

“Predictable Partnership”: Case of Russian-Azerbaijani Relations

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Abstract—After the collapse of the USSR and the restoration of state independence the Republic of Azerbaijan implements foreign policy in accordance with national interests, and builds equal and mutually beneficial relations with the Russian Federation as its main strategic partner. The nature of these relations can be considered predictable, the success of which is reflected in the areas of political dialogue and security, military, technical and economic cooperation, as well as in ongoing humanitarian projects. The article provides a detailed analysis of each of these areas, as well as examines the prospects of projects implemented by Azerbaijan and Russia in the framework of “predictable partnership”.

Keywords—Azerbaijan; Russia; strategic cooperation; regional security; Caspian Sea; South Caucasus

I. INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the Soviet Union marked not only the geopolitical shift of the end of the XX century, but also created the basis for the new era of relations between the former metropolis - Russia and the former Soviet republics. A special model that can be called a “predictable partnership” is the cooperation between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation.

Pragmatic political, economic and cultural cooperation between the countries laid the foundations for stability and regional security in the South Caucasus and in the basin of the Caspian Sea, where the geopolitical and national interests of various countries intersect. Of course, the key to success of the “predictable partnership” is associated with the political will of the leaders of Azerbaijan and Russia, as well as the successful work of state authorities and the dialogue between civil societies of the two countries, which laid a solid foundation for bilateral cooperation.

Azerbaijan and Russia are successfully cooperating in the production and transportation of hydrocarbons, the development of transport projects, and the trade in agricultural and industrial products. A key factor of the partnership is cross-border cooperation in order to combat such negative trends as religious extremism and terrorism.

Along with the political and economic component of bilateral relations, humanitarian cooperation is of particular importance, which can be considered as an independent

direction in the “predictable partnership” of Azerbaijan and Russia. It is the centuries-old cultural and civilizational coexistence of the peoples of the two countries within the same state, familiarization with each other’s rich culture and historical heritage, as well as the factor of intensive human connections that successfully complement the modern pragmatic nature of relations between the two states.

The history of relations between the former metropolis and the former soviet republic over the past three decades is characterized by periods of both mutual distrust and fruitful cooperation. Bakhrevsky E. [7] identifies several stages in the development of relations between the two states. The first stage relates to 1991-1993 (during the reign of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan), which was characterized by the predominance of destructive moments in relations between the two countries. The second stage dates from 1993 until 1997, the beginning of which is connected with Heydar Aliyev’s coming to power in Azerbaijan. This stage is characterized by stability, which resulted in the conclusion of the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Security between Russia and Azerbaijan. Period of 1997-2001 refer to the third stage, which is characterized as “the time of mutual searches for the optimal parameters of cooperation between the two countries”. The fourth stage falls on the years 2001-2008, marked by the dynamic development of mutual understanding between the two countries, the apogee of which falls on the adoption of the Declaration of Friendship and Strategic Partnership between Azerbaijan and Russia. Since 2008, relations between the two countries have entered the fifth stage of development.

The current stage of relations between Russia and Azerbaijan, which we decided to call as “predictable partnership”, is connected with the deepening of economic cooperation between the two states, building political dialogue and strengthening regional and international security, as well as cooperation in the military-technical and humanitarian spheres. In this regard, it seems logical to analyze each of the areas constituting the essence of the relationship between the two states at the present stage of their development

II. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted on the basis of a descriptive analysis of key areas of cooperation between Azerbaijan and Russia, the pragmatic and confidential nature of which allows us to call it predictable. A detailed analysis of these areas on the basis of both academic and periodic literature, as well as official statistical data, allows the author to identify future trends in relations between the two countries and present a forecast regarding the directions and prospects of “predictable partnership”.

III. DISCUSSION

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A. *Economic Cooperation*

The economic cooperation of Azerbaijan with Russia, as well as with other countries, is based on the principles of equality and mutual benefit. The trade and economic agreements signed between the countries after the collapse of the USSR raised questions of cooperation in monetary and exchange rate policies, as well as in the energy sphere. These agreements were concluded by the Azerbaijan Republic not only with the federal government, but also with the subjects of the Russian Federation. Moreover, economic cooperation between the two countries is also successfully developing at the level of international intergovernmental organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC). The trade missions of Azerbaijan and Russia are successfully operating in the capitals of both countries. The Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation between Azerbaijan and Russia, along with the trade missions of the ministries of economy of the two countries, are effective mechanisms of organizing and conducting business forums, trade fairs, exhibitions and conferences with the participation of representatives of private structures of Azerbaijan and Russia. In addition, in order to develop economic cooperation with Russia, commissions were established between Azerbaijan and the Moscow government, the administration of St. Petersburg, as well as the governments of Tatarstan and Dagestan.

The issue of economic cooperation between Azerbaijan and Russia within the CIS deserves special attention, as the priority areas are enshrined in the documents adopted by the CIS:

- Completion of the formation and full functioning of the free trade zone within the CIS in accordance with the rules and regulations of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

- The development of common markets for certain types of products, primarily agricultural.
- Interaction in the field of transport, including the formation of a network of international transport corridors.
- Development of cooperation in the field of energy in order to increase the reliability of energy supply and optimize the use of fuel and energy resources.
- Formation on the basis of national innovation systems of interstate innovation space, contributing to the promotion of scientific and technical developments and inventions.
- Creation of efficient payment and settlement mechanisms and wider use of the stock market for the mutual movement of financial capital [8].

The basis of economic relations between Azerbaijan and Russia is trade that has reached record levels over the past few years. At the moment Azerbaijan is the most important and largest trade partner of Russia in the South Caucasus region. It is noteworthy that along with the growth of quantitative indicators of exports and imports, the trend of qualitative transformation of the structure of trade has been widely developed between the two former Soviet republics. The latest statistics indicate that in 2017 the trade turnover grew by 35%, amounting to 2.5 billion dollars [9]. There is no doubt that the basis for the successful development of trade between the two countries is the factor of the rapid development of the economic infrastructure, as well as the growth of the market capacity. These factors, in turn, contribute to the maintenance of intensive trade between Azerbaijan and Russia, increasing the complementarity of trade, which allows us to predict the further development of Azerbaijani-Russian economic relations. This forecast is confirmed by the fact of signing a number of intergovernmental and interdepartmental documents between Azerbaijan and Russia during the official visit of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev to Russia in September 2018. The package of documents (14 documents, among those 5 roadmaps were presented) provides for the deepening of economic relations between the two countries until 2024. In this regard, President Aliyev noted that “the growth in commodity turnover also speaks of positive trends in the economies of our countries, as well as of the great potential of economic cooperation. I am sure that the trade turnover will grow in the following years” [13].

Economic cooperation between Azerbaijan and Russia covers not only trade and investment, but also spheres of energy, transport, engineering, etc. At the same time, given the fall in oil prices and the devaluation of national currencies, both countries attach particular importance to the development of non-oil sector, seeking to diversify economies. Russia is Azerbaijan’s main partner in non-energy (non-oil) exports of the Republic of Azerbaijan, within the framework of whose cooperation economic projects are being implemented in the fields of tourism, pharmaceuticals, engineering and real estate.

The transport and communication projects of the two countries, namely the North-South route, imply the

implementation of a number of ambitious infrastructure projects. As Mamedov F. points out, “along with this, a lot of work is being done to facilitate bureaucratic procedures to increase the competitiveness of the route. The President of Azerbaijan noted a 100-fold increase in freight traffic in 2017 along the North-South route, if last year the freight traffic amounted to only 1,700 tons, then in only seven months of the current year the volume increased to 170 thousand tons” [11].

B. Political Dialogue and Security

Political dialogue and security are areas in which the relations between Russia and Azerbaijan are dynamically developing. An important component of this process is the political will and confidential relations between the presidents of the two states. In the field of regional and international security, countries have common goals, within the framework of which law enforcement agencies of states cooperate, meetings at the level of countries' Security Councils are held periodically, and joint measures are taken to combat international terrorism.

The nature of predictability and the high level of trust that characterize relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation are also confirmed in the new tradition established last year by the leaders of the general staffs of Russia and NATO. In 2018 in Baku the chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation Valery Gerasimov twice met with NATO commander-in-chief Curtis Scaparrotti, during which issues of European and global security were discussed. Given the growing tensions between Russia and the United States, as well as with the NATO, the choice of Baku as a platform for dialogue between the two political parties that are actually in a state of confrontation indicates the growing prestige of Azerbaijan as an international actor. Moreover, Azerbaijan is a member of the Non-Aligned Movement and is not a member of any military-political bloc. The main principles that guide the Republic of Azerbaijan in foreign policy are respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state of the world community, as well as equal cooperation based on a solid foundation of international law.

Another format directly related to Azerbaijan, within which cooperation between Russia and the United States is implemented, is the OSCE Minsk Group, which deals with the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the form of political dialogue with the participation of both parties to the conflict and the co-chair countries. Despite the fact that the conflict has not been resolved for 30 years [1-2], the efforts of the co-chair countries show respect for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the inviolability of its state borders.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that diplomatic efforts and peace initiatives undertaken by Russia to resolve the Karabakh conflict do not contradict cooperation with the Republic of Azerbaijan in the military-technical sphere [4]. Today, Azerbaijan has acquired military equipment for its total amount equal to 5 billion dollars from Russia. The prospects for the development of cooperation in the military-technical sphere are determined by the growth of technologies of the Russian military industrial complex, which coincides with the needs of Azerbaijan.

One of the regions in which the interests of Azerbaijan and Russia overlap can be considered the Caspian Sea basin, disputes and disagreements over the legal status of which have been going on for more than two decades. The landmark event in this direction was the conclusion of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea last year in Aktau. This document was the result of a complex diplomatic work carried out over 22 years by the five Caspian littoral states. The adopted document creates an opportunity to define the boundaries of national sectors in the Caspian under international law, and also gives an additional impetus to the cooperation of the Caspian “five”. It is obvious that after the conclusion of the agreement, the laying of the pipeline under the Caspian Sea will begin, as well as multilateral cooperation in the transport and communications sector [5].

C. Humanitarian Cooperation

Humanitarian cooperation between Azerbaijan and Russia acquires special significance due to the fact that the human factor has become a defining element of the foreign policy activities of states. So, if until recently, foreign policy was implemented exclusively by representatives of government bodies, modern international relations are characterized by the participation of representatives of civil society. According to [10], this in turn is due to the fact that in the post-bipolar world non-military and non-economic resources of foreign policy influence, so-called alternative resources, which are commonly called “soft power,” acquire special significance.

According to [14], the expansion of humanitarian cooperation between Azerbaijan and Russia with wide involvement of civil society into this cooperation fully meets the national interests of the two states, contributes to the depoliticization and de-ideologization of bilateral relations. According to a fair opinion of a number of experts, today “the processes of humanitarian interaction between the two countries are no longer just a separate addition to the political efforts of states, but also an independent process that unites our countries at the level of civil society” [15].

The Moscow Declaration, signed in 2004 during the visit of the President of Azerbaijan to Russia, can rightly be considered as the key document promoting successful cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan in the humanitarian sphere. Thus, a special section on the humanitarian relations of the former Soviet republics contains the following areas of cooperation:

- the expansion of youth and student exchanges, relations between the media, contacts between scientists and artists;
- development of ties in the field of national education systems;
- study on a mutual basis of Russian and Azerbaijani languages and literature;
- guaranteeing favorable conditions for the preservation and development of the ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious identity of national minorities;

- creation of conditions for the start of operation of the Russian Cultural Center in Baku, expansion of the activities of the Baku Slavic University.

The Russian Information and Cultural Center was opened in Baku in 2011. As for universities, it should be noted not only the expansion of BSU activities, but also the opening of branches of the Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov and the First Moscow State Medical University (MGMU) named after I. M. Sechenov.

An important element of humanitarian cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan, that holds together the spiritual and cultural community of our peoples, is the Russian language. Despite the fact that the Russian language has no official status in Azerbaijan, the interest for it remains, which, in particular, is confirmed in such an important area as education. In Azerbaijan, secondary schools, higher and secondary educational institutions with programs in Russian continue to function. Moreover, since 2010, at the initiative of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan with the assistance of the Russian Embassy in Azerbaijan and the representative office of Rossotrudnichestvo the project for in-depth study of the Russian language has been successfully implemented in 50 pilot schools with instruction only in the Azerbaijani language.

Special attention should be paid to the fact that cooperation in the field of popularization of languages is conducted on a reciprocal basis. Thus, the Moscow State Linguistic University has a center for learning the Azerbaijani language. In December 2009, at the site of the Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov, a presentation of the textbook of the Azerbaijani language was held.

Analyzing the humanitarian cooperation between Azerbaijan and Russia the successful format functioning since 2010 - the Baku International Humanitarian Forum [6], which is traditionally held in the capital of Azerbaijan under the auspices of the heads of the two states, should be especially mentioned. The forum gathers on its site representatives of the political, scientific and cultural elite of the world community, including prominent statesmen, Nobel Prize winners, leaders of international organizations in order to hold a dialogue, exchange views and discuss a wide range of global issues of interest to the entire world community.

IV. RESULTS

Over the past decade the strategic partnership between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation has reached the new level, turning into an exemplary model of "predictable partnership". The exemplary nature of this model is due to the political and economic realities of the modern post-bipolar world, characterized by the confrontational nature of relations between the West and Russia, protectionism policies and the growth of populism, as well as negative trends such as the growing geography of international terrorism, extremism and propaganda of national and religious intolerance. In such

conditions, the predictable nature of relations based on the generally accepted principles of international law and the spirit of respect for sovereignty and good neighborliness is a desirable paradigm that will allow developing mutually beneficial cooperation of states in the future as well as making a significant contribution to common efforts to ensure international peace and security.

Azerbaijan and Russia have a number of coinciding interests both in the South Caucasus region and the Caspian Sea basin, and on the global level, which implies joint efforts to combat terrorism and extremism. Moreover, such landmark projects as North-South Corridor, the Baku International Humanitarian Forum, as well as the support provided by the two countries to each other at the sites of international organizations such as the UN, the Council of Europe and the CIS, allow us to conclude that the significant part of these projects can be implemented on a multilateral basis with the participation of a larger number of international players. This approach, based on a solid foundation of international law, will help avoid tensions in the system of international relations itself, and also allow conflicting subjects of international law to join forces to respond to contemporary challenges and threats to international peace and security using successful international dialogue platforms.

V. CONCLUSION

The relations established between Russia and Azerbaijan can be fully described by the term "strategic partnership". It is the predictable nature of the relationship, as well as the common goals and strategic interests of the two former Soviet republics that led to maintenance of the regional security, the implementation of major economic and transport projects, agreement on the status of the Caspian Sea, as well as coordinated fight against terrorism and extremism in the Caucasus. This is essential for this region, in which various civilizations and geopolitical interests of various world powers intersect, as well as national interests of regional subjects of international law. The successful model of the "predictable partnership" of the regional leader, Azerbaijan and the global power, Russia, is the guarantor of stability, security and peaceful coexistence in the South Caucasus region. At the same time, the unresolved territorial conflicts that arose after the collapse of the USSR, including the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, pose a threat to regional security, as well as hampering the full-fledged economic development of the South Caucasus. In this regard, Russia, as the main strategic partner of Azerbaijan, should make every effort within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group to resolve the conflict within the framework of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This, in turn, will strengthen the position of Russia in the region as a great power, interested in peace and security in the Caucasus, and will also give impetus to the development of regional economic, energy and transport projects.

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