

УДК 327

ESTABLISHMENT, CURRENT STATE AND PROSPECTS OF POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN AZERBAIJAN AND SERBIA

СТВОРЕННЯ, ПОТОЧНИЙ СТАН І ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ ПОЛІТИЧНИХ ВІДНОСИН МІЖ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНОМ І СЕРБІЄЮ

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Abstract. The article examines the establishment, dynamics and current state of political and diplomatic relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Serbia, development trends and reasons hindering the development of political relations, as well as targeted visits of heads of state and government. It also analyzes in detail the role of organizations engaged in cooperation between the two countries in the political sphere, the activities of the intergovernmental commission, the Inter-Parliamentary Group and other issues.

Key words: Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, Baku, political-diplomatic relations, Kosovo conflict, president, parliament, prime minister, MFA, embassy

Анотація. У статті розглянуто встановлення, динаміку та поточний стан політико-дипломатичних відносин між Азербайджанською Республікою та Республікою Сербія, тенденції розвитку та причини, що перешкоджають розвитку політичних відносин, а також цілеспрямовані візити глав держав та урядів. Тут також детально проаналізовано роль органів, що здійснюють співпрацю між двома країнами в політичній сфері, діяльність міжурядової комісії, міжпарламентської групи та інші питання.

Ключові слова: Азербайджанська Республіка, Республіка Сербія, Белград, Баку, політико-дипломатичні відносини, Косовський конфлікт, президент, парламент, прем'єр-міністр, МЗС, посольство

Introduction. The development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the Republic of Serbia in the political sphere is one of the most important directions of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. The independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan was recognized by the official Belgrade representing the Yugoslav Federation on December 31, 1991, and diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on August 21, 1997 [Azərbaycan Respublikası Xarici İşlər Nazirliyi. Xarici siyasət. İkitərəfli münasibətlər, 1997]. The passage of political relations between the two countries through specific stages of development indicates the presence of important and specific moments of cooperation between the parties. In particular, over the past ten to twelve years, relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Serbia have been developing in all spheres. High-level mutual official visits and documents signed during these visits indicate that Azerbaijan is at the stage of developing cooperation relations with Serbia in the political sphere.

The latest literature review. In recent years, scholars have paid considerable attention the political relations between the two countries. Here we can specify the works of such authors as Askerzade A., İsmayılov M., Bayramov V. and others who have covered this problem.

The purpose of the research is to establish political relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Serbia, to identify their current state and prospects through scientific and political research.

Research results. The position of the Azerbaijani state on the Kosovo issue was one of the factors that seriously affected the political relations between our countries. Speaking about the Kosovo issue, the first thing that comes to mind is the participation of peacekeeping forces. So, in January 1997, a peacekeeping unit was created as part of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces. After the ratification of the agreement between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the Republic of Turkey in the Azerbaijani Parliament on October 20, 1999 on the status of the Azerbaijani contingent going to Kosovo within the framework of the Kosovo task force, a group of Azerbaijani peacekeeping contingent servicemen began to perform their duties in this direction [Askerzade, 2009, p.6].

Since September 1999, a Turkish battalion of the Azerbaijani peacekeeping platoon (1 officer, 1 sergeant and 32 soldiers) has been operating in Kosovo. The Azerbaijani peacekeeping platoon provided security in the area of Dragash (the settlement of Brod, etc.). At a meeting with Azerbaijani Defense Minister Safar Abiyev, NATO Secretary General Lord George Robertson expressed gratitude for the role of Azerbaijani peacekeepers and stressed “the special position of the Azerbaijani contingent of more than 40,000 peacekeepers in Kosovo” [Askerzade, 2009, p.6].

On February 26, 2008, immediately after the Kosovo Parliament declared independence, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev declared that this decision was illegal, recognized the territorial integrity of Serbia and expressed political will regarding the withdrawal of Azerbaijani peacekeepers from Kosovo. The Milli Majlis made a decision in April 2008, and the Azerbaijani peacekeeping platoon was withdrawn from Kosovo once and for all [Beynəlxalq sülhməramlı əməliyyatlarda iştirak, 2008].

Baku’s decision to withdraw its peacekeeping forces from Kosovo has certainly disappointed the Muslim residents of this place. However, residents of the Dragash region, as children of a common Islamic culture, understood Azerbaijan’s step in this direction, as well as the non-recognition of Kosovo’s independence due to the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia [Kosova’da Karabağ Olayları Az Biliniyor, 2012].

It should be noted that the withdrawal of our peacekeeping forces from Kosovo and the non-recognition of the independence of a region with a common Islamic cultural heritage was a decision that meets the national interests of Azerbaijan, and in this matter the state interests of Serbia and Azerbaijan coincided. This position of our state, of course, had a positive impact on the development of Belgrade-Baku political relations, and soon at the 86th plenary session of the UN General Assembly on March 14, 2008, Serbia defended the legal position of Azerbaijan. Thus, at this plenary meeting, the draft resolution “on the situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan” (A/62/L.42) was considered, resolution 62/243 was discussed and adopted. Serbia was among the 39 countries that voted for the resolution during the voting [Резолюции и решения принятые Генеральной Ассамблеей на шестьдесят второй сессии, 2008, p.3].

Until 2010, meetings of state and government officials coincided only at international events, meetings of regional and international organizations. For example, during Serbia’s chairmanship in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization in 2006-2007 [Почео састанак Савета министара спољних послова БСЕЦ, 2008], Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Mammadyarov visited Belgrade, and in 2003, 2004, 2009, when our country chaired the NOD [Azərbaycan - Qara Dəniz İqtisadi Əməkdaşlıq Təşkilatı (QDİƏT) münasibətləri, 2009], the Serbian Foreign Minister visited Baku [Məmmədli, 2014]. October 10-12, 2007 Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources H. Bagirov at the 6th Belgrade Conference of European Environment Ministers [Azərbaycan Respublikasının Serbiya Respublikasındakı səfirliyi], on December 5, 2008, Justice Minister F. Mammadov in Belgrade, with the support of the OSCE, took part in an international conference on the topic of teaching the judiciary [Məhkəmə islahatı üzrə Azərbaycanın təcrübəsi böyük maraq doğurur].

The Ministers of Azerbaijan and Serbia, who took part in international events, also held a bilateral meeting during the visit and exchanged views on the creation of a regulatory framework for cooperation and the development of ties between our countries.

On May 11-13, 2010, Serbian President Boris Tadic arrived in Azerbaijan on an official visit and resumed bilateral political relations between Baku and Belgrade, entering an important stage when mutual visits of high-level government officials became intensive [Azərbaycan Respublikası Xarici İşlər Nazirliyi. Xarici siyasət].

At the meeting of the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Serbia in an expanded format, the sides exchanged views on political, economic, humanitarian, cultural, judicial, legal and other issues related to bilateral, as well as regional and multilateral cooperation. President Ilham Aliyev stressed that relations between our countries have reached a new level, Serbia is regarded as a strategic partner, and strong bilateral relations serve and open up opportunities for expanding regional cooperation between the Balkan and Caucasian regions. In turn, President Boris Tadic announced Serbia's intention to develop relations with Azerbaijan as true friends. The Presidents also noted that our countries have common interests in preserving territorial integrity [Azərbaycan və Serbiya Prezidentlərinin geniş tərkibdə görüşü olmuşdur, 2010].

After the meeting, the presidents signed a "Joint statement", "Protocol on cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia", "Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on trade and economic cooperation", The "Convention between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on the abolition of double taxation with respect to taxes on income and property" and other intergovernmental agreements [Azərbaycan Respublikası Xarici İşlər Nazirliyi. Xarici siyasət] serve the purpose of establishing long-term strategic relations between the parties and strengthening cooperation based on the principles of friendship.

The joint statement of the Presidents determined further prospects for the development of cooperation in all spheres of relations between the two countries: international organizations (UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, etc.) took part in it, deepening cooperation within the framework of international cooperation, the need for close cooperation in combating all forms of international crime, investing in the economy and the importance of obtaining benefits from energy projects, this also affected the position of the parties, which clearly focused on territorial integrity and other issues [Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin və Serbiya Respublikası Prezidentinin Birgə Bəyanatı].

The protocol on cooperation signed during the visit between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs refers to the development of bilateral relations in the political, economic, scientific, technical, cultural and consular spheres, the promotion of intensive dialogue and cooperation within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, dialogue on visa regimes and simplification of visa procedures, the Diplomatic Academy The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia and "Kosa Popovich" provided for the exchange of experience, lecturers and participants between the Diplomatic Academy, etc. [İsmayılov, 2018, p.286].

In general, the results of the first official visit of the President of Serbia at a high level were positive and significant in terms of the development of bilateral relations.

An event regarded as an important step in relations – the opening of the Azerbaijani Embassy in Belgrade in March 2010 and the Serbian Embassy in Baku in May 2011 [Azerbaijan-Serbia relations, 2020] opened up new opportunities in the development of bilateral diplomatic and political relations.

On May 26, 2011, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, in an interview with the newly appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Serbia to our country Zoran Vajovic, noted the importance of mutual visits at a high level in the development of bilateral relations, noted that the visit of President Boris Tadic in May last year was very successful and productive, and noted that he stressed the presence of a large the potential for expanding cooperation between our countries in various fields [Azerbaijan-Serbia relations, 2020].

It should be noted that embassies have played an important role in the development of relations. Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Belgrade Eldar Hasanov, carrying out active work in this direction, constantly kept in touch with the leaders and representatives of state and

government bodies, the Parliament of Serbia, tried to keep in the spotlight and develop the current state of political, economic, humanitarian and inter-parliamentary relations between the two countries.

One of the main activities of the Embassy is to bring objective information about the Karabakh issue to the Serbian public, to achieve parliamentary recognition of the Khojaly genocide. Despite the fact that the Khojaly genocide has not been recognized in the Serbian Parliament, this issue has become public knowledge and the subject of discussion in the press.

The state visit of President Ilham Aliyev to Serbia on June 8-9, 2011 gave an impetus to the expansion of cooperation and brought a new content to the relations – the content of strategic partnership. At the one-on-one and expanded meeting of the heads of state, it was stressed that cooperation between our countries is successfully developing in political, economic, cultural, humanitarian, scientific, educational and other spheres, and high-level bilateral visits contribute to deepening relations [Əliyev İ., 2017, p.142]. President Boris Tadic called Azerbaijan an important partner of Serbia, noted the importance of strengthening political, economic, cultural and humanitarian ties between the parties. Stressing the high level of political ties, President Ilham Aliyev expressed confidence that Azerbaijani-Serbian relations will develop rapidly. The Presidents emphasized that they support the territorial integrity of our countries [Əliyev İ., 2017, p. 143; 32].

After the meeting, our countries signed 12 agreements on cooperation in the field of emergencies, economics, science, education, energy, civil aviation, culture, sports, tourism and other spheres [Əliyev İ., 2017, pp.144-146].

Making a statement at a press conference after the signing of the documents, President Boris Tadic expressed his agreement with the political relations that have risen to a strategic level and stated that he would constantly protect the territorial integrity of our country, commented on the main content of the signed agreements, touched upon areas of cooperation in energy and other sectors of the economy,

He thanked Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev for the financial assistance allocated in connection with the construction of cultural centers in Belgrade, and noted that they also discussed issues of cooperation in the field of health and defense [Əliyev İ., 2017, pp.147-149].

President Ilham Aliyev, making a statement, noted that our multifaceted relations are based on strong political ties, that there are tolerant and multicultural traditions in Serbia and Azerbaijan, stressed the importance of combining efforts in these areas [Azərbaycan və Serbiya prezidentləri mətbuata bəyanatlarla çıxış etmişlər].

During his visit to Serbia, President Ilham Aliyev also held meetings with the President of the National Assembly, Mrs. Slavica Djukic-Dejanovic and other officials who played an important role in the development of a wide range of relations between the two countries. Chairman of the Serbian Parliament – National Assembly Slavica Djukic-Dejanovic at a meeting with President Ilham Aliyev said that she considers Azerbaijan a strategic partner, attaches great importance to cooperation in various fields and international organizations, that it is necessary to develop cooperation in the field of inter-parliamentary relations [Əliyev İ., 2017, p. 154].

During the visit, President Ilham Aliyev took part in the opening of Tashmaidan Park in Belgrade and the monument to national leader Heydar Aliyev installed here [Azərbaycan Prezidenti İlham Əliyev Belqradada Taşmaydan parkının açılış mərasimində iştirak etmişdir, 2011], the Azerbaijani Embassy in Serbia and the bust of the brilliant composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli in Novi Sad [Serbiyanın Novi Sad şəhərində Üzeyir Hacıbəylinin büstü açılmışdır. “Azərbaycan” qəz, 2011]. The monument in Tashmaidan Park was visited. In the speeches delivered at both inaugural events, it was emphasized that relations between the two states are built on the basis of strategic partnership, relations will be strengthened in all directions in a bilateral and multilateral format [Azərbaycan Prezidenti İlham Əliyev Belqradada Taşmaydan parkının açılış mərasimində iştirak etmişdir, 2011].

After the visit of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev to Serbia, relations between the two countries became even more strained, and numerous exchanges of visits were

carried out. Among them the visits of Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic as Co-Chairman of the intergovernmental commission (August 31, 2011 - September 01), Minister of Labor and Social Policy Rasim Ljajic and Minister of Agriculture, Trade, Forestry and Water Management Petrovic (January 24-25, 2012), Minister of Economy and Regional Development Nebojsa Chiric (February 2, 2012), Minister of Foreign Affairs Vuk Jeremic (January 24-25, 2012) to participate in International Conference organized on March 14-15, 2012) and a delegation led by Deputy Chairman of the Milli Majlis AR Bahar Muradova to participate in the 20th session of the OSCE PA in Belgrade (2011, 06 – July 10), mutual visits of Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov and Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov (October 11, 2012) to participate in the anniversary event dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the Non-Aligned Movement, in particular, on February 7-9, 2013, the official visit of President Tomislav Nikolic to Azerbaijan occupy an important place.

Ilham Aliyev, who stressed the successful development of Azerbaijani-Serbian cooperation at the meeting with the Serbian Foreign Minister, positively assessed the high level of political ties between our countries and noted good prospects for bilateral ties. The Serbian Foreign Minister expressed solidarity with the President of Azerbaijan [Əliyev İ., 2017, p.174].

And the official visit of Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic to the Republic of Azerbaijan in February 2013 was an indicator of the high level of political ties between the two countries and opened up new opportunities for the development of relations.

At the one-on-one and expanded meeting of the presidents, the current state of individual spheres of relations within bilateral and international organizations was discussed, satisfaction was expressed with the effective development of bilateral relations, it was shown that there are broad prospects for cooperation in the fields of economy, energy, transport, investment, etc. The idea of President Tomislav Nikolic that our country should become a very reliable partner for Serbia was approved by the head of our state.

Several documents were signed during the visit. The most important political outcome of the high-level visit was the signing of the “declaration on friendly relations and strategic partnership” between our countries. The declaration supported the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Serbia, expressed the importance of resolving the Armenian-Azerbaijani and Kosovo conflicts in accordance with international law, cooperation in combating international terrorism, organized crime, arms and drug smuggling and human trafficking, preservation of cultural and historical values and other areas [Azərbaycan Respublikası və Serbiya Respublikası arasında dostluq münasibətləri və strateji tərəfdaşlıq haqqında Bəyannamə].

Then, in a statement by President Ilham Aliyev to the press, he reported on the successful development of relations between our countries, spoke in detail about the signed agreements and, in particular, about the provisions of the declaration and expressed confidence that after this visit, the relations of friendship and partnership between the two countries will reach a new level: “We will continue to cooperate successfully as friends and partners” [Əliyev İ., 2018, pp.24-25].

Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic, commenting on every word of President Ilham Aliyev about the indissoluble Azerbaijani-Serbian friendship, noted that in just a few years an intensive political dialogue at a high level has developed between our countries, official visits of heads of state have taken place, serious results have been achieved in bilateral and multilateral cooperation, our countries have become strategic partners, the Azerbaijani-Serbian friendship is an excellent example of mutual understanding and the establishment of friendly relations between peoples of different faiths [Əliyev İ., 2018, .25-26].

During the visit, President Tomislav Nikolic took part in the unveiling of the monument to Serbian scientist Nikola Tesla in the center of Baku.

Thus, the agreements signed during the visit, useful exchanges of views and statements by the heads of state brought the two countries even closer, opening up new opportunities for the development of friendly relations and interaction between the parties.

On April 13-15, 2015, Prime Minister Alexander Vucic and a delegation paid an official visit to Azerbaijan to participate in a meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission. President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev received the delegation. The sides exchanged views on the current state

and prospects of cooperation in such areas as energy, infrastructure, investments, cargo transportation, cultural, humanitarian, territorial integrity of our countries. During the discussions, we see a coincidence of the positions of the parties [İlham Əliyev Serbiya Baş nazirinin rəhbərlik etdiyi nümayəndə heyətini qəbul edib, 2015].

9 days after this meeting of the intergovernmental commission, on April 24, President Tomislav Nikolic visited the Republic of Armenia at a memorial service on the occasion of the centenary of the “fictitious Armenian Genocide”. This step by Serbia, which chaired the OSCE in 2015, naturally did not meet with satisfaction among the Azerbaijani public. At the same time, this step showed that Serbia, despite its strategic partnership with Azerbaijan, maintains close relations with Armenia and pursues a balanced policy in the South Caucasus.

The political analysis of the relations shows that the heads of state, in particular İlham Aliyev, played an exceptional role in the development of Azerbaijani-Serbian relations. In this sense, for his contribution to the development of friendship and cooperation between the two countries, Azerbaijani Head of State İlham Aliyev was awarded the highest Order of Serbia.

The logical conclusion of the development of Azerbaijani-Serbian political-diplomatic, bilateral and geopolitical relations along a dynamic and ascending line was the official visit to our country on May 21-22, 2018 by the President of the Republic of Serbia Alexander Vucic. During the meeting of İlham Aliyev and Alexander Vucic in an expanded format, an exchange of views on bilateral relations, regional and international issues took place, the presidents demonstrated the political will for more active cooperation. Alexander Vucic also congratulated İlham Aliyev on his election as president and on the 100th anniversary of the ADR [Əliyev İ., 2019, pp. 66-67].

After the meeting, agreements and memoranda were signed on healthcare, justice, quarantine and plant protection, international road and air transportation, “joint action plan for strategic partnership”, the presidents made statements to the press. In his speech, President İlham Aliyev said that the agreements and memoranda concluded will open up new opportunities for deepening relations, and the joint action plan for strategic partnership is an important and very important document that reflects all the important issues related to further cooperation. The Heads of State stated that the current state of trade turnover is unsatisfactory and that the exchange of views and cooperation to increase its volume will bring a positive result, considering this high-level meeting as another great success of Azerbaijani-Serbian political relations [Əliyev İ., 2019, pp.71-76].

Regular consultations between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs occupy an important place in the development of political relations between our countries. The Azerbaijani-Serbian Foreign Ministry held another political consultation in June 2019 in Belgrade with the participation of Deputy Ministers (R.Hasanov and Z.Vuyich), held among the delegations under the chairmanship. Consultations attract attention, covering almost all areas of relations.

The factor of the delivery of a large batch of mortar shells of various calibers from Serbia to Armenia during the Tovuz battles on July 12-14, 2020 had a negative impact on Azerbaijani-Serbian relations, military-economic relations. As you know, a few days before the start of hostilities, a large batch of mortar shells of various calibers was delivered from Serbia to Armenia.

On August 7, President Aleksandar Vucic called President İlham Aliyev to express regret over the incident and send a high-ranking delegation to investigate the situation, highly appreciated the strategic partnership relations between our countries and invited his colleague to make an official visit to Serbia. President İlham Aliyev welcomed his colleague’s decision to send a high-ranking Serbian delegation to investigate and discuss [Serbiya Respublikasının Prezidenti Aleksandr Vuçiç İlham Əliyevə telefonla zəng edib, 2020]. An important role in overcoming the problem was played by the agreement of the Presidents on the inadmissibility of actions in the future that negatively affect the interstate strategic partnership.

On July 25, 2021, President İlham Aliyev received a delegation headed by Serbian Foreign Minister Nikola Selakovic. The meeting discussed important areas of strategic partnership relations between the two countries, the role of the next meeting of the intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation in deepening economic cooperation, the participation of Serbian companies

in the restoration and reconstruction of our lands liberated from occupation against the background of the restoration of the territorial integrity of our countries.

Then, at the meeting of the Serbian Minister with his Azerbaijani counterpart, an exchange of views took place on further intensification of cooperation in bilateral and multilateral formats, issues of economic cooperation, visa liberalization and the creation of direct flights between Belgrade and Baku, preparations for the 60th anniversary of the Non-Aligned Movement were discussed. The Minister noted that Serbia attaches special importance to the strategic partnership with Azerbaijan, and expressed confidence that the high-level dialogue will be strengthened in the coming period. On this occasion, Selakovich invited Minister Bayramov to pay an official visit to Serbia. In addition, the head of Serbian diplomacy agreed with his Azerbaijani counterpart to hold bilateral political consultations between the two ministries, especially in the field of consular work. At the meeting, it was emphasized that both countries are committed to observing the principles of international law, as well as mutually support the preservation of territorial integrity and sovereignty .

On November 23, 2022, within the framework of the state visit of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev to Serbia, the heads of state signed the “Joint Statement between the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the President of the Republic of Serbia”, “Memorandum on the establishment of the Strategic Partnership Council between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Serbia” and the annex to it “Regulations of the Strategic Partnership Council between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Serbia”. Thus, the political relations between the two states have moved to a qualitatively higher level - the level of strategic partnership and alliance.

Conclusions. Thus, official diplomatic, political, economic and other relations between Azerbaijan and Serbia developed in the form of multilateral cooperation within the framework of the UN and international organizations until 2010. The visits of the heads of state have become the highest form of bilateral cooperation. The political will of the heads of state played an important role in the regulation, development and transition of political relations between our countries to the level of strategic partnership. Studies show that along with heads of state, heads of government, chairmen of parliaments, foreign ministers and chairmen of relevant committees, the Azerbaijani-Serbian Interparliamentary Friendship Group, as well as the ambassadors of both countries were an important component of the implementation of political ties. Thus, the parties attach great importance to political cooperation at the level of strategic partnership and alliance, which creates confidence in the prospects for the development of political relations.

As a result of the establishment of a close political dialogue and high-level partnership between Serbia and Montenegro, where cold relations on the Kosovo issue still remain, Azerbaijan has strengthened the geopolitical, political and economic positions of our state in the Balkan region, characterized by a complex ethno-political configuration.

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