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100 YEARS OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN'S DIPLOMACY: UPHOLDING NATIONAL INTERESTS AT THE CROSSROADS OF EPOCHS AND REGIONS

On 9 July 1919, the Government of the Azerbaijan People's (Democratic) Republic (ADR) adopted a temporary instruction on the secretariat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to a Decree of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan İlham Aliyev dated 24 August 2007, this date was taken as the basis for the establishment of the Day of employees of the Diplomatic Service of Azerbaijan. One century separates us from a time when the ADR was taking its first steps in the international arena. It was an incredibly hectic century which encompassed the collapse of former empires which perished in the fire of World War One, Azerbaijan's state independence in the form of the first republic in the Muslim East, the loss of this independence, seven decades within the USSR, and the new historic achievement – the proclamation in 1991 of the Republic of Azerbaijan which, for almost three decades, has consistently strengthened its positions in the region and the world as a whole.

Despite living at a junction where the interests of global superpowers converged and often overtly collided, the Azerbaijani people always showed a strong determination and steadfast will to uphold its freedom. This demonstrates a continuity of the traditions of statehood and the fact that it is embedded in national consciousness. Emphasizing this, the Founding Father of the modern Azerbaijani State Heydar Aliyev said in an address to young people in 2001, "Our greatest historic achievement is the acquisition of state independence."

In essence, the past hundred years have become the annals of the formation and development of modern Azerbaijani statehood. It should be noted that the Republic period of our history did not arise in a vacuum – it was organically prepared by all of its predecessors. Located at a crossroads of the Great Silk Road, Azerbaijan confirmed with its own example the accuracy of Napoleon's saying that "Geography is a destiny". Foreign policy mechanisms of promoting their own inter-

ests in such a difficult environment, their alignment with the aspirations of close and distant states were not at all alien to the old generations of our ancestors. There are quite a few documents in the archives of various countries regarding an exchange of embassies between medieval Azerbaijani states and those of Europe, Russia and Asia. One of the most remarkable figures of that time was Sarah Khatun, the mother of Uzun Hasan – the ruler of the Aghgoyunlu dynasty. She was so insightful in state affairs that she would conduct important negotiations and even succeeded in reaching an agreement with Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II, thus writing her name in history as the first female diplomat in the Muslim world.

Such was the rich historical foundation on which the people of Azerbaijan began to transform into a new social and political community, a nation, in the 19th century. This process proceeded synchronously with many countries of Eastern Europe and led to the subsequent proclamation of a state that embodied the model of a parliamentary republic. The Act of Independence of Azerbaijan adopted by the National Council on 28 May 1918 already stated: “The Azerbaijani Democratic Republic guarantees within its borders civil and political rights to all its citizens irrespective of ethnic origin, religion, social status and gender”. The document also emphasized the desire to “establish good-neighborly relations with all members of the international community”.

Of course, the very existence of the ADR in the aftermath of World War One, the Bolsheviks’ expansion and the aggression on the part of neighboring Armenia was as difficult and turbulent as it was crucial in terms of the development of Azerbaijan’s foreign relations. At that time, there were diplomatic missions of 16 states operating in Baku, including, for example, those of the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, Persia, Poland, Ukraine, etc. In its turn, the ADR Government had diplomatic and consular missions in Georgia, Armenia, Turkey, Ukraine and other countries, not to mention the delegation at the Paris Peace Conference. Thanks to the ADR Government, its explanatory work and interaction with foreign countries, the ADR on 11 January 1920 was de facto recognized by the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference. Unfortunately, the fall of the ADR under the onslaught of the 11th Red Army on 28 April 1920 interrupted the process of international recognition of Azerbaijan’s independence and prevented its logical conclusion – admission to the League of Nations.



Nevertheless, the 23 months of the ADR’s tumultuous history with five different Cabinets of Ministers and international situation changing with a kaleidoscopic speed demonstrated Azerbaijan’s ability to build diplomatic contacts with foreign countries and the focus on the development of such interaction.

This circumstance could not be ignored even by the new Bolshevik leaders who came to power in April 1920. In particular, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Azerbaijan SSR operated until the end of 1921, while missions



of a number of foreign states stayed in Baku until 1923. Also, the Embassy of Soviet Azerbaijan operated in Ankara. However, after the establishment of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (TSFSR) and its entry into the USSR, the decision was made to limit foreign policy activities of Azerbaijan and its relations with the outside world. Up until 1944, Azerbaijan, like other Soviet republics, was deprived even of formal rights to maintain foreign political contacts. However, awaiting a victorious completion of World War Two, Moscow decided in 1944 to revitalize, albeit at a purely symbolic level, the People's Commissariats of Foreign Affairs in USSR republics. These were transformed into ministries in 1946. However, up until 1968 the activities of these departments were so dependent on the central Soviet government that the person holding the post of minister in most of the Union republics except for Ukraine and Belarus, which had representative offices in the UN, performed these duties in combination with another position. In 1968, Baku became the first capital where the foreign minister focused on diplomatic work only.

Overall, as was the case in many other areas, the period when Heydar Aliyev led Soviet Azerbaijan was marked by the emergence of qualified Foreign Ministry professionals who subsequently formed the backbone of the diplomatic corps for the young Azerbaijan Republic.

Having restored its state independence in 1991 and become a fully-fledged member of the UN on 2 March 1992, just like at the beginning of the 20th century Azerbaijan was faced with aggression on the part of the Republic of Armenia. The unlawful use of force with the aim of seizing the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan was accompanied by large-scale ethnic cleansing and flagrant violations of international humanitarian law, including the Khojaly act of genocide. For more than a quarter of a century now, Azerbaijan has been fighting for the restoration of its territorial integrity and the right of its internally displaced persons to return to their places of origin in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan and adjacent administrative districts that are still under occupation.

In the current circumstances, it is quite clear that the elimination of the consequences of the military aggression by the Republic of Armenia is the primary and most significant problem which the Republic of Azerbaijan as a responsible member of the international community is trying to peacefully resolve through substantive and result-focused negotiations. As is known, the UN Security Council in 1993 adopted four resolutions – 822, 853, 874 and 884, which express explicit support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the fact that the Nagorno-Karabakh region is a part of Azerbai-

jan, condemn aggression and seizure of the country's territories, and demand immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of occupying forces.

For many years, the Republic of Armenia has tried to torpedo the conflict resolution process in every possible way, evaded its international obligations not to use force or threats of using force, to resolve international disputes by peaceful means, to respect the inviolability of state borders and territorial integrity of states. This line of conduct has brought Armenia to a dead end which can only be removed by normalizing the relations with neighbors and abandoning annexationist intentions. The sooner the Armenian leadership understands this fundamental truth and displays political will to start withdrawing its armed forces from the territories of our country they are holding by force, the sooner it will be possible to start moving towards creating conditions for a sustainable peace, security, well-being and development in the region.

On the other hand, despite the presence of foreign aggression, a balanced and multi-vector foreign policy pursued by the Azerbaijani state ensures consistent strengthening of Azerbaijan's international authority and significance in the system of international relations. By developing mutually beneficial and equitable cooperation both in bilateral and multilateral formats, Azerbaijan follows the path of meeting the needs of national progress by promoting its external relations and partnership. In particular, diversified cooperation develops successfully with all neighboring states – except for Armenia, of course. Azerbaijan grants its transit opportunities for the implementation of logistical projects within the framework of the East-West, North-South and South-West corridors. The development of the country's rich energy potential continues. Along with the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan main export pipeline, which has been a source of major revenue for many years, work on the Southern Gas Corridor is also in its final stages. Azerbaijan takes the most active part in the dialog among Caspian littoral states, which led to the signing of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea in 2018 and created the conditions for the transformation of the Sea into a zone of peace, good neighborliness, peace and cooperation. All this has allowed us the opportunity to minimize the adverse impacts of crises, which undermined global economic growth.

The internal potential accumulated in this way is consistently converted into the successes of Azerbaijan in various international organizations and initiatives. In

particular, after a nonpermanent membership in the UN Security Council in 2012-2013, Azerbaijan was elected by 176 votes as a member of the UN Economic and Social Council for 2017-2019. From 2019, Azerbaijan will assume presidency in the Non-Aligned Movement, the world's second biggest international platform Azerbaijan joined in 2011. The mere fact that a recent member of the Movement prepares to lead the organization is highly indicative. The significant progress made in advancing the cooperation with the European Union, as well as the consistent development of cooperation with NATO, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the League of Arab States, the African Union and the Organization of American States, also creates a favorable background for representing and defending our national interests. At the same time, Baku takes the most active part in the interaction within the framework of international organizations it is a member of. The OSCE, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking States, the CIS, GUAM, the Council of Europe and the BSEC are some of such multilateral formats.

Speaking about the place and role of Azerbaijan in the system of international relations, it should be noted that our country acts not only as an acceptor of signals transmitted from the main power centers, but also as an active producer making a tangible contribution to the definition of the global agenda. In recent years, Baku has established itself as one of the leading platforms for promoting the values of the dialogue of cultures, religions and civilizations. Launched at the initiative of President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev in 2008, the Baku process has become an effective factor in promoting the highest values of humanism at the global level.

It can be stated with full confidence that Azerbaijani diplomacy can be rightfully proud of the tumultuous century-old road it has covered. As President Ilham Aliyev said at the Global Baku Forum in 2018, "I think that if the founders of the first Democratic Republic had the chance to see how Azerbaijan develops today, they would have definitely been proud of us. We are proud of them. We demonstrate, first of all, to ourselves and also to the world that only during independence people can achieve success. Only when their destiny is in their hands, when they are masters of their fate they can be successful. Today's Azerbaijan is a good demonstration of that." 🌟