

AVAILING THE CAPACITY OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO ADVANCE AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES

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Introduction

Since independence, Azerbaijan has made strides in strengthening its international profile and expanding its engagement on the global stage. Through its membership in various international organizations (IOs) and strategic partnerships, Azerbaijan has pursued its interests, advocated for its independence and statehood, and sought solutions to regional security challenges. This article explores Azerbaijan's dynamic involvement in international organizations. Additionally, Azerbaijan's partnerships with key regional organizations are highlighted, underscoring its commitment to mutually beneficial cooperation and the pursuit of common goals. By analyzing Azerbaijan's foreign policy, diplomatic efforts and its contributions to international cooperation, this article sheds light on the country's adaptation to the evolving nature of international relations and the country's role in addressing regional and global challenges.

Azerbaijan, as many other countries, has recognized the importance of establishing close and comprehensive relations with regional and international organizations. For this purpose, Azerbaijan participates in the UN, the Council of Europe, the EU Eastern Partnership (EaP), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Islamic Cooperation Organization (ICO),

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the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and other regional bodies. Azerbaijan's multilateral cooperation has also emerged in the cultural sphere, another productive avenue for its international engagement, enabling the country to effectively link cultural and historical aspects of various challenges (i.e. Karabakh conflict) to present political and international relations. This approach has enabled Azerbaijan to establish contacts with organizations such as UNESCO, ISESCO, TURKSOY, among others.

One of Azerbaijan's key priorities has been to counter the Armenian narrative and convey Azerbaijan's truth to the world community about the heavy losses inflicted upon Azerbaijan with the occupation of Karabakh. Azerbaijan has consistently expressed its readiness to cooperate internationally in combating all forms of terrorism, highlighting the need for collective action, including in the Karabakh conflict. To this end, Azerbaijan has participated in global and regional platforms, including the GUAM, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and OSCE³.

This article is divided into four main sections, each underlining aspects of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. In the first section, initiatives undertaken by Azerbaijan within traditional international organizations were discussed. Authors name those IOs 'traditional' to which Azerbaijan has had membership since independence in 1991. The second section illustrates new memberships that Azerbaijan gained in the years following the independence due to the urge that the country needs to expand cooperation, build an image, and gain support. The third section depicts the role Azerbaijan assumed in the international arena as a founder and initiator of international organizations. Lastly, this article observes a strain of cooperation, which is establishing close ties with IOs without full-fledged membership. That's to say Azerbaijan actively seeks tailored partnership schemes with international organizations as an ally, rather than a full member. These sections aim to shed light on Azerbaijan's strategic approach to international cooperation and explore various aspects of Azerbaijan's engagement with international organizations. Considering the nation-states' desire to assert a role in international relations to serve their very own interests, Azerbaijan is not an exception to this tendency.

Initiatives Taken Within Traditional International Organizations

³ As we will see in the following heading of this article, cooperation with OSCE degraded gradually due to Azerbaijan losing confidence in the Minsk Group process under the auspices of OSCE, which has done little to help resolve the regional conflict within principles of international law.

The United Nations has certainly facilitated Azerbaijan's collaboration with nations worldwide in addressing the country's challenges. The primary focus of Azerbaijan's collaboration with the UN in the area of peace and security was to secure international support in calling off Armenia's claims and persistent use of force against Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.). Since its first engagement with the UN, Azerbaijan has sought to bring international attention to the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict and find peaceful and meaningful resolution, wielding UN's influence and resources.

The UN Security Council adopted resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884 in 1993 in response to the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and other adjacent territories by military groups affiliated with the Armenian Armed Forces. These resolutions reaffirmed Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, demanded the immediate cessation of armed hostilities and complete withdrawal of occupying forces from Azerbaijani territory, condemned all hostile actions in the region, and urged for negotiations for the resolution of the conflict (UN Security Council 1993).

President Heydar Aliyev attended the UN General Assembly sessions in September 1994, October 1995, and September 2000, using these platforms to expose Armenia's aggressive presence in Azerbaijan, which contradicted the UN resolutions. At the UN General Assembly (UNGA) session on October 29 of 2004, Azerbaijan's delegation took the initiative to include the issue of "the situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan" on the meeting's agenda. The issue addressed to the UNGA highlighted the illegal activities of transferring new settlers to the occupied territories of Azerbaijan (UN General Assembly 2004). In following years, Azerbaijan also managed to pass a resolution in the 60th session of the UN General Assembly, in which it is stressed "to urgently conduct an environmental operation to suppress the fires in the affected territories [of Karabakh]" since Azerbaijan did not have direct access to the region (UN General Assembly 2006).

Despite the adoption of several resolutions in the highest organ of policy-making in the world, Armenia rather disregarded international law, thus the implementation of the UN resolutions. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan has consistently sought international attention to the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict by utilizing UN platforms where the need for diplomatic resolution of the conflict and restoration of the occupied territories were emphasized.

Azerbaijan's non-permanent membership⁴ in the United Nations

⁴ The UNSC is composed of 15 members, of which five are permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and ten are non-permanent members elected by the UN General Assembly for two-year terms. Non-permanent members have the

Security Council (UNSC) from 2012 to 2013 is regarded as one of the most significant international achievements of the Republic (Habibbeyli 2017, 36)⁵. Representing the Eastern European group with extensive support, Azerbaijan's membership reinvigorated the government's efforts to bring the Karabakh conflict to the forefront agenda of the international community once again. During this time, the diplomatic outreach and the potential of Azerbaijan had improved, encouraging Azerbaijan to demand Armenia to withdraw from the occupied territories, as stated in the four existing UNSC resolutions. It is worth mentioning that Azerbaijan, during the chairmanship of the UNSC, organized a high-level meeting called "Strengthening international cooperation in the implementation of counter-terrorism obligations". For Azerbaijan, terrorism has been closely linked with the illegitimate regime in Karabakh that forced thousands out of their homes and impeded the state apparatus from functioning.

Moreover, during its second chairmanship of the UNSC, Azerbaijan enhanced the partnership between the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) through another high-level meeting, which took place on October 28, 2013 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.). As part of its efforts to strengthen collaboration between the UN and various international organizations, Azerbaijan proposed initiatives and put forth a proposal to develop relations between the UN and the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking States – later named as the Organization of Turkic States (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.b.). These efforts demonstrated Azerbaijan's commitment to promoting international institutionalism and fostering cooperation among diverse global entities.

Azerbaijan has also taken on the role of the sponsor for several resolutions endorsed by UN bodies. These resolutions encompass topics such as "Missing Persons" and "Release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts." In addition to advocating for the establishment of universal human rights standards, Azerbaijan emphasizes the need for heightened focus on instances of mass human rights violations, particularly in the context of armed conflicts

same rights and responsibilities as permanent members except for the veto power. They can vote on resolutions and participate in discussions on matters related to international peace and security.

5 Azerbaijan is the first country from the South Caucasus and Central Asia region to be elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Among the countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region, Azerbaijan is the second nation to have achieved this status in the Security Council.

(Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan s.d.).

Besides constructing its position along the axis of the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict, Azerbaijan also takes on different missions in the UN. In December 2020, a special session of the UN General Assembly took place in New York, devoted to combating the COVID-19 pandemic. Azerbaijan, representing the Non-Aligned Movement, proposed this special session dedicated to addressing the global health crisis caused by the coronavirus. Subsequently, on December 16, 2021, Azerbaijan, together with the organization of the Non-Aligned Movement, led the way in introducing a resolution⁶ at the UN General Assembly. This resolution aimed to ensure fair, affordable, prompt, and universal access to COVID-19 vaccines for all nations. The resolution received support from an overwhelming number of 179 member countries.

Aside from these main activities in the UN Headquarters, Azerbaijan closely engages with various UN agencies and assumes chairmanship and governance responsibilities in them. In 2017, for the first time in its 25-year membership since independence, Azerbaijan secured a membership in the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization (ILO), occupying an influential role in the ILO's decision-making processes and initiatives (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.). Furthermore, Azerbaijan has demonstrated its leadership capabilities by assuming vice-presidency positions in bodies of UNESCO in 2011 and by becoming a member of the UNHCR's Executive Committee in 2012.

Azerbaijan strategically hosts various international events in collaboration with the UN Agencies, including the World Forum on Inter-Cultural Dialogue in 2011, the 28th FAO Regional Conference for Europe in 2012, the first Global Forum on youth policy in 2014, the 7th UN Alliance of Civilizations Forum in 2016, the 4th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue in 2017, 2018 Baku Forum on Sustainable Development, and the conference titled "Towards Sustainable Development Goals, Sustainable Development and Promoting Decent Work" in 2018 and more. These forums serve to consolidate Azerbaijan's image as a committed state which devotes itself to promote inclusive societies, multiculturalism, regional cooperation, sustainable development, peace, and active participation in UN activities.

Cooperation with UNESCO has been defined as a top-priority area of Azerbaijan's cultural policy since its membership in 1992. This cooperation

6 The resolution is called "Ensuring equitable, affordable, timely and universal access for all countries to vaccines in response to the COVID-19 pandemic."

has been extensive and fruitful, leading to the wider recognition of Azerbaijan's cultural heritage, preservation of historical sites, and participation in international cultural events. The country has organized numerous joint events of international prominence with UNESCO, including the commemoration of Azerbaijani poet Fuzuli's 500th anniversary, and the observance of the epic Dede Korkud's 1300th anniversary. Over the years, several historical and cultural sites such as Icherisheher and the Shirvanshahs Palace have been included in UNESCO's World Heritage List, while Azerbaijan's intangible cultural heritage, including mugham music, Ashug art, Novruz holiday and Dolma⁷ making and sharing tradition, has been recognized by UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.b.). Azerbaijan consciously directs its efforts in a race to own as many items on the list as possible, knowing passiveness could lead to cultural dispossession for the country.

Azerbaijan became a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation⁸ in December 1991 and has since played an active role within the organization. Azerbaijan attaches great importance to the OIC due to the commonly shared Muslim identity and similarly oil-exporting status of many member states (Baylarov 2023, 17). Collaboration within the OIC takes place through various committees, such as the Committee on Science and Technology (COMSTECH) and the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC). In November 2011, Baku hosted the 29th meeting of COMSTECH, furthering cooperation in the field among OIC member states (Mincom.Gov.Az n.d.).

In April 2013, Baku hosted the second conference of Labor Ministers of OIC member states, focusing on labor, employment, and social protection. During the conference, the establishment of the OIC Labour Center was proposed by President Ilham Aliyev, receiving unanimous approval from the heads of delegations. Moreover, Azerbaijan's active participation and influence within the OIC have increased over the years, as demonstrated by its election as a member of the Executive Committee on Labor Issues for the OIC for the period of 2018-2020.

Most notably, the OIC Parliamentary Union recognized the Khojaly tragedy as an act of genocide in January 2012, marking the first time in history that an international body officially acknowledged the Khojaly massacre as a

7 "Dolma tradition is a set of knowledge and skills relating to the preparation of the traditional meal 'dolma'." It is crucial to perceive the genuine effort of Azerbaijan against the backdrop of the unsettled dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding the origins of the meal.

8 Established in 1969, with 57 member states, the OIC aims to protect the interests of the Muslim world, promote economic development, and maintain international peace.

genocide. This clear stance by the OIC regarding the decades-long conflict has further strengthened Azerbaijan's alignment and rapprochement with the organization and its commitment to promoting Islamic values and cooperation among member states (Baylarov 2023, 17). Baku was declared the capital of Islamic culture by the decision of ISESCO in 2009, and similarly in 2018, the city of Nakhichevan received the same prestigious title from the organization.

Despite joining the Commonwealth of Independent States, Azerbaijan considerably retained its focus on engaging in bilateral cooperation with each member state separately⁹. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan remains interested in participating within the CIS framework on issues of national interest in political, economic, and humanitarian spheres, considering the organization as yet a useful platform for dialogue among member states, although dialogue more of a bilateral nature (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.b.). In October 2011, at a meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of States in St. Petersburg, an agreement on the CIS free trade zone was signed, but Azerbaijan did not become a signatory, illustrating Azerbaijan's refraining attitude towards the organization with the ultimate aim of maintaining CIS as a discussion forum.

Azerbaijan's participation in the CIS has had its own dynamics and challenges. In fact, Azerbaijan's accession to the CIS was seen to be significant in preventing certain developments that could alienate Azerbaijan in the post-Soviet space and in turn create favorable conditions for Armenian rhetoric to gain prominence. Azerbaijan effectively utilized its position to veto many CIS documents that protected solely Armenian interests (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.b.). The country's strategic approach has allowed it to safeguard its national interests in the organization and prevent developments that may put its independence or security at risk.

Azerbaijan actively participates in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) with a policy focus on liberalizing the region's economy in various areas such as trade, investment, transport and energy (Mincom. Gov.Az n.d.; Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan n.d.)¹⁰. Azerbaijan hosted the

⁹ The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is an organization focused on developing multilateral cooperation among its member states in various areas, including the economic, military-political, and humanitarian spheres. It consists of 8 charter bodies, 69 sectoral cooperation bodies, and 15 other bodies, totaling more than 90 entities.

¹⁰ The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) is an intergovernmental organization established in 1985 with the objective of enhancing economic, technical, and cultural cooperation among its member states, which include Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Azerbaijan joined ECO in November 1992.

organization's summits in 2006 and 2012. During these events, member states adopted documents that reflected key principles, priorities, and regional directions of socio-economic and political relations among them. The Baku Declaration, issued at the end of the 2012 summit, highlights the member states' stance on the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict; criticizes Armenia for its violation of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity; and supports Azerbaijan's internationally defined interests (Economic Cooperation Organization 2012).

In 2002, former president of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, proposed the establishment of an ECO Research Center in Baku to enhance the organization's effectiveness. Finally, after years, in March 2021, the Charter of the ECO Research Center was signed at the 14th ECO Summit. The center's main objective is identified to be the facilitation of regional cooperation between member states based on economic research and empirical evidence. Furthermore, significant energy-related meetings of the organization were held in Baku in June 2021. The 4th ECO High-Level Experts Group Meeting on Energy was followed by the 4th ECO Energy Ministerial Meeting. The "Baku Declaration", which was adopted at the conclusion of the meeting, aims to intensify energy cooperation within the ECO. Additionally, the meeting resulted in the adoption of the ECO Energy Strategy 2030 and its Action Plan, the Charter of the Clean Energy Center, and the Regional Electricity Market Roadmap.

Within the framework of the ECO, official reports have recently referred to the concept of a 'corridor' in relation to the documents signed by Azerbaijan, Russia, and Armenia following the Second Karabakh War in 2020. This demonstrates Azerbaijan's successful foreign policy in promoting the term "Zangezur corridor" within the ECO region and drawing the attention of key regional players to this transportation route (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.b.)¹¹.

Lastly, among traditional organizations, we should also note Azerbaijan's membership in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) since 1992 and analyze the complicated and entangled nature of the relations. Admittedly, the OSCE has been actively cooperating with the government of Azerbaijan in projects related to the rule of law, democratic institutions, legislation improvement, migration, gender equality, and more (Azərbaycan beynəlxalq aləmdə [Azerbaijan in the international arena] n.d.). However, even more importantly, the OSCE established the OSCE Minsk Group in 1994 to lead the peace process and negotiations for the Nagorno-

¹¹ Zangezur corridor is a transportation route that passes through the southernmost borders of Armenia and connects Azerbaijan to Türkiye, which became dysfunctional after the First Karabakh War (1988-1994).

Karabakh conflict. The Minsk Group consists of three co-chairs, namely Russia, France, and the United States.

Undeniably, the Minsk Group and parties to the conflict managed to adopt, although not fully, the “Madrid Principles” as a working document outlining the basic principles for a peaceful resolution of the conflict during the period of intensive engagement between 2007 and 2008¹². However, tensions peaked between Azerbaijan and the Minsk Group in 2008, after co-chairs voted against the United Nations General Assembly resolution number S/62/243, which reiterated Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and called for the immediate withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied territories (Shiriyev 2016 445). This move caused disappointment in Baku and called the sincerity of the co-chairs into question.

Azerbaijan criticized the Minsk Group due to perceived stagnation in the negotiation process perpetrated by the group. President Ilham Aliyev stated that “the co-chairs of the Minsk Group have received a mandate to engage directly in this issue, but are serving the freezing of the conflict by their destructive activities” and that “(...) the destructive activities of the OSCE Minsk Group serves to strengthen the status quo” (Aliyev 2016). Considering the fact that Azerbaijan’s top foreign policy priority is the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, it is clear how failed mediation efforts and lack of willingness shown by the Minsk Group caused resentment (Mammadov 2015, 32).

Azerbaijan has called for more tangible results and sought to increase international support for its position on territorial integrity through political/peaceful means. Therefore, Baku has explored alternative paths such as forging a new partnership with the Non-Aligned Movement to communicate its position in a different platform, and even considered the possibility of transferring the mediation responsibility from the OSCE to the United Nations, as the UN holds more political and legal authority (Shiriyev 2016, 454–55; Ismayilov 2014, 97–98). Azerbaijan’s decision to join the NAM and its activity within the organization will be discussed in the next heading below.

Cooperation and Image Building through Securing New

¹² Basic principles: Evacuation and demilitarization of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh; an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security and self-governance; a corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh; future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of will; the right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence; and international security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation.

Memberships in International Organizations

Membership in international organizations certainly strengthens a state's position, recognition and legitimacy in the global arena. It signifies the state's commitment to international norms, values, and principles, which can positively influence its image and standing among the international community. International organizations, on the other hand, provide a platform for states to voice their concerns, advocate for their interests, and contribute to shaping global agendas and policies. By actively engaging in discussions in IOs, states promote their own perspectives, values, and interests. This active participation helps to build the state's reputation as a constructive and responsible actor, willing to engage in a dialogue above all. In addition, international organizations can create opportunities for states to expand cooperation beyond politics – in fields like trade, investment, economy and military.

In this respect, Azerbaijan has made symbolic gestures by joining several international organizations. In contrast to Armenia, Azerbaijan joined the Non-Aligned Movement on May 26, 2011, becoming the fourth former Soviet republic to do so, which was welcomed by unanimous support of the NAM states. As mentioned earlier, this decision was driven partly by Azerbaijan's disappointment with the OSCE's inability and/or unwillingness to effectively address the Karabakh conflict. By joining NAM, Azerbaijan aimed to cultivate functional partnerships and access an additional platform to voice its concerns rather than relying solely on singular allies (Strakes 2013, 40). Azerbaijan felt it necessary to diversify its ties away from traditional Western partners and engage with new allies in the international arena (Ismayilov 2014).

Membership marked a significant shift in Azerbaijan's foreign policy strategy, emphasizing the importance of multilateral diplomacy. Importantly, Azerbaijan viewed NAM as a potential ally in resolving the Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijan's former Foreign Minister, Elmar Mammadyarov, openly acknowledged that "membership in the Non-Aligned Movement would give his country 'an additional platform' to pursue and seek support for a solution to the conflict - meaning not just any solution but a solution on Baku's terms" (Fuller 2013, 10). Azerbaijan's efforts within NAM to address the Karabakh conflict have been fruitful. The inclusion of a paragraph on the conflict in the Final Document of the NAM Coordinating Bureau's ministerial meeting in May 2012 and the 18th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the NAM in 2019 demonstrated support for resolving the conflict based on principles such as respect for territorial integrity, non-use of force, and the

inviolability of internationally recognized borders (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.; UNIDIR 2019, 160).

Azerbaijan hosted and organized various meetings and initiatives within NAM. The country held the 18th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Movement in October 2019, which involved high-level representatives from 120 UN member states and 42 international organizations. As a result, Azerbaijan assumed the Chairmanship of the Movement for the period of 2019-2022. Recognizing Azerbaijan's effective chairmanship, member states appealed for an extension of its leadership for another year until 2023. Azerbaijan has gained valuable experience during its leadership, empowering the movement as a formidable global actor (Huseynov 2023).

The distinctive character of Azerbaijan's leadership is its coincidence with the onset of COVID-19 and, in turn, its decent management of the global health crisis via organization. Azerbaijan took the initiative in organizing the Online Summit-level Meeting of the NAM Contact Group in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This meeting assessed the impact of the pandemic on NAM member states and identified states' needs for potential remedies and follow-up measures at the highest decision-making level (Azərbaycan beynəlxalq aləmdə [Azerbaijan in the international arena,] n.d.). The outcome of the meeting was the adoption of the Declaration and the establishment of the Task Force on Combating the COVID-19 Pandemic. Consequently, Azerbaijan, on behalf of the NAM, proposed a resolution entitled "Ensuring equitable, affordable, timely and universal access for all countries to vaccines in response to the COVID-19 pandemic" at the 76th session of the UN General Assembly. This resolution highlighted the pivotal role of the NAM, under Azerbaijan's leadership, in global efforts to combat the pandemic.

As a continuous effort, Azerbaijan hosted another summit-level meeting of the NAM Contact Group to address post-pandemic recovery. In the same meeting, President Ilham Aliyev outlined the duty of the NAM as "to perform a more visible and effective role in the international arena and actively participate in the transformation of the new world order" (Huseynov 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.). Furthermore, Azerbaijan took the initiative to organize the first-ever NAM Youth Summit on the sidelines of the NAM Baku Summit in 2019. This event aimed to facilitate the exchange of ideas, visions, and perspectives among youth representatives from NAM member states, focusing on current challenges and sustainable development (UNIDIR 2019).

Another organization in which Azerbaijan has a relatively recent membership is the Council of Europe. In 2001, Azerbaijan joined the Council of Europe, a leading human rights organization in Europe, signaling

its willingness towards Western integration. Since 2002, Azerbaijan has signed the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which is a key legal instrument of the Council of Europe for human rights protection. Azerbaijan also ratified around 60 human rights conventions of the Council of Europe, primarily focusing on social rights (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.). Membership in the Council of Europe helped Azerbaijan to expand its diplomatic ties and diversify partners with the ultimate goal of defending Azerbaijan's national interests and impeding power imbalance in the region against the country (Valiyev and Mamishova 2019a, 279).

Azerbaijan has actively participated in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) since becoming a full member. The Azerbaijani delegation countered Armenia's arguments during sessions and managed to circulate documents demanding condemnation of the war crimes committed by Armenia against the Azerbaijani population during the Karabakh conflict (i.e. Khojaly massacre) and information about the situation of detainees in Armenia and Karabakh (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.). In 2005, the PACE adopted Resolution 1416 and Recommendation 1690 urging Armenia to "withdraw military forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan, and for the peaceful settlement of the conflict in accordance with the resolutions of UNSC" (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2005a; Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2005b). A similar standpoint was reiterated in the motion document 13546 and report document 13930, dating back to 2014 and 2015, respectively. The Assembly condemned the occupation of foreign territory by a member state as a serious breach of state obligations under the Council of Europe (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2014).

On the other hand, Baku played a pivotal role in fostering cultural exchange between the West and the East thanks to hosting the conference of the Council of Europe's Culture Ministers in 2008, inviting colleagues from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (Habibbeyli 2017, 41). This initiative was followed by Azerbaijan hosting the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Culture Ministers' Conference in 2009, allowing European countries' culture ministers to take part. The World Intercultural Dialogue Forum, held every two years, further promotes intercultural dialogue and understanding between two organizations and civilizations.

Founder and Initiator of International Organizations

The Organization of Turkic States, formerly known as the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States or Turkic Council, was established in 2009 as an intergovernmental organization with the main objective of fostering comprehensive cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries. The Turkic Council was created based on the Nakhchivan Agreement signed during a summit held in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan. The organization tries to achieve cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries in various areas. Efforts are being made “to strengthen mutual trust; establish peace in the region; promote a common approach to foreign policy; coordinate the fight against international terrorism, separatism, extremism and transnational crime; create favorable conditions for trade relations and investment; expand mutual relations in the fields of science, technology, education and culture” (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.a.).

Its founding members are Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey. Relations of these countries go beyond political and economic cooperation and are determined by shared roots, religion, history, culture, and values (Habibbeyli 2017, 41). Particularly, the bond between Azerbaijan and Turkey, in particular, is often described as “one nation, two states.” To achieve the abovementioned objectives, the organization operates related/affiliated organizations such as TURKSOY, Turkic Academy, TURKPA (Parliamentary Assembly), Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation. For instance, TURKSOY engages in various activities, including implementing joint programs and projects, preserving and researching shared cultural values, and promoting cultural exchanges. President Ilham Aliyev and the National Assembly of Azerbaijan actively support and prioritize the developments in this organization. Institutionalization and structuralization of political and economic relations among Turkic-speaking states is considered important for Azerbaijan that can be further advanced through TURKSOY’s initiatives.

Azerbaijan has also been a founding member of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) – established in 1992. The country’s participation in the organization aims to demonstrate and strengthen its special role in the Black Sea region, showcase a constructive approach, integrate into European structures, enhance Azerbaijan’s transportation and transit potential, establish multilateral cooperation, extend its influence to neighboring regions, and safeguard strategic interests (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.b.). Azerbaijan has chaired the BSEC on multiple occasions, particularly in 2003, 2004, 2009, and 2018, and hosted more than 20 events at various levels of the organization. During these meetings and the country’s chairmanship period, cooperation projects in transportation, energy, communication, and trade have been implemented. Azerbaijan

emphasizes the development of cooperation within the organization based on mutual interests in various priority areas, including trade, customs, transport, energy, environment, information and communication, scientific research, and technology. Azerbaijan has actively supported initiatives to enhance the efficiency of the BSEC.

The Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM) is another organization founded by Azerbaijan in alliance with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine¹³. The Charter of GUAM emphasizes the importance of regional cooperation based on respect for the sovereignty of states, with the goal of promoting democracy, security, stability, economic development, and social prosperity against separatism, extremism and conflict in the region (GUAM 2019). GUAM has undergone various stages of institutional restructuring, starting with the GUAM Advisory Forum in 1997, followed by the establishment of the GUAM Association in 2001, and finally the creation of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development in 2006, which was formalized through the adoption of the Organization's Charter at the Kyiv Summit.

As a founding member state, Azerbaijan actively participates in GUAM and supports the organization's efforts to become a more project-oriented institution. Azerbaijan places special importance on mutually beneficial cooperation in various areas such as trade, transport, customs, energy, tourism, technology, and agriculture. The country is also an initiator and active participant in projects aimed at facilitating and digitizing trade and transport routes of the region. Azerbaijan has chaired GUAM on several occasions, precisely in 2007-2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020.

The organization aims to address important issues for the participating countries through joint efforts, especially promoting peaceful conflict resolution, combating separatism, developing secure transportation corridors, and collaborating with European and trans-Atlantic institutions (Baylarov 2023, 18). The Presidents of GUAM member states have emphasized the need to strengthen quadrilateral cooperation based on principles such as respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, the inviolability of state borders, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and humanitarian cooperation (Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan n.d.). Founding principles and the starting point for GUAM cooperation imply the common concerns of member states, which ultimately urge GUAM states to take common stand and show solidarity against foreign threats to their state security.

13 Uzbekistan later joined in 1999 but withdrew its membership in 2005.

Cooperation Without Membership: Tailored Partnership Schemes with International Organizations

Azerbaijan's relationship with the European Union (EU) has evolved and grown closer since gaining independence in 1991, although Azerbaijan does not seek to join the EU formally (Chufrin 2019, 17). Initially, the focus was on technical assistance due to the country's economic challenges and the conflict with Armenia over Karabakh (Van Gils 2018, 740). Azerbaijani-EU engagement reached its comprehensive form with the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed in 1996. Subsequent policy frameworks such as the 'European Neighbourhood Policy' (ENP) in 2004 and the Eastern Partnership Program (EaP) in 2009, further emphasized European values such as democratization, good governance and market reforms, and aimed at multilateral cooperation.

Integration into European institutions is a key priority in Azerbaijan's foreign policy (Valiyev 2017, 136). Since joining the Council of Europe in 2001, Azerbaijan has taken significant steps to align its legislation with those of EU standards. Close relations have been established with the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, which targets democratization in legislation. Azerbaijan also signed the Protocols and Convention on Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Humanity in 2001 and 2002, respectively.

After Azerbaijan's accession to the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), a new policy framework for Azerbaijan-EU relations was adopted with the name of the "Republic of Azerbaijan-EU Action Plan" in 2006. This Action Plan, which replaced the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, outlined 10 priority areas for further development, including a peaceful resolution to the Karabakh conflict, strengthening democracy, improving the business and investment climate, enhancing customs services, and promoting energy and transport cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan (Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan n.d.).

Azerbaijan is one of the six former Soviet republics participating in the Eastern Partnership program to support political and economic reforms and foster closer ties between the countries of the region and the EU. Azerbaijan gained EU support for the construction of pipelines to transport Azerbaijani gas to Europe. Baku also negotiated a visa facilitation and readmission agreement, which simplified the visa process for Azerbaijani citizens. For instance, thanks to the visa facilitation agreement, a vast number of students gained the opportunity to pursue their education in European higher

education institutions with less obstacles and paperwork.

Azerbaijan-EU relations are often seen as primarily driven by pragmatic considerations. Azerbaijan particularly focuses on cooperation in the economic sphere, which does not stipulate legally binding political commitments (Rasizade 2003). The EU states are the country's largest foreign trade partners and investors, while Azerbaijan is considered an important strategic partner in the energy sector, providing resources to meet a considerable portion of the EU's oil and gas needs (Chufrin 2019, 17). Azerbaijan serves as Europe's link to the wider Caspian region, where it lays energy-rich fields, and plays as a "key partner on Caspian regional energy projects" (Makili-Aliyev 2013, 10).

Indeed, the energy sector has been a defining factor in mutual cooperation between Azerbaijan and the EU since the early 1990s (Mammadov 2015, 33). The energy relations have revolved around the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC). The SGC consists of three pipelines that connect Azerbaijani energy to Georgia, Turkey, Greece, Albania, and then to Italy¹⁴. The main supplier for the SGC is the Shah Deniz field – located in Azerbaijan's sector of the Caspian Sea. The EU signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Azerbaijan in 2006, and later the Joint Declaration on the South Corridor in 2011, reiterating the union's commitments to energy projects. Moreover, in 2016, these foundations were further expanded under a new EU program, thanks to which Azerbaijan was entitled to take advantage of the EU's technological and financial resources to solidify the energy policy (Chufrin 2019, 17).

While the energy-trade-investment triangle is a strong determinant of the relations, there is a non-economic area where Azerbaijan demands further engagement from the EU – the Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijan believes that the EU should play a more assertive role and aim at greater involvement in resolving the Karabakh conflict. The conflict is Azerbaijan's primary security concern to a degree of defining the Azerbaijan-EU relations. The EU addresses the conflict within the framework of regional security led by OSCE, the organization judged as biased in the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict (Van Gils 2018, 747–48). At some point Azerbaijan suggested the inclusion of an EU representative in the Minsk Group (Van Gils 2018, 747–48). The EU's limited role in the conflict contradicts Azerbaijan's desire for increased EU support in Azerbaijan's call for justice and territorial integrity – values that EU seemingly cherishes.

¹⁴ Those three pipelines are the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) passing through Azerbaijan and Georgia, the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) crossing Turkey, and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) connecting Greece, Albania and Italy.

Nevertheless, the EU does not refute the fact that Karabakh is an integral part of Azerbaijan and has officially condemned the self-proclaimed republic's presidential and parliamentary elections as illegal and obstructive to conflict resolution (Fuller 2013, 9). The European Parliament (EP) has adopted three specific resolutions in 2010, 2012 and 2013 calling for the abandonment of the status quo created by force in the Karabakh region, the withdrawal of Armenian forces from occupied territories, and the resolution of the conflict in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions and the OSCE Minsk Group principles (Ismayilov 2014). Both the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the EP have condemned the occupation of Azerbaijani territories through resolutions, but no sanctions have been imposed as a result to meet Azerbaijan's expectations (Makili-Aliyev 2013, 6–7).

NATO is another 'Western' organization that Azerbaijan has actively pursued (military) cooperation with since its participation in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council – a consultative forum which was succeeded by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997¹⁵. The Partnership for Peace Framework signed in 1994 laid the foundation for Azerbaijan's engagement with NATO, encompassing political dialogue, participation in NATO-led operations, and cooperation on defense reform. Azerbaijan also joined the Planning and Review Process in 1997, aiming to achieve military connectivity and exchangeability with NATO troops, thus aligning its armed forces with Western standards. Azerbaijan has demonstrated its commitment to international security by participating in NATO-led operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Kosovo. The country's involvement in these operations has signaled its willingness to assume wider security responsibilities (Valiyev and Mamishova 2019b, 279).

Due to broader security concerns that equally address the South Caucasus region, NATO attaches strategic importance to Azerbaijan and has increased its engagement with the country. In addition to cooperation on various security issues, such as providing training and assistance to Azerbaijani armed forces, Azerbaijan also proved indispensable for the Alliance in the Northern Distribution Network, which was crucial for NATO's military efforts in Afghanistan. Azerbaijan's military was involved in NATO's non-combat mission "Resolute Support" in Afghanistan, with a contingent of military personnel working alongside NATO forces (Government of the

¹⁵ The council members "regularly exchange views on current political and security-related issues... Longer-term consultation and cooperation also takes place in a wide range of areas. These areas include crisis-management and peace-support operations; regional issues; arms control and issues related to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; international terrorism; defence issues such as planning, budgeting, policy and strategy; civil emergency response; armaments cooperation; nuclear safety; civil-military coordination of air traffic management; and scientific cooperation" (NATO, *Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council*, 2023).

Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.).

Last but not least, Azerbaijan actively participates in NATO's efforts related to disaster response coordination and the protection of important energy infrastructure. "Azerbaijan is the only country among NATO's partner countries involved in the important issue of energy infrastructure" (Mammadov 2015, 33). The country contributes to intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism training, and the improvement of border and infrastructure security in collaboration with NATO allies (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.b).

However, Azerbaijan's entry into the Non-Aligned Movement in 2011 implied the country's intention to pursue pragmatic and mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of security without committing to join any military alliance, including NATO. Azerbaijan seeks partnerships that bring advantages without the commitment of membership in specific military blocs. The country maintains a balanced approach and military neutrality in the region, though focusing on increasing its defense capability and developing its armed forces by any means be it collaboration with NATO. Azerbaijan does not regard joining NATO or the Collective Security Treaty Organization for that matter as a realistic plan (Azərbaycan beynəlxalq aləmdə [Azerbaijan in the international arena] n.d.). Instead, it prioritizes integration into the European security system while maintaining its own independent line of military security.

In order to prevent any possible isolation in the energy field, Azerbaijan never overlooks energy-related organizations and cooperation formats. Azerbaijan, a non-OPEC country, closely cooperates with OPEC in the 'OPEC Plus' format. The main objective of this cooperation is to establish a consensus on the global oil market, overseeing demand and supply ends. Azerbaijan hosted important meetings of the Joint Technical Commission and the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee in 2019, where progress in commitments and global trends in the oil market were discussed. The country's significance in the energy sector is also evident through its observer status in the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF). Azerbaijan's involvement in the GECF allows for the development of transit and export gas pipelines, regulation of sustainable gas production, exploration of Caspian gas pipeline interconnections, and the introduction of innovations to ensure energy security in the Caspian region (Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan n.d.).

Conclusion

Azerbaijan's active participation in various international organizations has been instrumental in promoting its interests and enhancing cooperation on multiple fronts. For instance, "UNSC Resolutions 822, 856, 874 and 884, the UNGA Resolution, as well as decisions and resolutions adopted by the NAM, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, the OIC, and other international institutions, constitute the international legal grounds for the resolution of the Karabakh conflict" (Habibbeyli 2017, 43). Even though authors rather avoid adopting still imprecise and arbitrary term "small state/power" to theoretically frame this article, they agree with the argument set by scholars like Asle Toje and Tom Long that small states, in this case Azerbaijan, attempt to gain influence and achieve their political objectives – named as foreign policy in this research – through active engagement with international organizations, seeing those organizations, among other factors, as a shortcut to minimize the higher costs of one-to-one diplomacy with each country in foreign policy¹⁶. Within international organizations, Azerbaijan has actively engaged in committee activities, hosted summits, proposed resolutions, and advocated for initiatives to foster dialogue, cooperation, and address global challenges. Azerbaijan's participation in international organizations has played a crucial role in projecting its image as a responsible global actor and advancing its interests on the international stage.

Azerbaijan has taken several initiatives within the UN, OIC, CIS, ECO, and the OSCE – what authors call traditional organizations for Azerbaijan – to promote its national interests, raise awareness about the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict, and seek support for the resolution of the Karabakh issue. Through its involvement in these organizations, Azerbaijan has been able to bring international attention to its territorial integrity, garner support for its position, and advocate for peaceful solutions. Azerbaijan's diplomatic efforts, sponsorship of resolutions, hosting of international events, and active participation in decision-making processes have solidified its role as a proactive global player and a contributor to international cooperation and dialogue.

Azerbaijan has always been in pursuit of new memberships in international organizations, taking a strategic and proactive approach in advancing its national interests, enhancing its global recognition, and actively participating in shaping global agendas. By joining organizations such as the NAM and the Council of Europe, Azerbaijan has diversified its diplomatic ties, engaged with new allies, and utilized platforms to voice its concerns

¹⁶ Read Asle Toje's "The European Union as a Small Power" (<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02128.x>) and Tom Long's "Small States, Great Power? Gaining Influence Through Intrinsic, Derivative, and Collective Power" (<https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viwo40>)

and advocate for its position. The country's active involvement in the NAM has allowed Azerbaijan to address the Karabakh conflict, while Azerbaijan's leadership within the organization during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated its ability to manage global health crises and contribute to the international response. Moreover, membership in the Council of Europe has provided Azerbaijan with opportunities to strengthen its commitment to human rights and engage in parliamentary discussions to highlight Armenia's aggression and advocate for the resolution of the conflict.

Azerbaijan promotes its national interests by investing in the creation of new fronts of cooperation. As a founding member of the Organization of Turkic States, Azerbaijan demonstrates its commitment to enhancing cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries in various areas, guided by shared roots, history, and culture. Azerbaijan, as one of the initiators of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, showcases its constructive approach and regional role, contributing to transportation and transit potential, and safeguarding strategic interests. Additionally, as a founding member of GUAM, Azerbaijan actively engages in promoting democracy, security, economic development, and conflict resolution in the region. Through its active participation, chairmanship, and support for initiatives, Azerbaijan continues to play a key role in shaping and advancing regional cooperation within these organizations.

On the other hand, Azerbaijan has been proactive in seeking partnerships with Western institutions, such as the Council of Europe, NATO, OSCE, and the European Union. Throughout its engagement with these international organizations, Azerbaijan has strategically pursued partnerships and cooperation schemes tailored to its interests, emphasizing pragmatic and mutually beneficial collaboration rather than pursuing full membership. Azerbaijan has established close cooperation with NATO, aligning its defense capabilities and participating in various areas such as military reform, defense sector, energy security, cyber security, and humanitarian assistance. Regarding energy-related organizations and cooperation formats, Azerbaijan demonstrates its commitment to staying informed, influencing narratives, and fostering regional and global energy cooperation.

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ABSTRACT

Active participation in international organizations allows states to advocate for their interests, contribute to global agendas, and build constructive relationships with other countries. Azerbaijan cooperates with international organizations to cultivate functional relations, diversify its partnerships, open up to new platforms, take crucial initiatives, coordinate global policies, embrace universal values and norms, facilitate collaboration in areas such as transportation and energy, and address specific challenges. This article argues

that Azerbaijan, despite being a small state, achieves foreign policy priorities by

- 1) setting the agenda and taking initiatives within international organizations;
- 2) engaging in new memberships with existing international organizations;
- 3) participating in the establishment of new international organizations; and
- 4) reaping the benefits of partnership schemes that require no membership.

KEYWORDS

Azerbaijan, international organizations, foreign policy, cooperation, membership, partnership

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