radical changes in the international political environment and the emergence of a new geopolitical situation. Joining of new independent states to the system of international relations resulted the formation of a new structure of interstate relations around the world. This, on the one hand, is characterized by a decrease in political tension in the international arena, the disappearance of global conflict and, on the other hand, the emergence of a number of neighboring centers of strategic importance in political, economic and military relations. On October 18, 1991, the Republic of Azerbaijan, located in an important geopolitical place, proclaimed its independence. Thus, the changes in the international arena in the late 1980s and early 1990s put the priority of the formation and implementation of a new foreign policy in line with the principles of national statehood.

The Republic of Azerbaijan, officially is recognized by a number of countries for a short period has been a member of the UN since 1992, OSCE and OIC, joined the Council of Europe in 2001, establishing close ties with the European Union, NATO and other organizations. It is an active foreign policy direction for the development of beneficial relations. The rich economic

potential and favorable geopolitical position of the country are important for strengthening the independence of Azerbaijan and protecting state interests. The gradual recognition of Azerbaijan by the states of the world and the establishment of diplomatic relations in late 1991 and 1992 created conditions the widespread systematic integration into the world community. The establishment of bilateral political relations provided favorable conditions for the development of economic and cultural ties. Mutually beneficial economic cooperation, in turn, plays an important role in deepening political relations and strengthening mutual trust. In this regard, "The Contract of Century" on the exploitation of oil fields in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea, signed on September 20, 1994, gave a powerful impetus to the expansion of Azerbaijan's international relations and the strengthening of its international positions.

"The Contract of the Century" and the numerous oil contracts that were signed in the subsequent period contribute to the integration of Azerbaijan into the world community, demonstrating a wide network of common points of contact for the development of mutually beneficial cooperation. The Baku International Conference on Restoring the Great Silk Road, held on September 7-8, 1998 with the participation of 32 countries and 13 international organizations, is one of the most important achievements of Azerbaijan's foreign policy since its independence. The restoration of the Great Silk Road within the framework of the EU-TACIS-TRACECA program creates favorable conditions for the development of all countries in the Europe-Caucasus-Asia corridor, their economic potential and the expansion of multilateral economic cooperation. The leading role of Azerbaijan in the development of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport corridor, which plays an important role in the bridge between East and West, will further deepen the country's integration with the world. This is important not only for economic, but also for political stability and security. Along with the development of bilateral relations with the countries of the world, the expansion of multilateral cooperation within the framework of international and regional organizations plays an important role in the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Bulgaria can be considered a very important partner among the countries with which Azerbaijan cooperates. The Republic of Bulgaria recognized the independence of Azerbaijan on January 14, 1992, and diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on June 5, 1992. The Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Republic of Azerbaijan was opened in December 1999. On April 16, 2004, the Embassy of Azerbaijan was opened in Bulgaria. 16 meetings were held at the level of heads of state, 8 meetings at the level of heads of government, 6 meetings at the level of heads of parliaments and 54 meetings at the level of ministers. The contractual basis between the two countries is quite rich. 12 documents were signed in the political sphere, 5 document in the field

of social protection, healthcare, tourism, 17 document in the field of science and education, 7 document in the field of law and 32 document in other areas¹. It is no coincidence that the two countries worked together to develop an effective response against the threats for international peace and security, based on the principles of the United Nations Charter and the Helsinki Final Act and the principles of international law such as sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders. In March 2015, Azerbaijan and Bulgaria signed the Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership in order to expand their ties with new areas and give them a qualitatively new character. Given that friendly and fraternal relations are built on the basis of strategic partnerships, it is easy to understand that Bulgaria is a valuable partner and a country that can always be trusted. As strategic partners, the parties openly declared their intention to deepen and enlarge cooperation between the two countries and society in areas of mutual interest, both bilaterally and internationally.

In the field of politics, Azerbaijan and Bulgaria focus on regular high-level political consultations to discuss bilateral relations, global and regional issues of mutual interest, to facilitate dialogue and practical cooperation on bilateral, regional and international issues of common interest. In addition, increased cooperation in the United Nations, OSCE, Council of Europe, as well as in the European Union, NATO and other international and regional forums, including specialized agencies and institutions, joint initiatives on common regional and international issues of common interest, increased efforts the peaceful resolution of existing conflicts and the strengthening of international peace and security are the main objectives. It is one of the priorities to promote further development of cooperation and regular exchanges between the parliaments of Azerbaijan and Bulgaria with the support of relevant friendship groups, including multilateral forums.

Bulgaria highly appreciates Azerbaijan's economic potential, which is derived from its important geostrategic position and internal development trends. Increasing the importance of Azerbaijan as an energy exporter and transit country, attracts Bulgaria to cooperate with our republic. Since 1998, Bulgaria has been participating in the Eurasian Transport Corridor (TRACECA) project with Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan and Bulgaria also cooperate within the framework of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization. At the same time, important documents in the economic sphere have been signed between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria over the years. Works are continuing to strengthen and diversify cooperation in priority areas of industry, energy, transport, infrastructure, agriculture, information technology, communications, tourism and the environment, and to create and protect favorable conditions for increasing mutual investments.

The main area of economic cooperation between the two countries is the Southern Gas Corridor, which allows Europe to supply natural gas from Azerbaijan to Europe, thereby increasing the energy security of Europe by diversifying natural gas supply routes. The Southern Gas Corridor aims to strengthen the energy security of the European Union by delivering alternative natural gas from the Caspian region to Europe. As you know, within the framework of this project, one billion cubic meters of natural gas will be supplied to Bulgaria from 2020 through the Shah Deniz gas field. It is important to note that the Trans-Anatolian and Trans-Adriatic pipelines, the main route of the Southern Gas Corridor, do not physically pass through Bulgaria, but this country has great importance for the potential role in other European markets. Undoubtedly, energy is an important part of bilateral relations between two countries, and our countries have made significant progress in this area in recent years. It is clear that we still have untapped potential for expanding our cooperation on energy issues, and the Bulgarian government should value Azerbaijan as a desirable and reliable partner in the field of energy security. Bulgaria is interested in implementing strategic energy and transport infrastructure projects that link the EU and Azerbaijan as the Southern Gas Corridor. Azerbaijan plays an important role in diversifying energy security and natural gas supplies to Bulgaria and Europe, and is not only the main source of gas, but also the supplier of the Southern Gas Corridor, which will ensure energy security for Europe².

The rapid and dynamic development of Azerbaijan gives it the status of significant access to the transport corridors East-West and North-South. The factors that make Azerbaijan an irreplaceable country in terms of transit are the creation of modern infrastructure in the region, its geographical location and proximity to the ports of the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf, as well as financial stability. Transport is one of the priority areas for cooperation with Bulgaria in both bilateral and international transit corridors, and it is expected that this partnership will be strengthened in the coming years. Azerbaijan is the gateway to Bulgaria's access to fast-growing Central Asian markets, and Bulgaria is also a country that can provide access to the rest of Europe³

The rich cultural ties between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria coincide with the Soviet era. The 20-year treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance between the USSR and the Bulgaria which signed on March 18, 1948, played an important role in the systematic and consistent establishment of cultural ties. Since the beginning of the 50s of the last century, the organization of mutual visits to familiarize themselves with the formation of Azerbaijani-Bulgarian cultural ties has carried out regularly. The widespread, comprehensive and effective

months of weeks Soviet-Bulgarian, Bulgarian-Soviet friendship, which also directly contributed to the development of relations with Bulgaria.

The works of more than 50 translators, poets, writers, critics, journalists, literary critics and scholars have been translated from Bulgarian literature into Azerbaijani. The works of famous representatives of Bulgarian literature - Kristo Botev, Lamar, Anton Antonov-Tonich, Nikolai Vazhbarov, Liana Daskalova, Elisaveta Bakryan, Ivan Kolarov, Krum Grigorov, Jordan Milevin, Lyudmila Stoyanova and others are very close to the literary environment and the reader of Azerbaijan. It is very interesting that in 1952-1962 alone, about 200 works of more than 40 Bulgarian poets and writers were translated into Azerbaijani. Over the next decade (1962 - 1972), this number almost doubled. Translated samples of Bulgarian literature were printed in the magazines of "Communist", "Azerbaijan Youth", "Baku", "Literature and Art", "Pioneer of Azerbaijan", "Azerbaijan", "Stars" and "Azerbaijani Women". One of the important aspects of Azerbaijani-Bulgarian literary relations was that the theme of Azerbaijan in Bulgarian literature and the Bulgarian theme in Azerbaijani literature⁴. The literary works of Bulgarian authors, as well as D. Tachev's "Hello, Azerbaijan", "Baku Night", K. Kainov's "Decorate the World!", L. Elenkov's "Ancient Baku", L. Daskalova's poem "The Last Night of the Poet", Milevin's "Mardakan" and "Blue Lake" are the poems which written at that time. L. Daskalova's ballad "The Last Night of the Poet" is dedicated to the beloved Azerbaijani poet Samad Vurgun⁵

Over the years of independence, cultural cooperation has set many goals for both sides. The agreement between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria on cooperation in the field of culture dated April 8, 2011 was signed in Baku and the Agreement about the restoration and reconstruction of the Trapezitsa Architectural Museum-Reserve was signed in Sofia on May 27, 2015. The main priorities of bilateral cultural relations defined in these agreements are the promotion of intercultural dialogue through joint initiatives, a wider demonstration of the cultural heritage and achievements of both countries, as well as the intensification of initiatives to strengthen cultural ties between the regions.

The restoration of the Trapezitsa Architectural Museum-Reserve by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria, is an important initiative for the development of cultural ties. The project, implemented by the Foundation, provides for the conservation and restoration of the 150-meter-long western wall at the historical monument, the construction of a 700-meter tourist alley, the creation and maintenance of a cultural center, as well as the restoration and conservation of 3 churches in the area. The Trapezitsa is a national treasure of

the Bulgarian people. Being the spiritual center of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, Trapezitsa played a historical role in the formation of Bulgarian statehood. Therefore, participation in the restoration of Trapezitsa was accepted by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation as an important project that will promote tolerance, mutual respect and understanding, and, in particular, strengthen the traditional friendship between the friendly Azerbaijani and Bulgarian peoples. Undoubtedly, this project will benefit not only our two friendly people, but also tourists from all over the world who will visit Bulgaria in the coming years⁶.

On October 7, 2004, the Center for the Bulgarian Language and Culture was opened in Baku with the participation of President of the Republic of Bulgaria Georgi Pirvanov. The main goal of the Center for Bulgarian Language and Culture is to develop cultural ties between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria, stimulate youth interest in the culture, education and science of both countries and facilitate the learning process in the Bulgarian language. Bulgarian has been taught at the Baku Slavic University since 1996. In addition, an exhibition of works by Azerbaijani artists was organized at the National Academy of Arts of Bulgaria. Baku Slavic University Center was opened at the Oriental Languages and Culture Center at Sofia University with the support of the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Bulgaria. By the proposal of the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Bulgaria the exhibition of books about Azerbaijan and Bulgaria was organized in the Bulgarian National Library on June 2, 2015 in Sofia.

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev signed an order to celebrate the 650th anniversary of the great Azerbaijani poet Imaddaddin Nasimi and declare 2019 the Year of Nasimi. According to these documents, the book of the great thinker Imaddadin Nasimi “My Holy Temple” was published by the Azerbaijani Embassy in the Republic of Bulgaria in Sofia.

Among the areas that have been developed between the two countries, we must emphasize the importance of science. The cooperation agreement, signed on November 27, 1958 between the USSR Academy of Sciences and Bulgarian EA, played a great role in the development of Azerbaijani-Bulgarian scientists. The USSR Academy of Sciences created the Commission on Foreign Relations in 1959. According to a specific action plan defined in 1960, a scientific exchange of Azerbaijani-Bulgarian scientists was carried out at a high level. In 1960, Bulgarian scholars highly appreciated the exhibition, reflecting the historical monuments and cultural rise of Azerbaijan.

After independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan, activity in the field of international scientific cooperation expanded as in many areas. Within the framework of the IV World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, held in Baku in 2016, the Vice-President of the Republic of Bulgaria Iliana Yotova met with the President of ANAS, Academician Akif Alzade and discussed the

development of bilateral relations. Presidents of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences visited Azerbaijan in 2011, 2014 and 2018. Delegations led by ANAS President Academician Akif Alizade visited Sofia in 2017 and 2019. In 2017 an agreement on the cooperation in the field of science was signed between two academies. According to this Agreement the below mentioned projects are implementing currently:

“Reality and Future Perspectives of Social-humanitarian, Scientific and Cultural Relations of Azerbaijan and Bulgaria”;

“Contemporary Status and Transformations of the Environment in Mountain Territories on Greater Caucasus (Azerbaijan) and Pirin (Bulgaria)”;

“Hybrid $\text{FeCh}_x - \text{TiO}_2\text{-MoS}_x$ cathodes for electrochemical and photo-electrochemical applications”;

“Suppression of age-associated diseases by plant-derived substances in murine model of osteoarthritis”;

“The investigation of mechanical-chemical synthesis, based on polyolefin physical-chemical and physical-mechanical properties of polymer nanocomposites during extrusion process, the use of their possible industries”;

“Changing climate and flora in coastal areas – parallel between Bulgarian Black Sea and Caspian Sea coasts⁷.”

Scientists from Bulgaria has participated in various events in Baku in the field of nuclear physics, physiology, mathematics and other themes. Scientists and experts from Azerbaijan also have given lectures at conferences, seminars and symposia on the Bulgarian language, silk, philosophy and other fields of science.

As a result of the conducted studies, the following areas of cooperation were identified as priorities:

- lubricants, fuels and cutting fluids additives in the synthesis and study of various functional properties;
- compositions (additive) for lubricants and packages in the field of development;
- the theoretical basis of chemical additives (mechanism of action, structure and composition depending on the functional properties, etc.), research work in this area;
- preventing corrosion inhibitors and research in this area;
- the usage of lubricants, fuels and cutting fluids to prevent biological hazard, additives (biocides) synthesis and research in this area;
- high-performance lubrication use, environmentally friendly fuel, lubricating fluids in refrigeration and other special creations;

- history of two countries, culture and joint exhibitions, conferences of both countries;
- publication of materials on the basis of museum catalogs and books, albums;
- museums on the history and culture of Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Bulgarian history and culture, as well as the exchange of information on the materials kept in museums;
- secondment in order to train and familiarize the staff with the work of two museums in both countries;
- Bulgarian folklore genres, and comparative study of scientific research;
- Bulgarian translation of examples of folklore;
- the history of libraries on the history of science and literature, manuscripts, documents, maps in Bulgaria, and familiarity with archival materials, also copying and creating opportunities for Azerbaijani specialists to work in libraries of the country;
- materials on oriental manuscripts, historical documents kept in the “SS. Cyril and Methodius” National Library of Bulgaria and study projects on the following material in particular the Ottoman Empire;
- activity within the "Horizon 2020";
- implementation of joint research study of earthquakes, seismographs;
- modern movement and deformation on the basis of the GPS data analysis;
- Seismic hazard and seismic hazard assessment and engineering application of their results;
- deposition processes, in order to determine the causes of volcanic eruptions and explosions for the analysis and interpretation of digital records.

Currently, the priority tasks for both countries can be partnerships and exchanges between scientific and research institutions at a high level, including through the provision of scholarships and programs for students and doctoral students, as well as initiatives to expand scientific ties between the regions.

As a result of the analysis, we can summarize that, friendly relations between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria are based on the principles of strategic partnership. Both countries have a policy of supporting each other, bilaterally and internationally. Analyses in the political, economic, cultural and scientific fields show that bilateral relations have a strong legal basis. About 80 documents signed in various fields and the work done on the basis of these documents is a clear proof of this. The rapprochement between countries is one of the key factors that characterize them as strong partners. We can hope that in the coming years, Bulgaria will protect right of Azerbaijan as a reliable partner within European Union, NATO, BSEC and other international

organizations and will continue to support Azerbaijan in resolving the Azerbaijan-Armenia-Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

NOTES

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БЪЛГАРИЯ КАТО НАДЕЖДЕН СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИ ПАРТНЬОР НА АЗЕРБАЙДЖАН В ЕВРОПА: ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИ, ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИ, КУЛТУРНИ И НАУЧНИ ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯ МЕЖДУ ДВЕТЕ СТРАНИ

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Резюме

В статията са подложени на анализ отношенията на стратегическото партньорство между Азербайджан и България в областта на политическите, икономическите, културните и научните дейности, като са направени и предложения за насоките на бъдещото сътрудничество. Анализът включва задълбочено проучване на съдържанието на приятелските отношения, които България, като член на Европейския съюз, демонстрира спрямо Азербайджан, както и на съвместното участие в много проекти, в които Азербайджан е един от ключовите партньори, като например проекта за Южен газов коридор. Сътрудничеството в много и различни области играе ключова роля за укрепване на позициите на двете страни и за идентифициране на насоките на бъдещото съвместно сътрудничество.

Ключови думи: култура, споразумения, делегиране/упълномощаване, България, наука.

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