

# 25 years of independence: preliminary results

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18 October is a significant date for the people of Azerbaijan. On this day in 1991, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Azerbaijan adopted the Constitutional Act on State Independence. This marked the restoration of Azerbaijan's statehood after 71 years within the USSR. On 29 December 1991, a nationwide referendum was held to identify the nation's attitude to the Constitutional Act on Independence, and 95 per cent of eligible citizens voted in it. The people of Azerbaijan unequivocally spoke in favor of their statehood. In May 1992, the Milli Majlis (the National Assembly) of Azerbaijan adopted the attributes of the independent state – the anthem, the flag and the coat of arms.

A short time later, the country was faced with a realistic threat of losing its still fragile statehood: the ever-expanding military aggression of Armenia was aggravated by the obvious and hidden destructive deeds of the near and distant states seeking their own interests in the region. Their escapades led to domestic political strife and separatist actions. But the return of experienced political figure Heydar Aliyev to power helped Azerbaijan to rectify the situation. Unfortunately, Armenian aggression continues – almost 20 per cent Azerbaijani territory is occupied, one million Azerbaijanis have become refugees and IDPs, and tens of thousands of people have been killed and injured, captured and tortured in the war. Today, the restoration of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of our country is the most important task of the state, which has been repeatedly emphasized by President Ilham Aliyev.

Despite all the difficulties, Azerbaijan has become one of the key countries of the region in political and economic respects. For several years now, Azerbaijan has been among world leaders for the pace of economic growth. The energy projects of regional proportions, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipelines, the development of the Caspian gas field of Shah Deniz, as well as the TAP and TANAP projects, have significantly changed not only the economic, but also the geopolitical situation in the region. Projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and the North-South transport corridor will further enhance Azerbaijan's role as an international transit hub.

Important steps are being taken to diversify Azerbaijan's economy and reduce its dependence on energy. The launch of the first Azerbaijani telecommunication satellite into orbit has been one in a series of such initiatives. Large-scale infrastructure projects are also implemented in the country.

Azerbaijan has been destined to gain independence twice over the course of one century. The first Republic lasted less than two years at the beginning of the last century, but despite such a short period of time, the experience of the first democratic state in the whole of the Muslim East was of paramount historical significance. The present Republic of Azerbaijan has existed for a quarter of a century and is playing an increasingly active role in the international arena. Today, the primary task is to restore the territorial integrity of the country and thereby ensure the irreversibility of its state independence.