

BETWEEN ALLY AND THREAT: CONSTRUCTING RUSSIA IN AZERBAIJAN'S OFFICIAL RHETORIC

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Abstract

Following the 44-day war of 2020, Azerbaijan has been consistently reshaping its role and position in international politics. In this context, its relations with regional powers, primarily Russia, are of particular interest. This study examines how Azerbaijan's official rhetoric constructs and shapes the narrative around the perception of Russia. The research focuses on how Baku's official discourse, operating within the realities of 2020-2025, balances the concurrent and competing perceptions of Russia as both a "threat" and an "ally". The research demonstrates that Azerbaijan employs a model of "symmetric partnership", where the allied relationship does not imply political dependence. Instead, it serves to advance economic and security interests while maintaining ample room for geopolitical maneuvering.

Keywords: *Russian Federation, Republic of Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, North-South Transport Corridor, South Caucasus, sovereignty.*

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Introduction

After the 2020 war, Azerbaijan has been consistently reformulating, rebuilding, and refining its role and place within the international order and world politics. It asserts greater agency and autonomy, seeking to consolidate its self-perceived status as a middle power and to secure international recognition of that status. In this context, relations with regional powers — primarily Russia and Iran — are of particular interest with respect to shifts in the regional order and the evolving pattern of cooperation and competition between emerging and established regional powers.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian-Azerbaijani relations experienced a complex and contradictory course, fluctuating between Mutalibov's strongly pro-Russian policy and Elchibey's explicitly anti-Russian stance.¹ The situation stabilized under Heydar Aliyev, who forged a pragmatic and balanced foreign policy, combining the development of energy projects with the West with a strategy of avoiding confrontation with Moscow.²

Under Ilham Aliyev's tenure in Azerbaijan, particularly following the 2020 Karabakh war, Russia temporarily expanded its military and political presence in the region by deploying its peacekeepers.³ According to Yemelianova, the outcome of the 2020 Karabakh war can be viewed as a transactional exchange, wherein Russia tacitly supported Azerbaijan's assumption of control over Nagorno-Karabakh in return for the opportunity to establish a temporary military presence.⁴

The concentration of Russian resources on the Ukrainian front due to the war, coupled with Baku's growing assertiveness, allowed Azerbaijan to gradually

¹ Galina M. Yemelianova, 'The De Facto State of Nagorno-Karabakh: Historical and Geopolitical Perspectives', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 75.8 (2023), pp. 1336–59, doi:10.1080/09668136.2023.2214708.

² Marut Vardazaryan, 'Rousastani Dashnut'yun ev Aderbejani Hanrapetut'yan p'okharaberut'yunneri zargatsman dinamikan 2013 t. [Development Dynamics of Relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2013]', *CyberLeninka*, 2013 <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/development-dynamics-of-relations-between-russian-federation-and-azerbaijani-republic-in-2013/viewer> [accessed 24 April 2026]; Anar Valiyev and Narmina Mamishova, 'Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy towards Russia since Independence: Compromise Achieved', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 19.2 (2019), pp. 269–91, doi:10.1080/14683857.2019.1578053; Vahram Hovyan, 'Rus-adrbejanakan haraberut'yunnere [Russian-Azerbaijani Relations], 2020.' <https://orbeli.am/hy/post/687/2020-11-04/%D5%8C%D5%B-8%D6%82%D5%BD-%D5%A1%D5%A4%D6%80%D5%A2%D5%A5%D5%BB%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6%20%D5%B0%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%A2%D5%A5%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6%D5%B6%D5%A5%D6%80%D5%A8> [accessed 24 April 2026].

³ Yemelianova, 'The De Facto State of Nagorno-Karabakh'.

⁴ Ruben Elamiryan and others, 'Russia and the Conflicts in the South Caucasus: Perspectives from Armenia and Azerbaijan', with Aris, Stephen and others, preprint, ETH Zurich, 30 October 2021, p. 14 p., application/pdf, 14 p., doi:10.3929/ETHZ-B-000514342.

neutralize Moscow's leverage and achieve the withdrawal of Russian troops from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2024, which had been stationed there since the 44-day war.⁵

Since the beginning of 2025, relations escalated due to a series of incidents, including the downing of an Azerbaijani civilian aircraft in December 2024 and actions taken against Azerbaijanis in Yekaterinburg.⁶

There is a substantial body of literature analyzing Azerbaijan-Russia relations since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and in recent years a number of new studies have addressed this relationship in light of the post-2020 context. Broadly, this corpus focuses on the implementation of strategy — energy diplomacy, military-technical cooperation, transport corridor politics, and patterns of hedging or balancing between great powers. This study adopts a different approach: rather than asking how cooperation or competition is enacted in practice, it asks how official rhetoric constructs and shapes the narrative of Azerbaijan's perception of Russia's role. It examines how this discourse navigates between coexisting, and at times competing, framings of Russia as threat and as ally — a tension captured in the characterization of the relationship as “frenemies”.⁷

Accordingly, this study poses the following research question: How does Azerbaijan's official rhetoric balance “allied cooperation” with Russia and the emphasis on its own sovereignty in the context of the 2020-2025 post-conflict realities?

For this purpose, this paper focuses on speeches of Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev that encompasses the period between 2020 and 2026. Using the method of Ethnographic Content Analysis it tries to reveal how Russia is constructed in Azerbaijani official rhetoric.

The paper is structured as follows: first it introduces the methodological approach employed for data collection and analysis, followed by a brief historical overview. Then, it presents the main analysis where extracted textual fragments are grouped into key thematic categories and conclusion, where key findings are summarized.

⁵ Irakli Sirbiladze, *Russia's Leverage Before the War in Ukraine*, The End of Russia's “Unipolar Moment” in the South Caucasus (German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2024), pp. 7–11 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep62978.6> [accessed 24 April 2026].

⁶ Denis Cenuša, ‘The Nature of the Azerbaijan-Russia Relations: Through Crisis to More Symmetry’, *Geopolitics and Security Studies Center, GSSC (Previously Known as Eastern Europe Studies Centre, EESC)*, 2025 <https://www.gssc.lt/en/publication/the-nature-of-the-azerbaijan-russia-relations-through-crisis-to-more-symmetry/> [accessed 24 April 2026]; Merhat Sharipzhan, Current Time, ‘Deaths Of Azerbaijanis After Russian Police Raid Fuel Diplomatic Row With Baku’, News, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 17:36:07Z <https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-russia-police-raid-deaths-caucasus-diplomacy/33460707.html> [accessed 3 July 2026]; ‘Russian Raids On Azerbaijanis In Yekaterinburg Trigger Diplomatic Crisis Between Moscow and Baku’, *Caucasus Watch*, 30 June 2025 <https://caucasuswatch.de/en/news/russian-raids-on-azerbaijanis-in-yekaterinburg-trigger-diplomatic-crisis-between-moscow-and-baku.html> [accessed 3 July 2026].

⁷ Tabib Huseynov, *AZERBAIJAN-RUSSIA: FRENEMIES FOREVER?*, 2025.

Methodology

The research was conducted using the Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) method developed by David Altheide.⁸ Unlike quantitative content analysis, which relies on calculating the frequency of words and concepts, ECA is a qualitative and flexible approach. It allows the researcher to read "between the lines," delving into the context, hidden meanings, and rhetorical nuances of official texts. The choice of this method is justified by the fact that it enables the researcher to remain flexible, continuously reviewing and adapting analytical categories throughout the study to align with emerging data.

To construct the dataset, purposive sampling was applied. The study material was collected from the official website President.az, covering the period from 2020 to 2025. The research targeted President I. Aliyev's speeches, interviews, and official statements containing the keywords "Russia" or "Russian". Overall, 55 official sources from the specified period were extracted and analyzed, alongside several key bilateral documents concerning Russian-Azerbaijani relations.

In line with the logic of ethnographic content analysis, a specific analytical protocol was developed to guide data collection and interpretation. This included guiding questions such as:

1) how is Russia framed or referred to in the given text (e.g., as a partner, ally, or mediator), and

2) what is the tone of this reference (positive, neutral, or negative)? This protocol was not static; it was continuously tested, enriched, and revised during direct engagement with the texts, thereby reflecting emerging patterns.

In the final stage of the analysis, the extracted textual segments and concepts were grouped according to core thematic directions. The main thematic categories established are: "allied interaction", "regional security", "transport communications", "economic relations", "humanitarian and historical ties" as well as the most crucial concept in the context of this study: "sovereignty-balancing". Such a thematic classification provides a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of Azerbaijan's diplomatic discourse directed toward Russia.

Allied Interaction

In Azerbaijan's official rhetoric, the concept of "allied interaction" with Russia is not static. While early statements in 2020-2021⁹ were dominated by neutral-

⁸ David Altheide, 'Ethnographic Content Analysis', *Qualitative Sociology*, 10 (1987), pp. 65–77, doi:10.1007/BF00988269.

⁹ 'Interv'yu Il'khama Aliyeva nemetskomu telekanalu ARD, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev's Interview with the German TV Channel ARD, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/45111> [accessed 14 June 2026]; 'Obrashcheniye Prezidenta Azerbaydzhana Il'khama Aliyeva k Narodu, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Address to the Nation by the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/45924> [accessed 26 April 2026].

positive terms such as “partner” and “neighbor” the discourse later shifted, first transitioning into a “strategic partnership”¹⁰ and subsequently being institutionalized at the highest level.¹¹

Central and foundational to this evolution is the Declaration on Allied Interaction signed on February 22, 2022.¹² It is characterized not only as a primary political document but also as an instrument that has elevated interstate ties to a new qualitative level in both form and content.¹³ Official Baku regularly reaffirms the existing “strong political will” at the leadership level to implement the provisions of the declaration, emphasizing that it is not merely declarative but aimed at concrete results.¹⁴

One of the crucial tools for legitimizing this allied relationship is “personal diplomacy”¹⁵. In official texts, the tone towards the Russian leadership is highly positive and respectful.¹⁶ Frequently resorting to a discourse of gratitude, the state alliance is reinforced by emphasizing the personal interactions, joint decisions, and mutual trust between Presidents Aliyev and Putin; for example, the cessation of the

¹⁰ Il'kham Aliyev Oznakomilsya v Dashkesane s Deyatel'nost'yu Integrirovannogo Regional'nogo Pererabatyvayushchego Kompleksa "Chovdar" ZAO AzerGold, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Familiarized Himself with the Activities of the "Chovdar" Integrated Regional Processing Complex of AzerGold CJSC in Dashkasan, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/52522> [accessed 26 April 2026].

¹¹ V Sochi Sostoyalas' Dvustoronnyaya Vstrecha Mezhdru Il'khamom Aliyevym i Prezidentom Rossii Vladimirom Putiny, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Bilateral Meeting Between Ilham Aliyev and Russian President Vladimir Putin was Held in Sochi, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/54419> [accessed 26 April 2026].

¹² ‘Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Mezhdunarodnoy Konferentsii Na Temu "Yuzhnyy Kavkaz: Razvitiye i Sotrudnichestvo", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Attended the International Conference "South Caucasus: Development and Cooperation", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/55909> [accessed 26 April 2026]; ‘Il'kham Aliyev Vystupil Na Shushinskom Global'nom Mediaforume, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Spoke at the Shusha Global Media Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/60544> [accessed 26 April 2026].

¹³ ‘Sostoyalas' Vstrecha Il'khama Aliyeva s Predsedatelem Pravitel'stva Rossii, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting was Held Between Ilham Aliyev and the Prime Minister of Russia, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/65170> [accessed 26 April 2026].

¹⁴ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Vystupil Na Shushinskom Global'nom Mediaforume, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Spoke at the Shusha Global Media Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan].

¹⁵ Tizoc Chavez, ‘Presidential Transitions and the Role of Personal Diplomacy’, *Congress & the Presidency*, 53.1 (2026), pp. 3–32, doi:10.1080/07343469.2026.2638762.

¹⁶ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Obratilsya k Narodu, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/44435> [accessed 26 April 2026].

war and the ensuing stability are directly attributed to President Putin's personal intervention.¹⁷

- *"Of course, we highly appreciate your personal role in this matter".*
- *"I would like to once again express my gratitude to you for the role you played in the settlement of the Karabakh conflict..."*
- *"We expect the continuation of your active personal role and the role of Russia in achieving these goals".*
- *He emphasizes the personal contribution of the Russian President: "Through the mediation of the Russian Federation and personally President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, a trilateral Statement was signed..."*

Notably, the Azerbaijani side places special emphasis on the stability of the relations. The rhetoric is clear: the form and nature of cooperation have not changed,¹⁸ all "roadmaps" are being implemented,¹⁹ and problematic issues requiring resolution between the two countries "simply do not exist"²⁰. This discourse aims to present Russian-Azerbaijani relations as a stable partnership.

Azerbaijan does not limit its relations strictly to the military-political level. Special importance is attached to ongoing projects in transport infrastructure, energy, trade, economy, and humanitarian spheres.²¹ Remarkably, cooperation is

¹⁷ 'V Sochi Sostoyalas' Dvustoronnyaya Vstrecha Mezhdru Prezidentom Azerbaydzhana Il'khamom Aliyevym i Prezidentom Rossii Vladimirom Putinyom, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Bilateral Meeting Between the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and Russian President Vladimir Putin was Held in Sochi, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'.

¹⁸ 'Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu General'nomu Direktoru Mezhdunarodnogo Informatsionnogo Agentstva "Rossiya Segodnya" Dmitriyu Kiselevu, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Dmitry Kiselyov, Director General of the International Information Agency "Rossiya Segodnya", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/67537> [accessed 26 April 2026].

¹⁹ 'Il'kham Aliyev Oznakomilsya v Dashkesane s Deyatel'nost'yu Integrirovannogo Regional'nogo Pererabatyvayushchego Kompleksa "Chovdar" ZAO AzerGold, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Familiarized Himself with the Activities of the "Chovdar" Integrated Regional Processing Complex of AzerGold CJSC in Dashkasan, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'.

²⁰ 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye Vo 2-Om Shushinskom Global'nom Mediaforume, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Attended the 2nd Shusha Global Media Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/66533> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²¹ 'Il'kham Aliyev i Pervaya Ledi Mekhriban Aliyeva Posetili Fizulinskiy, Zangilanskiy, Lachinskiy i Dzebrail'skiy Rayony, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva Visited Fizuli, Zangilan, Lachin, and Jabrayil Districts, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/50632> [accessed 14 June 2026]; 'Prezidenty Azerbaydzhana i Turtsii Vystupili s Zayavleniyami Dlya Pressy, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Presidents of Azerbaijan and Turkey Made Press Statements, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/48792> [accessed 14 June 2026]; 'Interv'yu Il'khama Aliyeva Telekanalu "Evron'yus", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev's

highly valued not only at the federal level but also at the level of the subjects of the Russian Federation (e.g., Tatarstan,²² Dagestan,²³ Chechnya²⁴), making the alliance network denser and more multi-layered. This multifaceted interaction is combined with the rejection of Western (particularly French) mediation, explicitly viewing Russia as the preferred primary partner stemming from historical logic.²⁵ This, in turn, serves official Baku's strategy of keeping extra-regional powers out of the South Caucasus. Russia is juxtaposed against France, which Baku accuses of maintaining a "biased and pro-Armenian"²⁶ stance.

Economic Ties

In Azerbaijan's official rhetoric, the discourse on economic relations with Russia is characterized by a pronounced pragmatism.

One of the key narratives in this direction is energy diplomacy and the discourse of "non-competition". Given Europe's temporary energy crisis in light of the Russo-Ukrainian war, Azerbaijan has found itself in an in-between position. Official Baku openly acknowledges that the European Union has approached it with a request to increase gas supplies.²⁷ However, to maintain allied trust with

Interview with Euronews TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/60723> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²² 'Sostoyalas' vstrecha Il'khama Aliyeva s Raisom Respubliki Tatarstan Rustamom Minnikhanovym, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting was Held Between Ilham Aliyev and Rais of the Republic of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/60297> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²³ 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Rukovoditelya Respubliki Dagestan Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Received the Head of the Republic of Dagestan of the Russian Federation, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/58102> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²⁴ Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Prokhodyashchey v Shushe Mezhdunarodnoy Konferentsii Na Temu "Formirovaniye Geopolitiki Bol'shoy Yevrazii: Ot Proshlogo k Nastoyashchemu i Budushchemu", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Conference in Shusha on "Shaping the Geopolitics of Greater Eurasia: From Past to Present and Future", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/59576> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²⁵ 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastnikov 53-Go Zasedaniya Soveta Rukovoditeley Organov Bezopasnosti i Spetsial'nykh Sluzhb Gosudarstv-Uchastnikov SNG, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Received the Participants of the 53rd Meeting of the Council of Heads of Security Agencies and Special Services of CIS Member States, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/61538> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²⁶ 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Myunkhene v Plenarnom Zasedanii Na Temu "Preodolevaya Gory? Postroyeniye Bezopasnosti Na Yuzhnom Kavkaze", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in a Plenary Session in Munich on "Moving Mountains? Building Security in the South Caucasus", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/58996> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²⁷ 'Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Evron'yus", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Euronews TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/62438>

Russia, Aliyev routinely emphasizes in his speeches that Azerbaijan “has never intended and has no intention to compete with Russian gas in the European market”, asserting that this policy is purely commercial in nature.²⁸ Furthermore, he firmly denies reports regarding the re-export of Russian gas to Europe, characterizing them as “informational manipulation”²⁹ and instead highlights, as a gesture of goodwill, the assistance provided to Russia's Gazprom in supplying gas to Armenia through Azerbaijani territory.³⁰

Another important layer is the discourse surrounding military-technical cooperation and food security. Russia is presented as a reliable partner and a major supplier of food commodities (grain, fertilizers)³¹. Highly praising Russian military equipment, Aliyev emphasizes that, unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan purchases it strictly at “market prices” without ever complaining about its quality.³² Such ironic comparisons (which are also present in rhetorical questions directed at Armenia regarding its trade turnover growth)³³ are aimed at positioning Azerbaijan as a

[accessed 26 April 2026]; ‘Il’kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Forume “Karabakh: Vozvrashcheniye Domoy Spustya 30 Let. Dostizheniya i Trudnosti”, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the Forum “Karabakh: Back Home After 30 Years. Accomplishments and Challenges”, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/62400> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²⁸ “‘Il’kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Mezhdunarodnoy Konferentsii Na Temu “Yuzhnyy Kavkaz: Razvitiye i Sotrudnichestvo”, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Attended the International Conference “South Caucasus: Development and Cooperation”, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’; ‘Prezident Frantsuzskoy Respubliki Emmanuel’ Makron pozvonil Prezidentu Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki Il’khamu Aliyevu, Ofitsial’nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron Called the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/56842> [accessed 14 June 2026].

²⁹ Il’kham Aliyev Dal Interv’yu Mestnym Telekanalam, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Local TV Channels, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/67871> [accessed 26 April 2026].

³⁰ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Prokhodivshey v Universitete ADA Mezhdunarodnoy Konferentsii Pod Nazvaniem “Novyy Vzglyad Na Yuzhnyy Kavkaz: Postkonfliktnoye Razvitiye i Sotrudnichestvo”, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Attended the International Conference “A New Glimpse at the South Caucasus: Post-Conflict Development and Cooperation” at ADA University, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/51088> [accessed 26 April 2026].

³¹ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Dal Interv’yu Mestnym Telekanalam, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Local TV Channels, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

³² ‘Il’kham Aliyev Provel Press-Konferentsiyu Dlya Predstaviteley Mestnykh i Zarubezhnykh SMI, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Held a Press Conference for Representatives of Local and Foreign Media, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/50738> [accessed 26 April 2026].

³³ Il’kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye Vo 2-Om Shushinskom Global’nom Mediaforume, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Attended the 2nd Shusha Global Media Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

solvent, independent, and non-subsidized partner. At the same time, the military-technical discourse adapts to new realities. Official Baku shows understanding toward the fact that Russia has temporarily exited the global arms market due to the war, yet expresses readiness to resume purchases in the future.³⁴

Within the economic rhetoric, the theme of resilience against geopolitical shocks occupies a distinct place. Aliyev continuously notes a steady growth in trade turnover (with an increase of around 17%, reaching up to 4.5 billion dollars as of 2024)³⁵ and the successful implementation of seven “roadmaps”.³⁶ To underscore its independence from Western economic influence, special emphasis is placed on the high percentage of transactions conducted in national currencies (70% for Azerbaijani exports and 50% for Russian exports),³⁷ as well as the transit of Russian oil through Azerbaijani territory.³⁸ Notably, to emphasize its own energy sovereignty, Aliyev invokes historical memory, recalling the 2006-2007 crisis when Baku demonstratively rejected Russian gas following a sharp price hike by Gazprom³⁹.

Parallel to this, Azerbaijan’s stance on integration projects, particularly the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), is highly telling. At the discursive level, Aliyev warmly welcomes the entry of Russian capital into the country (for instance, KAMAZ investments) and partnerships in shipbuilding and

³⁴ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Dal Interv’yu General’nomu Direktoru Mezhdunarodnogo Informatsionnogo Agentstva “Rossiya Segodnya” Dmitriyu Kiselevu, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Dmitry Kiselyov, Director General of the International Information Agency “Rossiya Segodnya”, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

³⁵ ‘Sostoyalas’ Vstrecha Il’khama Aliyeva s Predsedatelem Pravitel’sтва Rossii, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting was Held Between Ilham Aliyev and the Prime Minister of Russia, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

³⁶ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Oznakomilsya v Dashkesane s Deyatel’nost’yu Integrirovannogo Regional’nogo Pererabatyvayushchego Kompleksa “Chovdar” ZAO AzerGold, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Familiarized Himself with the Activities of the “Chovdar” Integrated Regional Processing Complex of AzerGold CJSC in Dashkasan, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

³⁷ V Astane sostoyalas’ vstrecha Il’khama Aliyeva s Prezidentom Rossii Vladimirom Putinyem, Ofitsial’nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting Between Ilham Aliyev and Russian President Vladimir Putin was Held in Astana, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/66383> [accessed 26 April 2026].

³⁸ ‘Sostoyalas’ Vstrecha Il’khama Aliyeva s Rukovoditelyami Vedushchikh Kompaniy Germanii, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting was Held Between Ilham Aliyev and Heads of Leading German Companies, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/59166> [accessed 26 April 2026].

³⁹ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Dal Interv’yu Mestnym Telekanalam, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Local TV Channels, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/58555> [accessed 26 April 2026].

pharmaceuticals;⁴⁰ however, he draws a clear line, stating that Azerbaijan has no plans to join the EAEU and is guided purely by pragmatism.⁴¹

Transport Communications

In Azerbaijan's official rhetoric, the theme of transport communications occupies a distinctive place. Analysis reveals that within this discourse, Azerbaijan attempts to position itself as an indispensable logistical hub, simultaneously utilizing transport projects as leverage to strengthen its position in regional processes.

The central axis here is the International North-South Transport Corridor. In official texts, Aliyev routinely emphasizes the global significance of this project and the importance of joint work with Russia.⁴²

The rhetoric adapts to new geopolitical realities, particularly against the backdrop of the Russo-Ukrainian war and sanctions. Aliyev notes that the corridors passing through Azerbaijani territory have become vitally necessary for Russia, highlighting that the development of this project aligns directly with Russian interests.⁴³ In this context, Azerbaijan presents itself as a partner that has already completed or is currently modernizing the necessary infrastructure on its territory.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ 'Il'kham Aliyev Vstretilsya s Predstavatelyami Obshchestvennosti Dzhebrail'skogo Rayona, Zalozhil Fundament Memorial'nogo Kompleksa i Vosstanovleniya Goroda, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Met with Representatives of the Public of Jabrayil District, Laid the Foundation for a Memorial Complex and the Restoration of the City, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/53343> [accessed 14 June 2026].

⁴¹ 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Mezhdunarodnom Forume Na Temu "COP29 i Zelenoye Videniye Dlya Azerbaydzhana", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Forum on "COP29 and Green Vision for Azerbaijan", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/65580> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁴² 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Mezhdunarodnom Forume Na Temu "COP29 i Zelenoye Videniye Dlya Azerbaydzhana", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Forum on "COP29 and Green Vision for Azerbaijan", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'; 'V Astane sostoyalas' vstrecha Il'khama Aliyeva s Prezidentom Rossii Vladimirom Putiny, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [A Meeting Between Ilham Aliyev and Russian President Vladimir Putin was Held in Astana, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'.

⁴³ 'Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Evron'yus", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Euronews TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'.

⁴⁴ 'V Universitete ADA s Uchastiyem Il'khama Aliyeva Sostoyalas' Mezhdunarodnyy Forum Na Temu "K Novomu Miroporyadku", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [An International Forum "Towards a New World Order" was Held at ADA University with the Participation of Ilham Aliyev, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/68514> [accessed 26 April 2026]; 'Il'kham Aliyev i Prezident Vladimir Putin Vystupili s Zayavleniyami Dlya Pressy, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev and President Vladimir Putin Made Press Statements, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/66707> [accessed 26 April 2026].

Azerbaijan declares that both the railway and highway sections of the project within its borders are fully ready, and Baku can accommodate at least 15 million tons of cargo traffic moving south from Russia.⁴⁵ By emphasizing the project's "global significance" Aliyev also promotes the Azerbaijan-Russia-Iran trilateral format, which involves not only transport networks but also the interconnection of power transmission lines.⁴⁶

Another crucial component of the transport communications discourse involves the narrative surrounding the so-called "Zangezur Corridor" and Armenia's sovereignty.

The analysis uncovers a clear tactic: particularly between 2020 and 2024, Aliyev deliberately marginalizes Armenia from the decision-making process, recognizing Russia as the primary subject of negotiations. He justifies this by asserting that Armenia's railway network is "100 percent owned by Russian Railways"⁴⁷. In official speeches, Armenia is characterized as a "dependent country" and a "small, poor satellite" of Russia.⁴⁸ Such aggressive rhetoric aims to legitimize the claim that the opening of the "Zangezur Corridor" presented as a logical offshoot of the North-South route, is coordinated with Russia and directly serves the interests of Russia (and other regional players).⁴⁹

⁴⁵ 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Mezhdunarodnom Forume Na Temu "COP29 i Zelenoye Videniye Dlya Azerbaydzhana", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Forum on "COP29 and Green Vision for Azerbaijan", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan].

⁴⁶ 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Sekretarya Vysshego Soveta Natsional'noy Bezopasnosti Irana, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Received the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/67879> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁴⁷ 'Il'kham Aliyev prinyal uchastiye v mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii v Baku na temu "Vdol' Srednego koridora: geopolitika, bezopasnost' i ekonomika", Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Conference in Baku "Along the Middle Corridor: Geopolitics, Security and Economy", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/57968> [accessed 26 April 2026]; 'Il'kham Aliyev Obratilsya k Narodu, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan].

⁴⁸ 'Il'kham Aliyev prinyal uchastiye v mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii v Baku na temu "Vdol' Srednego koridora" [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Conference in Baku "Along the Middle Corridor"].

⁴⁹ 'Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Al'-Arabiya", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Al Arabiya TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/69968> [accessed 26 April 2026]; 'Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Evron'yus", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Euronews TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]; 'Prezident Frantsuzskoy Respubliki Emmanyuel' Makron pozvonil Prezidentu Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki Il'khamu Aliyevu, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron Called the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]; 'Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Mestnym Telekanalam, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an

Furthermore, throughout 2022-2024, at the discursive level, Baku “defended” Russian interests in Armenia by referencing the November 10 (9) Statement and demanding that control over the corridor be handed over to Russian border guards. Aliyev mockingly raised a rhetorical question as to why Armenia opposes the Russian presence in the corridor when they already control Armenia’s airport and borders.⁵⁰

Beyond infrastructure, Azerbaijan underscores its role as an energy and logistics mediator. Aliyev openly states that Azerbaijan is acting as a mediator between Ukraine and the EU in negotiations to continue the transit of Russian gas to Europe, and is ready to make the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline available for Russian oil exports, a move that aligns with Baku’s commercial interests.⁵¹

In the political arena, this economic and logistical interdependence is reinforced by institutional initiatives. Aliyev highly values cooperation with the EAEU (highlighting Putin’s invitation) and particularly promotes the “3+3” regional cooperation format.⁵² References to this format and the joint Russian-Turkish monitoring center in Aghdam⁵³ (between 2020-2022) are indicative of Azerbaijan’s strategy, which sought to monopolize regional security and logistics issues among regional powers (Russia, Turkey, Iran), thereby blocking the entry of extra-regional (Western) forces and solidifying the Moscow-Ankara-Baku axis.

Interview to Local TV Channels, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/63017> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁵⁰ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Dal Interv’yu Mestnym Telekanalam, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Local TV Channels, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁵¹ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Prokhodyashchey v Shushe Mezhdunarodnoy Konferentsii Na Temu "Formirovaniye Geopolitiki Bol'shoy Yevrazii: Ot Proshlogo k Nastoyashchemu i Budushchemu", Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Conference in Shusha on "Shaping the Geopolitics of Greater Eurasia: From Past to Present and Future", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]; ‘Il’kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye Vo 2-Om Shushinskom Global’nom Mediaforume, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Attended the 2nd Shusha Global Media Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁵² ‘Il’kham Aliyev prinyal uchastiye v mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii v Baku na temu "Vdol' Srednego koridora: geopolitika, bezopasnost' i ekonomika", Ofitsial’nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Conference in Baku "Along the Middle Corridor: Geopolitics, Security and Economy", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]; ‘Il’kham Aliyev Prinyal Sekretarya Vysshego Soveta Natsional'noy Bezopasnosti Irana, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Received the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁵³ ‘Il’kham Aliyev prinyal uchastiye v mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii v Baku na temu "Vdol' Srednego koridora: geopolitika, bezopasnost' i ekonomika", Ofitsial’nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Conference in Baku "Along the Middle Corridor: Geopolitics, Security and Economy", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

Humanitarian and Historical Ties

In Azerbaijan's official rhetoric, humanitarian and historical ties serve a dual purpose: on the one hand, they legitimize the "allied" relationship with Russia as a historically justified necessity; on the other hand, they reframe historical facts to favor Azerbaijan's territorial and political ambitions.

Aliyev frequently employs the terms "Tsarist Russia" and the "Russian Empire" not with historical neutrality, but with a sharply critical tone.⁵⁴ He presents the "resettlement of Armenians" under early 19th-century treaties (Kurakchay, Gulistan, Turkmenchay) as a deliberate process aimed at "altering the religious composition in the new lands of the empire".⁵⁵ This claim occupies a cornerstone position in Azerbaijani propaganda, attempting, on the one hand, to deny the indigenous presence of Armenians in the region, and on the other, interpreting it as a blow dealt by the empire to "Azerbaijani statehood". Furthermore, the actions of the Russian Empire are portrayed by Aliyev in a negative light, particularly regarding the dissolution of the "Albanian Church" and its subordination to the Armenian Church. Aliyev's claim aligns with official Azerbaijani historiography but contradicts the widely accepted approach in historical science and, in fact, reality, according to which the Catholicosate of Gandzasar was the Catholicosate of Caucasian Albania (Aghvank) of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The purpose of this discourse is evident: to depict the Armenian presence in the region as "artificial" and the product of imperialist policies, thereby denying Armenia's claim to the territories.⁵⁶

Even in more contemporary realities, a tone of hostility persists. Aliyev portrays the activities of the Armenian diaspora in Russia (such as the cases involving

⁵⁴ 'Il'kham Aliyev dal interv'yu turetskomu telekanalu Haber Türk, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Turkish TV Channel Haber Türk, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/42869> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁵⁵ 'Interv'yu Il'khama Aliyeva Nemetskomu Telekanalu ARD, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev's Interview with German TV Channel ARD, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/45111> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁵⁶ 'Leo, Hayots' patmut'yun, Yerkeri zhoghovatsu, h. III [Leo, History of Armenia, Collected Works, vol. III] (Yerevan, 1973); Lernik A. Mkrtumyan, Aghvanits' (Gandzasari) Kat'oghikusut'yuny [Lernik A. Mkrtumyan, The Catholicosate of Aghvank (Gandzasar)], <https://orient.sci.am/archive/58/article-6nRqkxoeY3TSj9h4li0pgrZwWvKNCIAO2HcFQuP.pdf> [accessed 4 July 2026]; 'Henrik Svazyan, Aghvanits' Yekeghets'in [Henrik Svazyan, The Church of Aghvank], https://arar.sci.am/Content/254851/file_0.pdf [accessed 4 July 2026]; 'Hayk Karapetyan, Gandzasari Kat'oghikusut'yune ZHE. Dari Verjin Yev ZH-E Dari Skzbin [Hayk Karapetyan, The Catholicosate of Gandzasar at the End of the 17th and Beginning of the 18th Century], https://arar.sci.am/Content/253999/file_0.pdf [accessed 4 July 2026]; George Bournoutian, *From the Kur to the Aras: A Military History of Russia's Move into the South Caucasus and the First Russo-Iranian War, 1801-1813* (BRILL, 2020).

Ruben Vardanyan or the film about Garegin Nzhdeh) as “propaganda of fascism” that also threatens Russia.⁵⁷

Conversely, the humanitarian discourse is exceedingly warm and positive. Aliyev emphasizes the “brotherly ties” between Azerbaijan and Russia and the friendship between their peoples.⁵⁸ In this context, the “special care” given to the Russian language in Azerbaijan is of significant importance, highlighting Russian-language tuition in over 320 schools and the presence of branches of Moscow universities.⁵⁹

The presentation of Soviet ties in Aliyev’s rhetoric is designed to strengthen bilateral trust by underscoring the positive legacy of the Soviet era. Particular emphasis is placed on the joint victory in the Great Patriotic War.⁶⁰ Additionally, highlighting Heydar Aliyev’s role in the construction of the BAM (Baikal-Amur Mainline) plays an important part in this rhetoric.⁶¹

Overall, Aliyev speaks of the Russian side as an “ally” and a “friend” utilizing symbols such as language and history to secure Moscow’s trust. However, these “concessions” in the cultural arena provide Azerbaijan with the necessary maneuverability in the political arena.

Sovereignty-Balancing, Regional Security

The central and arguably most complex layer of Azerbaijan’s official rhetoric is the discourse on “sovereignty and balancing”. In this regard, a sharp transformation in tone is observed: while the warmth of partnership prevails in economic and transport matters, on issues concerning sovereignty, Baku’s discourse becomes rigid, demanding, and occasionally markedly critical.

⁵⁷ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Obratilsya k Narodu, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁵⁸ ‘Interv’yu Il’khama Aliyeva Avtoritetnomu Rossiyskomu Zhurnalu “Natsional’naya Oborona”, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev’s Interview with the Prestigious Russian Magazine “National Defense”, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/53199> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁵⁹ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Provel Press-Konferentsiyu Dlya Predstaviteley Mestnykh i Zarubezhnykh SMI, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Held a Press Conference for Representatives of Local and Foreign Media, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁶⁰ ‘Sostoyalas’ Vstrecha Il’khama Aliyeva s Predsedatelem Pravitel’sтва Rossii, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting was Held Between Ilham Aliyev and the Prime Minister of Russia, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁶¹ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Prinyal Ministrov Inostrannykh Del, Natsional’noy Oborony i Nachal’nika Natsional’noy Razvedyvatel’noy Organizatsii Turtsii, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Received the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, National Defense, and the Head of the National Intelligence Organization of Turkey, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/46077> [accessed 26 April 2026].

Azerbaijan spares no effort in demonstrating that good relations with Russia are anchored exclusively on mutual respect for independence, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of borders,⁶² and that “national interests always come first”.⁶³

The most vivid episode of this balancing act and the demonstration of diplomatic “red lines” is the reality surrounding aviation incidents. When an Azerbaijani civilian aircraft was shot down over Russian territory,⁶⁴ Aliyev’s rhetoric became unprecedentedly harsh. The international investigation, which included specialists from Azerbaijan, Russia, Brazil, and ICAO revealed that the aircraft was damaged from the outside, and Azerbaijan announced the discovery of fragments of a Russian “Pantsir-S” missile.⁶⁵

Aliyev characterized the initial Russian official versions (a bird strike) as “delirium”, “absurdity” and “nonsense”⁶⁶ openly blaming Russian representatives and demanding an investigation by an international, rather than a Russian, committee. Furthermore, Aliyev compared this to the “accidental” downing of a Russian helicopter by Azerbaijan in 2020, when Baku immediately apologized and punished those responsible, whereas Russia, according to Aliyev, was trying to “cover up” the incident.⁶⁷

⁶² ‘Deklaratsiya o soyuznicheskom vzaimodeystvii mezhdru Rossiyskoy Federatsiyey i Azerbaydzhanskoy Respublikoy’ [Declaration on Allied Interaction between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Azerbaijan] <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5777> [accessed 24 April 2026].

⁶³ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Panel’nom Zasedanii Na Temu "Strategicheskoy Vzgl'yad: Yevraziya" Davosskogo Vsemirnogo Ekonomicheskogo Foruma, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in a Panel Session on "Strategic Outlook: Eurasia" at the Davos World Economic Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/35647> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁶⁴ R/K "Azatutyun", ‘Bakvits' Grozni t'rch'ogh mardatar ink'nat'ir e kortsanvel [Passenger Plane Flying from Baku to Grozny Crashed]’, Lurer, "Azat Yevropa/Azatutyun" radiokayan [News, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty] <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/bakvits-grozni-trchogh-mardatar-inknatir-e-kortsanvel-/33252276.html> [accessed 18 June 2026].

⁶⁵ ‘Adrbejanakan ink'nat'iri kortsaman hetak'nnut'yan ardyunk'nery khraparakven arajika orerin [The Results of the Investigation into the Crash of the Azerbaijani Plane Will Be Published in the Coming Days]’, 4 February 2025 <https://www.1lurer.am/hy/2025/02/04/Ադրբեջանական-ինքնաթիռի-կործանման-հետաքննության-արդյունքները-կհրապարակվեն-առաջիկա-օրերին/1259729> [accessed 18 June 2026].

⁶⁶ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Azerbaydzhanskomu Televideniyu, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Azerbaijani Television, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/67806> [accessed 26 April 2026]; ‘Il’kham Aliyev Vstretitsya s Chlenami Semey Pogibshogo v Aviakatastrofe Ekipazha i Vyzhivshimi Bortprovodnikami, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Met with the Family Members of the Crew Killed in the Plane Crash and the Surviving Flight Attendants, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/67842> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁶⁷ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Al-Arabiya", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Al Arabiya TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

The final resolution of the Azerbaijani civilian aircraft incident occurred on April 15, 2026, when Russia and Azerbaijan issued a joint statement.⁶⁸ The parties officially confirmed that the plane crashed in Russian airspace as a result of an unintentional strike by an air defense system. The Russian side agreed to pay financial compensation to the families of the victims and the survivors.⁶⁹

The resolution of this tough stance, Vladimir Putin's personal apology, is presented in official texts not merely as a diplomatic gesture, but as an indicator of Azerbaijan's "state power and international prestige" emphasizing that this was the first instance of Russia apologizing to another state.⁷⁰

Another pillar of the sovereignty discourse is geopolitical independence, particularly against the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis. Despite the declaration of alliance with Moscow, Aliyev openly and "without concealing it" states that Azerbaijan supports the territorial integrity of Ukraine.⁷¹

Moreover, Azerbaijan does not hesitate to openly criticize the instruments of Russian influence in the South Caucasus. For example, in his speeches, Russian peacekeepers face severe criticism, whom Aliyev accuses of allowing the "infiltration of Armenian mines".⁷² At the same time, he expresses dissatisfaction and criticism regarding instances where peacekeepers allowed foreign citizens (e.g., members of the French Parliament) to enter Nagorno-Karabakh without Azerbaijan's permission. His tone on this issue is strictly cautionary: he asserts that the peacekeepers were informed that no foreigner could go there without their permission.⁷³ An even harsher discourse is applied against the activities of Ruben

⁶⁸ 'Russia, Azerbaijan Reach Agreement on Resolving Aftermath of AZAL Plane Crash', TASS, <https://tass.com/politics/2117461> [accessed 18 June 2026].

⁶⁹ 'Vlasti Chechni Ob'yavili Traur v Svyazi s Aviakatastrofoy Pod Aktau - Gazeta.Ru | Novosti [Chechen Authorities Declared Mourning in Connection with the Plane Crash Near Aktau - Gazeta.Ru | News]', Gazeta.Ru, 27 December 2024 <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/-2024/12/27/24731846.shtml> [accessed 18 June 2026].

⁷⁰ 'V Dushanbe Sostoyalas' Vstrecha Prezidenta Azerbaydzhana Il'khama Aliyeva s Prezidentom Rossii Vladimirom Putinyom v Formate Odin Na Odin, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A One-on-One Meeting Between the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and Russian President Vladimir Putin was Held in Dushanbe, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/70298> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁷¹ 'Il'kham Aliyev v Gorode Chernobbio Dal Interv'yu Ital'yanskoy Gazete Il Sole 24 Ore, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to the Italian Newspaper Il Sole 24 Ore in Chernobio, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/57095> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁷² 'Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Mestnym Telekanalam, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Local TV Channels, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan].

⁷³ 'Pod predsedatel'stvom Prezidenta Il'khama Aliyeva sostoyalos' soveshchaniye v videoformate, posvyashchennoye itogam 2020 goda, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Video Conference Chaired by President Ilham Aliyev Dedicated to the Results of 2020 was Held, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/49933> [accessed 26 April 2026].

Vardanyan in Artsakh. He is labeled as a “Russian citizen” who was “smuggled” into Karabakh.⁷⁴ Similarly, during the 44-day war of 2020, Russian political circles are criticized for supposedly “supporting Nikol Pashinyan, who is considered ‘anti-Russian’”,⁷⁵ or for “allowing ethnic Armenian oligarchs to send weapons and mercenaries from Russia”.⁷⁶

Finally, sovereignty is constructed by portraying Armenia as dependent on external powers. As proof of its own full independence, official rhetoric constantly notes that, unlike Armenia, where Russia has a military base and controls the borders, there is “not a single Russian soldier” on Azerbaijani territory.⁷⁷ Aliyev also recalls that Russia was part of the OSCE Minsk Group (accused of “monopolizing” the issue for many years), a format that has finally “died”,⁷⁸ and that relations must now be built on new, peer-to-peer rules.

In Azerbaijan's official discourse, the interpretation of security relations with Russia is distinguished by multi-layered balancing. Ilham Aliyev's rhetoric reflects a complex tightrope walk: on one hand, Russia's role as a key regional security actor is recognized and legitimized;⁷⁹ on the other hand, threats are reconceptualized, and its own sovereignty is strictly defended, especially under the circumstances created by the Russo-Ukrainian war.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Myunkhene v Plenarnom Zasedanii Na Temu "Preodolevaya Gory? Postroyeniye Bezopasnosti Na Yuzhnom Kavkaze", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in a Plenary Session in Munich on "Moving Mountains? Building Security in the South Caucasus", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁷⁵ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Turetskomu Telekanalu A Haber, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Turkish TV Channel A Haber, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/43250> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁷⁶ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Myunkhene v Plenarnom Zasedanii Na Temu "Preodolevaya Gory? Postroyeniye Bezopasnosti Na Yuzhnom Kavkaze", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in a Plenary Session in Munich on "Moving Mountains? Building Security in the South Caucasus", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁷⁷ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Al'-Arabiya", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Al Arabiya TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁷⁸ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Obratilsya k Narodu, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁷⁹ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Al'-Dzhazira", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Al Jazeera TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/41429> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁸⁰ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Myunkhene v Plenarnom Zasedanii Na Temu "Preodolevaya Gory? Postroyeniye Bezopasnosti Na Yuzhnom Kavkaze", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in a Plenary Session in Munich on "Moving Mountains? Building Security in the South Caucasus", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

The Azerbaijani official narrative consistently highlights Russia's role in halting the 44-day war in 2020 and resolving the September 2022 escalation.⁸¹ He characterizes Russia not only as a great power but also as a regional country with a direct interest in maintaining stability in the South Caucasus. Aliyev notes that Russia differs from Western actors because, according to him, it is located within the region itself and has a better understanding of local political and security realities.⁸²

During the studied period, the most dynamic shift occurred in the rhetoric regarding Russian peacekeepers. Between 2020 and 2022, he frequently describes them as an "important factor of stability" and notes that no serious incidents were recorded in their zone of responsibility.⁸³ He also publicly thanks the peacekeepers and emphasizes that numerous operational issues are resolved with their participation.⁸⁴ However, the emphasis on sovereignty is already visible here. Aliyev constantly reminds that the presence of the peacekeepers is temporary and based on Azerbaijan's consent.⁸⁵

Prior to their withdrawal in 2024, official Baku employed a tactic of harsh rhetorical pressure, questioning their effectiveness.⁸⁶ The discourse frequently

⁸¹ 'Pod Predsedatel'stvom Il'khama Aliyeva Sostoyalos' Soveshchaniye, Posvyashchennoye Itogam Shesti Mesyatsev Etogo Goda, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting Chaired by Ilham Aliyev Dedicated to the Results of the First Six Months of This Year was Held, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/56665> [accessed 18 June 2026]; 'Il'kham Aliyev prinyal uchastiye v zasedanii Soveta glav gosudarstv SNG v Astane, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Attended the Meeting of the CIS Heads of State Council in Astana, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/57566> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁸² 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastnikov 53-Go Zasedaniya Soveta Rukovoditeley Organov Bezopasnosti i Spetsial'nykh Sluzhb Gosudarstv-Uchastnikov SNG, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Received the Participants of the 53rd Meeting of the Council of Heads of Security Agencies and Special Services of CIS Member States, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'.

⁸³ Interv'yu Il'khama Aliyeva Avtoritetnomu Rossiyskomu Zhurnalu "Natsional'naya Oborona", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev's Interview with the Prestigious Russian Magazine "National Defense", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'.

⁸⁴ 'V Sochi sostoyalos' trekhstoronnaya vstrecha mezhdru Prezidentom Rossii Vladimirom Putiny, Prezidentom Azerbaydzhana Il'khamom Aliyevym i prem'yer-ministrom Armenii Nikolom Pashinyanom, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Trilateral Meeting Between Russian President Vladimir Putin, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was Held in Sochi, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/54420> [accessed 14 June 2026].

⁸⁵ 'Il'kham Aliyev Provel Press-Konferentsiyu Dlya Predstaviteley Mestnykh i Zarubezhnykh SMI, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Held a Press Conference for Representatives of Local and Foreign Media, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'.

⁸⁶ 'Pod predsedatel'stvom Prezidenta Il'khama Aliyeva sostoyalos' soveshchaniye v videoformate, posvyashchennoye itogam 2020 goda, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A

raised the deployment of Armenian-made mines in the peacekeepers' zone of responsibility in 2021,⁸⁷ the downing of the Azerbaijani civilian aircraft by the Russian side and the subsequent justifications characterized by Aliyev as “kindergarten-like” and the transportation of “illegal ore” through the Lachin (Berdzor) corridor.⁸⁸

All this served to legitimize the installation of the Lachin (Berdzor) checkpoint. Aliyev’s statement that Azerbaijan did not ask the Russian side but simply informed them of its actions is characteristic. However, following the end of the conflict and the premature departure of the peacekeepers, the discourse softens sharply. The withdrawal is presented as proof of the trust and the “high level of alliance” between the two leaders, demonstrating that the two sides manage to resolve even the most sensitive issues without confrontation.⁸⁹

In this context, Ilham Aliyev categorically denies all accusations of ethnic cleansing or the forced displacement of Armenians. According to the official Azerbaijani view, the departure of the Armenian population after the September 2023 events was their “own decision”.⁹⁰ According to him, Azerbaijan provided “the most comfortable conditions possible” for those leaving. Aliyev strongly criticizes France and certain representatives of the European Union (such as Josep Borrell) for spreading “false narratives” and “black propaganda” regarding ethnic cleansing.⁹¹

Video Conference Chaired by President Ilham Aliyev Dedicated to the Results of 2020 was Held, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁸⁷ Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Forume "Karabakh: Vozvrashcheniye Domoy Spustya 30 Let. Dostizheniya i Trudnosti", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the Forum "Karabakh: Back Home After 30 Years. Accomplishments and Challenges", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'; 'Il'kham Aliyev Vystupil Na Shushinskoy Global'nom Mediaforume, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Spoke at the Shusha Global Media Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁸⁸ 'Sostoyalas' Vstrecha s Uchastnikami III Shushinskogo Global'nogo Mediaforuma, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting was Held with the Participants of the 3rd Shusha Global Media Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/69421> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁸⁹ 'Sostoyalas' Vstrecha Prezidenta Il'khama Aliyeva i Prezidenta Vladimira Putina Odin Na Odin, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A One-on-One Meeting was Held Between President Ilham Aliyev and President Vladimir Putin, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/65564> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁹⁰ ‘ Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Evron'yus", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Euronews TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'; 'Interv'yu Il'khama Aliyeva Telekanalu "Evron'yus", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev's Interview with Euronews TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁹¹ ‘ Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastnikov 53-Go Zasedaniya Soveta Rukovoditeley Organov Bezopasnosti i Spetsial'nykh Sluzhb Gosudarstv-Uchastnikov SNG, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Received the Participants of the 53rd Meeting of the Council of Heads of Security Agencies and Special Services of CIS Member States, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'; ‘V Universitete ADA s Uchastiyem Il'khama

In Aliyev's rhetoric, Russian-Turkish cooperation gains special significance. He frequently presents the joint Turkish-Russian monitoring center as a new and effective format for ensuring security in the region.⁹² In his view, the foundation of regional stability is not Western intervention, but rather the cooperation between Russia, Turkey, and other states of the region. This idea is most clearly expressed through the support shown for the "3+3" format, where Russia is viewed as a key participant in regional security.⁹³

Conclusion

The complex and dynamic mechanisms of constructing Russia's image in Azerbaijan's official rhetoric during the 2020-2025 period highlight that Baku's discourse toward Russia is built on a foundation of dualism. The primary sources for this research were the speeches, statements, and other materials published on the official website of the President of Azerbaijan. This selection is justified by the fact that in Azerbaijan's political system, the formulation and implementation of foreign policy are largely concentrated in the hands of the country's president. At the same time, the use of such a source base has certain limitations. In particular, exclusively studying the president's statements does not always allow for a complete reconstruction of the entire process of attitude formation and communication, considering the multi-layered nature of diplomatic practices, strategic communication, and political messaging. Attitudes and discourses regarding foreign policy are also formed and disseminated through other official and unofficial platforms, which are subjects for separate studies.

In the official discourse of the Azerbaijani leader, Russia is presented through various formulations: neighbor, partner, and subsequently, ally, which was codified in the 2022 Moscow Declaration. This shift is presented not as a coincidence, but as the result of the "strong political will" and personal trust between the leaders of the two countries, allowing relations to remain stable even amidst global geopolitical crises.

Aliyeva Sostoyalsya Mezhdunarodnyy Forum Na Temu "K Novomu Miroporyadku", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [An International Forum "Towards a New World Order" was Held at ADA University with the Participation of Ilham Aliyev, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan].

⁹² 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Forume "Karabakh: Vozvrashcheniye Domoy Spustya 30 Let. Dostizheniya i Trudnosti", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the Forum "Karabakh: Back Home After 30 Years. Accomplishments and Challenges", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan].

⁹³ 'Il'kham Aliyev Vystupil s Rech'yu Na V S'yезде Azerbaydzhantsev Mira v Shushe, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Delivered a Speech at the 5th Congress of World Azerbaijanis in Shusha, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/55859> [accessed 18 June 2026]; 'Il'kham Aliyev dal interv'yu Anatoliyskomu agentstvu Turtsii, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Turkey's Anadolu Agency, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/53249> [accessed 18 June 2026].

On the one hand, Azerbaijan constructs Russia as an indispensable ally and partner. This is manifested through the emphasis on bilateral economic relations, the development of the “North-South” transport corridor, as well as the preservation of humanitarian and historical ties and the Russian language. This discourse serves as a tool to mitigate tensions with Russia and encourage “allied interaction”.

On the other hand, in the post-conflict period, Azerbaijan strives to consolidate its status as a state with greater autonomy, consistently balancing Russian influence and emphasizing its own sovereignty. The premature departure of the Russian peacekeepers is presented in the official discourse as a manifestation of high-level trust. At the same time, the denial of ethnic cleansing and the framing of the depopulation of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh as the population's “own decision” demonstrate how Azerbaijan legitimizes its actions by rejecting any possibility of external (including Russian) intervention.

The research reveals that in Azerbaijan's rhetoric, allied ties do not imply political dependence. On the contrary, Baku employs a model of “symmetric partnership”, where any action threatening its own sovereignty meets with a harsh, demanding, and sometimes critical response. This allows Azerbaijan to present itself as an independent regional power in its relations with Russia.

Nevertheless, Azerbaijan positions itself as an indispensable geo-economic hub for Russia. Official rhetoric exploits the Western sanctions imposed against Russia, emphasizing the vital importance of the routes passing through Azerbaijani territory for Moscow. Simultaneously, by promoting the “3+3” format, Baku seeks to monopolize regional security together with Russia, pushing out extra-regional forces. Aliyev initiated this discourse as early as 2020, and by April 2022, he was already speaking about the necessity of its continuation.

In summary, during the studied period, Azerbaijan's official rhetoric constructed a model of relations with Russia based on a “symmetric partnership”. It allows for the utilization of the economic and security advantages provided by allied relations, while simultaneously maintaining ample room for geopolitical maneuvering.

Azerbaijan attempts to keep Russia at a close enough distance to neutralize threats, and at a far enough distance to emphasize its own independent role in the region.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.