

“AZERBAIJAN’S FOREIGN POLICY IS PURSUED IN A PRINCIPLED AND PERSISTENT MANNER”

Interview of Elmar Mammadyarov,

Foreign Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan, with “IRS-HERITAGE” magazine

How would you characterize the foreign policy of Azerbaijan, its fundamental principles and priorities in 2014?

President Ilham Aliyev, speaking at the fifth meeting of the heads of diplomatic service bodies of Azerbaijan on 7 July 2014, noted the principled and consistent implementation of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy, stressed that Azerbaijani diplomacy is experiencing a period of steady development and set new tasks.

In accordance with the strategic course determined by the President on the basis of our national interests, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2014 ensured the implementation in the international arena of an independent, active and robust foreign policy based on the progress made by Azerbaijan in the political, economic and social spheres, particularly, over the past decade.

Azerbaijan, which carries out its foreign policy on the basis of norms and principles of international law and the UN Charter, constantly promoted the upholding of rule of law in international relations including the compliance of states with international commitments and obligations. As a result of this policy, Azerbaijan is perceived in the world as a reliable partner, and the number of partners who want to cooperate closely with Azerbaijan is growing steadily.

In the past year the system of international relations was particularly affected by new confrontations and growing divisions along the lines of military-political blocks: alongside with the threats emanating from the Armenian aggression Azerbaijan had to encounter the emergence of new conflict hotspots, rising terrorism and transnational threats in its proximity.

In these troubling conditions, protecting the independence and sovereignty of our country, eliminating the consequences of the Armenian aggression and occupa-

tion and ensuring our territorial integrity, preventing dangers and threats to our country through political and diplomatic means, promoting our economic interests, energy and transport strategy, informing the world of the truth about our country, cultural and humanitarian diplomacy, protecting the rights of Azerbaijani citizens abroad and relations with the Azerbaijani Diaspora abroad were the basic priorities of our foreign policy.

Bilateral diplomacy evolved as the main mechanism of cooperation in our relations with the countries of the world. In general, in accordance with the philosophy and the basic principles of bilateral relations built by Azerbaijan, our bilateral relations with this or that state do not have the character that can affect our bilateral relations with other countries.

In bilateral diplomacy, the focus was on relations with neighboring countries. Today Azerbaijan and neighboring states have formed relations of strategic cooperation based on the principles of good neighborliness, non-interference in each other’s affairs, equality, mutual respect and fruitful cooperation. Based on the model of successful bilateral cooperation, formats of trilateral cooperation - Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey, Azerbaijan-Iran-Turkey and Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan-Turkey are developing, contributing to the further development of regional cooperation and stability.

From a geographical, historical, traditional and geopolitical point of view, Azerbaijan’s foreign policy is not limited to one region and has such dimensions as the South Caucasus, the Caspian Sea basin and Central Asia, South-Eastern Europe, the Islamic world, and the post-Soviet and Euro-Atlantic space, so our multilateral foreign policy has been evolving along the Caspian, Black, Mediterranean and Adriatic Seas. We hope that in the com-



ing years, in addition to the South-South and East-West areas of cooperation, the Baltic Sea and the Persian Gulf dimensions will further develop in our foreign policy on the North-South vector.

In particular, taking into account the further expansion of the geographical dimensions of our foreign policy after the non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council in 2012-2013 and the increase in its potential impact on global developments, our bilateral relations, along with Latin America, gained opportunities for favorable development in the Asian and African directions. The creation of our new diplomatic missions in these regions and mutual visits constitute a serious basis for the further development of relations and strengthening of our position.

As a result of the successful policy pursued by us on a bilateral and multilateral basis, today Baku, along with the status of a regional and even within a broader framework - business, cultural and sports center - receives the status of a "diplomatic capital" where global issues are discussed. This is confirmed once again by the activities undertaken in Baku during the year through international organizations and visits paid on a bilateral and multilateral basis.

Thus, as a continuation of the successful domestic policy, our independent, principled, flexible and consistent foreign policy serves national interests, and despite the alarming processes occurring around us, Azerbaijan has further strengthened its position as a developing and prosperous area for cooperation.

Please tell us about the work carried out during the year to settle the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Liquidation of the consequences of the Armenian aggression and occupation against Azerbaijan and the resolution of the conflict are a priority task facing us. In the course of the negotiations to resolve the conflict, the basis of our position is the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied Azerbaijani territories, the liquidation of occupation and aggression, which are the fundamental basis of the conflict, the return of Azerbaijani refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes, the restoration of the territorial integrity, sovereignty and internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan. It was clearly brought to the attention of our partners at all meetings that the



territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan is not subject to negotiations to resolve the conflict. The political and legal basis of our position in the norms and principles of international law, the UN Charter, UN Security Council resolutions and documents adopted by other international documents.

The international community sees the settlement of the conflict precisely within the framework of these principles, in particular the territorial integrity, sovereignty and internationally recognized borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan. During the year, within the framework of international organizations, consistent work was carried out to strengthen this position.

For example, in the final statement of the NATO summit held in Wales on 4-5 September, member states of NATO, expressing support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan, stressed that they support the settlement of the conflict in the South Caucasus precisely on the basis of these principles. They stressed the unacceptability of the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of states or the implementation of threats through the use of force, and emphasized the importance of respect for the internationally

recognized borders of states. The Jeddah Declaration of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), held in the city of Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 18-19 June, expressed solidarity with the fair position of Azerbaijan in connection with the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and adopted resolutions condemning the aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan and the destruction of our historical and cultural heritage in the occupied territories. The "Final Algiers document" adopted at the end of the 17th session of the Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement held in Algeria on 28-29 May supported the peaceful settlement of the conflict within the framework of well-known UN Security Council resolutions and the territorial integrity, sovereignty and internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan. The Non-Aligned Movement, which includes 120 countries, is a global influential international institution that represents the greatest number of countries after the United Nations. The final declaration of the Cooperation and Economic Forum of the Arab League - Central Asia –the Republic of Azerbaijan, held on 13 May in Riyadh, once again stressed the importance of settling the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in

accordance with UN Security Council resolutions on the basis of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In addition, this well-known position on the settlement of the conflict was backed by the final documents of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey and Azerbaijan-Iran-Turkey trilateral meetings, as well as in joint statements by Azerbaijan and other countries on a bilateral basis.

Though Armenia made every effort to prevent the adoption of documents calling for the conflict to be settled precisely within the framework of the territorial integrity, sovereignty and internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan, it, however, failed.

Certain work was carried out to ensure the recognition of one of the worst tragedies of humanity –the Khojaly genocide, commemorate its victims and bring the Karabakh realities to the attention of the international community. For example, today the parliaments of Colombia, the Czech Republic, Romania, Serbia, Honduras, Peru, Panama, Pakistan, Mexico, Jordan, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sudan, and 15 states of the United States of America have officially recognized the Khojaly genocide, the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan are supported, and these states have assessed our country as a strategic partner.

Prevention of illegal activities in our occupied territories and the involvement of foreign legal entities and individuals in these activities is the focus of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including our diplomatic missions. The necessary steps are being taken in this direction in both bilateral and multilateral formats.

Azerbaijan has repeatedly expressed its readiness to work on the peace agreement. In their recent statements, the co-chairs also noted that they support the start of work on a peace agreement. What is the position of the Armenian side on this issue? How realistic is it to start working on a peace agreement?

At the meetings of the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan held on 10 August 2014 in Sochi on the initiative of Russian President Vladimir Putin with the participation of the countries co-chairing the OSCE Minsk Group, on September 4 in Wales on the initiative of US Secretary of State John Kerry and on 27 October in Paris on the initiative of French President Francois Hollande, positive trends were observed in terms of conflict resolution. After the Paris meeting, French President Francois Hollande called on the parties to the conflict - Armenia and Azerbaijan - to work on the peace agreement. The countries co-chairing the OSCE Minsk Group, in a statement they made on 4 De-



ember at the level of foreign ministers, also called on the parties to start work on the peace agreement as soon as possible. Azerbaijan strongly declared its readiness to work on the peace agreement.

However, seeing positive trends in the sphere of conflict resolution, Armenia resorted to provocations to disrupt the negotiations and deliberately aggravate the situation. The events that took place on the line of contact in July and the holding of large-scale military exercises involving a large number of troops and military equipment in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan after the Paris meeting of the presidents were steps taken by Armenia aimed at provocation. In order to affect the feelings of Azerbaijani society, our compatriots Dilgam Asgarov and Shahbaz Guliyev, who had visited the graves of their parents in their native land, were taken hostage by force and a so-called trial was organized for them, while another of our compatriots Hasan Hasanov was brutally murdered. Such provocative steps as the intensive violation of the ceasefire by Armenia, shootings at civilians along the line of contact and the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and attempts to change the demographic composition of the occupied territories continued.

According to international law and the UN Charter, as an aggressor state Armenia, by all criteria, is a country in respect of which sanctions must be imposed for occupation, aggression and bloody ethnic cleansing against Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, up to now, no such measures have been taken against Armenia. If Armenia had been sanctioned, its aggression and occupation against Azerbaijan would not have taken on such a scale and more than one million Azerbaijanis would not have become refugees and IDPs. The OSCE Minsk Group should take the necessary practical measures to put an end to the pretexts and provocations of Armenia in the negotiation process so that it finally takes a constructive approach, starts to work on the



peace agreement, and seriously consider applying sanctions against Armenia.

The unresolved conflict is the biggest threat to regional peace and security, and all responsibility for this falls on Armenia as an aggressive state. For the peaceful settlement of the conflict, the Armenian armed forces must first of all withdraw from Azerbaijani territories.

What can you say about Azerbaijan’s cooperation with the UN and the country’s participation in global processes?

Active work was carried out with international organizations that make up the foundation of our multilateral diplomacy, and in this sense, our work in the UN is of particular importance.

Azerbaijan addressed the general discussion at the 69th session of the UN General Assembly devoted to the identification of new development goals facing the world after 2015 and presented its own views in terms of global development.

At the Millennium Summit held in 2000, states identified the Millennium Development Goals that were planned to be implemented until 2015.

In 2015, the 70th anniversary of the UN will be marked.

Along with its symbolic meaning, this also promises opportunities to review the success made by the UN over the past 70 years, as well as to determine the challenges ahead. It is necessary to examine in a holistic form the objectives of the United Nations in connection with the provision of the future international order. In this context, within the framework of the processes associated with the 70-year anniversary, we consider it important to pay attention to welfare and development issues in addition to issues of peace and security. Based on this detailed approach, we believe that the issue of reform in the UN should not be limited only to the UN Security Council. In general, you need a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of the UN system.

It is gratifying that Azerbaijan promptly managed to meet the Millennium Development Goals and is a state that has entered an entirely new stage of development. Azerbaijan, which has achieved high development at the national level, is contributing to cooperation and development in the region and beyond through the large-scale projects that it has initiated and directly participates in. Such projects as the Trans-Anatolian and Trans-Adriatic Pipelines, the Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway (TASIM) and Baku-Tbilisi-Kars will contribute to the realization of the development goals set by the United Nations

to the world for the period after 2015. In other words, Azerbaijan is a country contributing to the implementation of the UN Millennium Development Goals, global development and stability not only at the national level, but also in the region and in the wider framework.

Mutually beneficial cooperation is successfully developing with the UN Alliance of Civilizations to promote at the international level the successes of Azerbaijan, which is an example of multiculturalism, interreligious and intercultural dialogue. As proof of the appreciation of the work carried out by Azerbaijan in this direction at the global level, the 26 September 2014 meeting of the Group of Friends of the Alliance at the level of foreign ministers decided to hold the 7th Global Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations in Baku in the spring of 2016. On 8-30 October 2014, Baku hosted the 1st Global Forum on Youth Policies. This forum played an important role in encouraging as an example the successful youth policy implemented at the national level in our country.

Along with the aforesaid facts, Azerbaijan also took an active part and made a contribution to the discussion of such global issues as the ensuring of international peace and security, the fight against terrorism, disarmament and nonproliferation, environmental protection, sustainable development, etc.

It is known that Azerbaijan has turned from a country receiving aid into a donor country and is implementing various aid projects in this field at the international level. In this regard, we ask you to inform us about the activities in 2014 of the Azerbaijan International Development Agency (AIDA) established under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The rapid development of the Republic of Azerbaijan in recent years has created conditions for the entry of our country into the family of world donor countries and for the development of humanitarian diplomacy, which is a new foreign policy of Azerbaijan.

In general, assistance and support for the needy is one of the many high moral qualities typical of the Azerbaijani people. In this sense, it is necessary to emphasize the role of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, which is carrying out a noble mission in our country and abroad.

In 2011, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the Azerbaijan International Development Agency (AIDA).

As a result of ophthalmic operations conducted by AIDA and the Islamic Development Bank in several African countries, thousands of people suffering from cataracts restored their vision.



Our country also focuses on assistance to countries affected by natural disasters. For example, humanitarian aid was provided to Afghanistan, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Pakistan and the Gaza Strip. As an example, I would like to note the conduct of humanitarian campaigns by AIDA and our country's embassy in Pakistan for the population of 8 cities affected by heavy rains in September. In the course of humanitarian campaigns, humanitarian aid consisting of food was rendered to about 25,000 people.



I would like to emphasize that on the eve of the 91st anniversary of the birth of national leader Heydar Aliyev, the “Heydar Aliyev Water Supply Project” was implemented in the Tank region of the Dera Ismail Khan territory of Pakistan on the initiative and under the patronage of the President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO and ISESCO, MP Mehriban Aliyeva, AIDA and the embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Pakistan.

As a result of this project, the problem of supplying quality drinking water to tens of thousands of residents of the region, who were deprived of drinking water for centuries and collected rainwater from the sewers for household use, was completely solved.

Refresher courses on technologies of increasing oil production organized by AIDA for the fifth time created an opportunity for familiarizing developing countries with the knowledge and experience of Azerbaijan, which is an ancient oil-producing country, in this area. Joint research in the oil fields of foreign countries also creates conditions for strengthening the authority of the oil science of Azerbaijan in the world.

At the same time, in order to inform the official, scientific and public circles of foreign countries about the realities of Azerbaijan and the achievements of our country, AIDA implements programs of cooperation with renowned

international research centers, allocates scholarships to students in developing countries to study at the leading universities of Azerbaijan and master the specialty they have chosen, and supports the formation of their human capital.

Thus, through its programs and projects at the global level, AIDA contributes to sustainable development and humanitarian missions. These noble missions will continue.

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has signed a decree on additional measures to improve the procedures for issuing visas in connection with the upcoming first European Games to be held in 2015 in Baku. What kind of work is being carried out in the visa system in the context of developing tourism in Azerbaijan?

On the basis of Order No 675 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 8 August 2014 “On some measures related to the first European Games”, consistent work is being carried out to implement measures entrusted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The European Olympic Committee, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) are being provided with full information on visa facilitation, and the rules for issuing visas to foreigners and



persons without citizenship residing in foreign countries and visiting our country have been posted on the websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and our overseas diplomatic missions.

In order to organize at a higher level the work to issue visas for foreigners and stateless persons who come to our country in connection with the development of tourism in the Republic of Azerbaijan, sustained measures are being taken to improve the existing software in the interagency automated information and search system "Entry-Exit and Registration" (IAMAS), to conduct a detailed statistical analysis in this area; to equip embassies and consulates with satellite communications via the Azerspace-1 telecommunications satellite to improve the exchange of information between the diplomatic missions of the Republic of Azerbaijan in foreign countries and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan. At the same time, in order to ensure the efficiency of the work to issue visas to foreigners and stateless persons coming to our country, according to an order issued by the president of the Republic of Azerbaijan, relevant activities are being conducted to increase the number of employees at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic missions.

Work to issue electronic visas to tourists coming to Azerbaijan is being successfully carried out. As evidence,

we can cite the gradual increase in the number of tourists seeking e-visas.

On 1 September 2014, as a result of successful activities, the "Agreement on visa facilitation between Azerbaijan and the European Union" entered into force. Corresponding work began to sign bilateral agreements on visa-free entry for diplomatic and service passport holders with Denmark, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, where the above agreement is not applicable. The Kingdom of Norway and the Republic of Azerbaijan have already signed a bilateral agreement "on visa-free entry for persons with diplomatic and service passport holders".

In order to establish and expand cooperation with foreign countries in the consular sphere, improve the legal framework for the protection of the rights of citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan residing in foreign countries, as well as to facilitate travel for citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan to foreign countries, the need for bilateral agreements between our country and a number of states "On cooperation in the consular sphere", "On mutual assistance in the consular sphere" and "On the visa-free entry and exit of diplomatic and service passport holders" was considered. ♦

