

AZERBAIJAN'S INDEPENDENCE IS ETERNAL

The establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic is a historic event. A democratic republic was created for the first time in the Muslim world. We are rightfully proud of the fact that the Azerbaijani people created this republic. This shows again that the Azerbaijani people are a great, freedom-loving and progressive people. The Azerbaijani state has great respect for the memory of the founders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. A few years ago, I signed an executive order on erecting a monument in honor of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in the center of Baku. The names of the founders of the Democratic Republic were immortalized. This year has been declared a "Year of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic" in Azerbaijan, and we have been conducting major events both in our country and in many foreign countries to celebrate this anniversary. These events will be held until the end of the year.

I want to say again that we are rightfully proud of this historic event. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic existed for 23 months but managed to do a lot during this time. The state flag of Azerbaijan was established, citizenship of Azerbaijan was established, our national army was established. Next month, we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of our army. In September 1918, the national army of Azerbaijan, together with the Islamic Army of the Caucasus, liberated Baku from the occupation of Armenian-Bolshevik detachments and returned our ancient city of Baku to the Azerbaijani people. The Democratic Republic created a border detachment. The historical name of Ganja was returned to this city. More than 200 laws were adopted in a short time. A special place among them, of course, is held by the law on granting women the right to vote. Baku State University was established, and this shows that the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic intended to do a great deal of work in terms of training national personnel and devel-

oping education. Our native Azerbaijani language was adopted in all educational institutions.

In a word, a lot was done. The Democratic Republic sought to create a strong state so that the Azerbaijani people could live in the conditions of freedom and calm. Unfortunately, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic did not exist for long – the republic fell after 23 months. This is a great tragedy for us. I am absolutely sure that if independence had not been lost in 1920, Azerbaijan could be among the richest and most developed countries of the world now, because our natural resources and geographical location enabled us to effectively use these natural resources. In the second half of the 19th and in early 20th century, Baku and Azerbaijan provided a significant part of the world's oil production.

Unfortunately, we lost our independence. This shows again that it is more difficult to preserve independence than to gain it. The flag raised in 1918 was lowered in 1920, but it was raised again by great leader Heydar Aliyev at a session of the Nakhchivan Supreme Majlis 70 years later. The flag of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was adopted as the state flag at a session of the Supreme Majlis of Nakhchivan.

Azerbaijan gained its independence twice in the 20th century, the second time in 1991. It was a historic opportunity. As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan became an independent country for the second time. Unfortunately, the first years of independence went down in our history as tragic and very difficult years for our country. Unfortunately, the forces that were leading Azerbaijan could not govern Azerbaijan at the proper level in 1991-1993. They did not realize the responsibility they had and brought the young independent state practically to an uncontrollable state. The negative events and phenomena Azerbaijan experienced in 1991-1993 called the country's

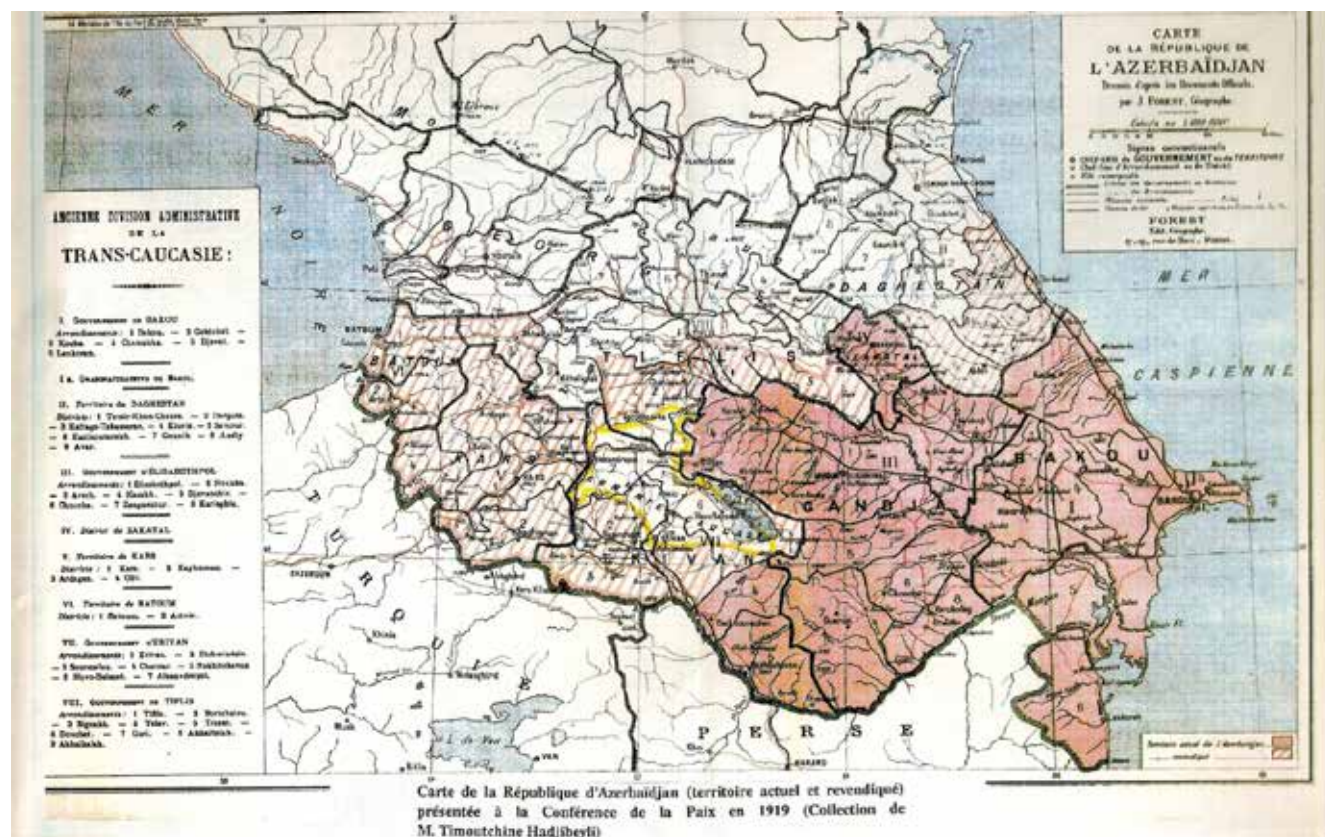


independence into question. The situation aggravated further in 1992, after the PFPA-Musavat tandem had staged a coup d'état and forcibly seized power. There were chaos, anarchy and arbitrariness in our country. The PFPA-Musavat government was engaged in looting. Our lands were under occupation, which resulted in many refugees and IDPs appeared. The PFPA-Musavat government shed fraternal blood and unleashed a civil war, which turned into a great tragedy for our people.

In a word, those years are a black spot and years of shame in our history. The Azerbaijani people managed to endure this anti-national government for only a year, after which it was consigned to the archives of history. The Azerbaijani people turned to their leader Heydar Aliyev and invited him to take power, demonstrating their wisdom again. Heydar Aliyev's invitation to take power had many reasons. First and foremost, the people remembered well what he had done as the head of Azerbaijan in the 1970s and early 1980s, the development, creative work and improvement Azerbaijan had achieved. It was under his leadership that Azerbaijan rose from being the very backward republic in the 1970s to the most advanced places in the Soviet Union. Other reasons were that Heydar Aliyev was always with

his people in the most difficult times, showed great wisdom and courage. Immediately after the bloody January tragedy, on 21 January 1990, he went to the permanent representative office of Azerbaijan in Moscow and condemned the Communist Party for the crime it had committed, criticized it, denounced this bloody tragedy, and communicated the pain of the Azerbaijani people to the whole world. At that time, the PFPA-Musavat organization was practically invisible, it had its heart in the mouth, it disappeared and deserted. Heydar Aliyev raised his voice of justice alone and in the center of the Soviet Union, demonstrated solidarity with the people and communicated this tragedy to the whole world. Of course, the people of Azerbaijan know that history perfectly well. While working in Nakhchivan, the great leader managed to save Nakhchivan from Armenian occupation, which was also a very difficult task. Nakhchivan was surrounded by the enemy, and self-defense detachments were organized there. The enemy was given a fitting rebuff and put back in its place.

As I have already mentioned, it was Heydar Aliyev who first approved the state flag of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic as the national flag at a session of the Supreme Majlis of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. He did



Map of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic demonstrated at the Paris Peace Conference

not allow a referendum on the preservation of the Soviet Union to be held in Nakhchivan although this referendum was held in all other places of Azerbaijan. He changed the name of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, removing the words "Soviet Socialist" from it. Of course, the people knew very well that Heydar Aliyev is a strong leader, a man attached to his homeland, and this is what the leader of Azerbaijan should be like.

Year 1993 was a turning point in our history. The history of our independence actually begins from that year because it was formal and conditional in 1991-1993. It is possible to say that Azerbaijan was controlled from the outside. We all know this well. Therefore, the Azerbaijani people rightly consider Heydar Aliyev to be the founder of Azerbaijan's state independence, the architect of the Azerbaijani state, and this is a historical truth.

In those challenging circumstances, Heydar Aliyev managed to lead Azerbaijan out of the difficult situation and put it on a path of development. From 1993 to this day, Azerbaijan has lived an independent life in the true sense of the word. The foundations of statehood were laid, the Constitution of an independent state and our national ideology were adopted. Today, the ideol-

ogy of Azerbaijanism is our ideological foundation. Political reforms were initiated, important decisions and laws related to democratic development were adopted. A policy of economic liberalization began, and the transition to a market economy took place precisely on the initiative of Heydar Aliyev.

An end was put to international isolation and Azerbaijan managed to establish constructive relations with leading countries of the world. Relations with neighboring states were normalized. After all, it was absurd that Azerbaijan had very tense relations practically with all neighboring states before 1993. The establishment of relations with large neighboring states is one of the historical merits of Heydar Aliyev. Serious economic reforms resulted in an influx of major investment in Azerbaijan. The Contract of the Century was signed, becoming the key contributor to our economic independence. We are all well aware that there can be no talk of political independence in the absence of economic independence. Serious steps were taken in building the army. A regular army was established in Azerbaijan. In a word, Azerbaijan has been confidently marching along the path of development since 1993, and this path continues today.

Azerbaijan has been developing dynamically since 2003. We have managed to create a strong and powerful state. Azerbaijan is a country that conducts an independent policy in the true sense of the word. There are not too many countries like that on the world map today. In particular, if we look at the countries with a small territory and population, we can see that there are not too many countries capable of pursuing an independent policy. We are conducting an absolutely independent policy. Our policy is based on national interests. The interests of the Azerbaijani people are the source and basis of our policy. The possibilities for influencing our policy from the outside are equal to zero. This was shown by a recent story. I can say that there are even no such attempts today because we are pursuing a principled policy. This policy is supported and defended by the Azerbaijani people. The unity of the people and the government is the main reason behind our success.

Azerbaijan strengthens its positions on the international arena today. We are a country enjoying great authority in the international community. The number of countries cooperating with us is gradually increasing. We have twice presided over the UN Security Council, the most influential organization in the world. Starting



*Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers
on the establishment of the Azerbaijani Parliament*



Members of the Azerbaijani delegation at the Paris Peace Conference



First session of the ADR Parliament on 7 December 1918

from next year, we will preside over the world's second largest organization after the UN, the Non-Aligned Movement. We cooperate very closely with all other leading international organizations. We are a member of some organizations and cooperate with others. The world community treats Azerbaijan with great respect and sympathy. The positions of Azerbaijan on the political map of the world are very strong today.

The work carried out in recent years in relation to the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has further broadened the legal framework for its settlement. Of course, the basis of this legal framework is formed by the four resolutions of the UN Security Council and decisions of the OSCE. Since 2003, similar decisions and resolutions have been adopted by other international organizations. Among them are the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, GUAM, ECO and other organizations. This represents a legal framework for resolving the conflict. We have also created an economic basis for a settlement and established a powerful army. As a result of the comprehensive measures taken, Azerbaijan has secured full political and diplomatic advantage in this matter. As a result, no matter how hard the Armenians

of the world have tried, no state has recognized the illegal Nagorno-Karabakh regime.

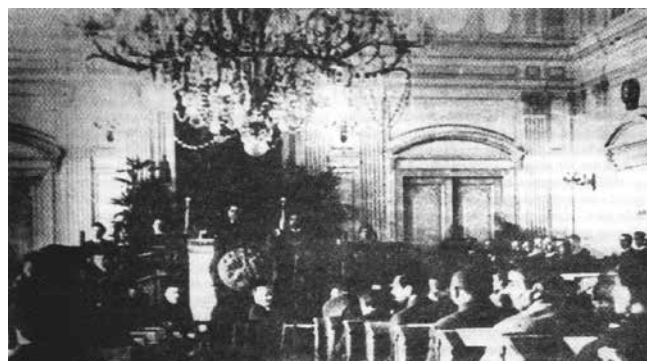
We are well aware that the norms of international law are often violated and do not work these days. The power factor comes to the fore, and this is a reality. Therefore, the world community's support for our position on the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a great achievement for us. I believe that in addition to the norms of international law, there is also a factor of a strong Azerbaijan. We have managed to create a strong state. I want to say again that the number of countries cooperating and interested in cooperating with us is on the increase. There is growing respect for us, and the approval of our work is evident. Under such circumstances, no country can establish any relations with the illegal regime – we will never allow this to happen. We will never allow a second Armenian state to be created on our historical lands. There is only one way of resolving the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – the restoration of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan which is recognized by the international community.

We have created a strong army. In 1918, when the decision to create the Azerbaijani army was made, the founders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic could probably never imagine that the Azerbaijani army

would be among top 50 strongest armies of the world. Both the logistics and the combat capability of our army are at the highest level. We have managed to prove this on the battlefield. Two years ago, the Azerbaijani army managed to free some of the occupied lands from the invaders. A part of Agdara, Fuzuli and Jabrayil districts has been liberated from the invaders. Citizens of Azerbaijan have returned to these liberated lands. Life has returned to these lands, and this was done by the Azerbaijani state and the Azerbaijani army.

A strong army forms the basis of our independence and is the guarantor of security. There is complete security in Azerbaijan. As an independent country, Azerbaijan is one of the most stable countries on a global scale today. We have created a strong economy. We have used our natural resources very rationally, and economic independence is the key factor behind our political independence. There can be no talk of political independence in the absence of economic independence. Strong economic fundamentals will allow Azerbaijan to successfully develop in the future without depending on anyone.

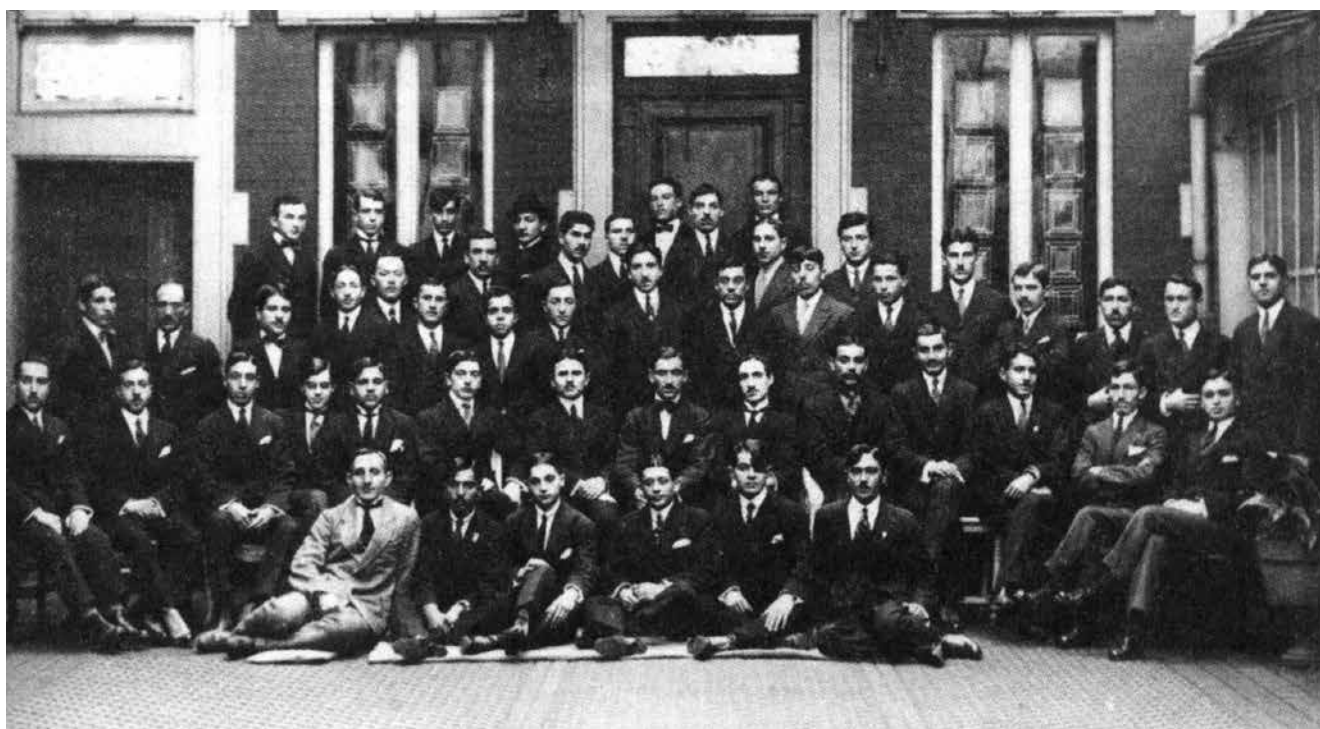
Over the past 15 years, our economic development has reached a record level on a global scale. The economy of Azerbaijan has grown 3.2 times, and this development is unseen in the world. We have created large foreign exchange reserves. Our foreign exchange



*Adoption of the ADR Declaration of Independence,
28 May 1918*

reserves are on a par with the gross domestic product. Our foreign debt is at a level that reserves exceed it four to five times. In other words, if we look at the economic map of the world, we can see that such indicators are very rare. We have created this ourselves, without any help from the outside, as a result of a prudent policy and judicious steps. Azerbaijan today is a completely independent state from an economic point of view. We do not depend on anyone and for this reason confidently conduct an independent policy.

Our economic successes are recognized by influential international economic organizations. Azerbaijan ranks 35th in the world in terms of competitiveness and third in terms of development among developing





The Fourth Government Cabinet of the ADR

countries. It is not us who says this, but the Davos Economic Forum, the world's leading economic forum.

In other words, a strong economy allows us the opportunity to implement any social and infrastructure projects in Azerbaijan, and we are doing that. Azerbaijan is a social state. The attention being paid to the social sphere helps us resolve many social problems, including projects related to social infrastructure. Over the past 15 years, more than 3,000 schools, over 600 medical institutions and more than 40 Olympic centers have been built. All of this is underpinned by our policies and economic power. We have transformed our natural resources, our oil, into human capital. Work in this direction continues and will be continued. We have created a strong infrastructure that has strengthened the independence of our country, the infrastructure that will serve the Azerbaijani people for decades to come. We have implemented all key infrastructure projects practically from scratch.

We have connected the seas by a network of oil and gas pipelines. For the first time in history, the Caspian Sea has been connected with the Black and Mediterranean seas through pipelines. Oil and gas pipelines Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum and Baku-Supsa have been built on our initiative. From the point of view of energy security, Azerbaijan has become an important country not only in the region, but also on a global scale.

A lot of work is being done to implement the Southern Gas Corridor now, and it will be officially inaugurated tomorrow. This is also a great historic victory.

By creating a transport infrastructure, we are connecting the continents. Azerbaijan, a country that does not have access to the world ocean, is becoming one of the world's transport centers today. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and other transport infrastructure projects we have initiated, the launch of the Alat port, the largest port in the Caspian Sea, and the steps aimed at creating the North-South transport corridor pursue the one goal of turning Azerbaijan into one of the transport hubs of the world peace. A lot has been done in this direction. This is a factor that strengthens our independence, a factor that develops the non-oil sector. We are seriously dealing with this issue. Sooner or later our natural resources will be depleted although the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli contract has been extended until 2050. This contract will operate at least until then. I am absolutely convinced that Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli will have sufficient reserves of oil even beyond 2050.

As for our natural gas resources, they will be sufficient for us and for the countries using them as a result of this cooperation for at least another 100 years. Despite this, we still need to look ahead. We must pursue the long-term and sustainable development strategy for our country. We have very clear thoughts and views on this issue.

I believe that Azerbaijan as an independent state has achieved historic success in the humanitarian sphere. Azerbaijan is known in the world as one of the centers of multiculturalism today. In fact, this is the case despite the lukewarm attitude to this approach in the world. Despite this, we are going our own way. We are absolutely sure that we are on the right track because our example and the work we are doing lead to the strengthening of the interreligious and interethnic dialogue and ultimately serve stability and security.

No-one could have ever imagined that Azerbaijan would be among the world's leading countries in the field of sports. We have achieved this. When one of our athletes won a high place in European or world championships in Soviet times, we perceived this as a great historic event. Today our athletes have won hundreds of medals in European, world championships and Olympic games. For the number of medals won at the latest Olympic games, Azerbaijan ranks 14th on the world scale. Just imagine what a significant achievement it is to finish 14th in the Games joined by about 200 countries. What is this the result of? It is the result of the work done, the right policy and talent of our people, the unity between the people and the government. Whatever sphere we look at, there is development and progress everywhere. We have a clear view on further dynamic development. The independent Azerbaijan is a source of pride for every citizen of Azerbaijan today. We have turned the dreams of the founders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic into reality. We have built a state I am sure every citizen of Azerbaijan, every Azerbaijani is proud of. I am absolutely sure that if the founders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic could see the present-day Azerbaijan, they would also be proud of our country.

Azerbaijan possesses rich natural resources, and although a significant part of them has been depleted, they still remain. Azerbaijan is a place where oil was industrially produced for the first time in the world in 1846. There is even a monument reflecting this event. At that time, Azerbaijan provided a significant part of world's oil for decades. But could the Azerbaijani people use these natural resources? No. Look at the position we were in. Today we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Democratic Republic. Look at the position our country was in up to that time. Abject poverty, illiteracy and completely destroyed historical cities. Why? Because Azerbaijan was not independent! If it hadn't been for the Azerbaijani oil in Soviet times, during World War II, the Soviet Union could not have achieved victory



*Deputy's badge
of ADR Parliament Speaker A. M. Topchubashov*

over fascism. Everyone should know this. We have made a decisive contribution to the victory. At that time, the Azerbaijani people, workers and oilmen of Azerbaijan, as well as Azerbaijani oil, served the all-Union budget. Despite all these resources, Azerbaijan was the most backward republic of the Soviet Union before Heydar Aliyev came to the leadership of the republic in 1969. Why? Because we were not independent! They were not masters of our own destiny.

In the 1970s, thanks to the tireless efforts of Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijan achieved significant development. However, it was not independent. The troubles our people experienced in the first years of independence, the occupation of our lands, the civil war and incompetent activity of the PFPA-Musavat tandem practically destroyed our country. But we have revitalized it. How? Thanks to independence! Our fate is in our own hands now. Our future is in safe hands.

The present-day Azerbaijan demonstrates again that independence is our biggest asset. This is really the case. Independence is our biggest asset, the greatest benefit and the biggest happiness. The independence of Azerbaijan is eternal. 🌟

(speech of President Ilham Aliyev at the official reception marking the 100th anniversary of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic)