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Azerbaijan–Israel Relations in the Legacy of Heydar Aliyev: Education Collaboration

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Abstract—The strong partnership between Azerbaijan and Israel is based on mutual respect, shared values, and a long-standing tradition of tolerance. For centuries, Jews have lived peacefully in Azerbaijan, free from antisemitism and able to preserve their identity. Since regaining independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has developed close ties with Israel as part of its Western-oriented foreign policy. This relationship has grown across multiple sectors, including energy, defense, agriculture, and technology. High-level visits by Azerbaijani Presidents Heydar Aliyev and Ilham Aliyev, along with Israeli Prime Ministers, have deepened diplomatic cooperation and mutual trust. Security collaboration, particularly in the fight against international terrorism, remains a central pillar of their partnership. The two countries continue to strengthen their strategic alliance through shared interests and consistent political dialogue, making their bilateral relations a notable example of successful inter-state cooperation in a complex geopolitical landscape

Keywords— Azerbaijan; Israel; relations; policy; education.

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INTRODUCTION

The relations between Azerbaijan and Israel are deeply rooted in centuries of mutual respect, tolerance, and cooperation, forming a strong bond that has withstood various historical challenges. Despite difficulties faced over time, this relationship has remained resilient, grounded in a shared commitment to combating discrimination and promoting inclusion. Azerbaijan's long-standing tradition of peaceful coexistence with its Jewish communities is a clear reflection of its tolerant and progressive society. Jews in Azerbaijan have been able to preserve their traditions while actively contributing to the country's social, cultural, and political life, demonstrating mutual respect and acceptance. Over recent decades, this historical friendship has evolved into a dynamic strategic partnership, expanding into key areas such as security, energy, economic development, and technology. Cooperation in combating global terrorism and

ongoing high-level diplomatic exchanges have further strengthened bilateral ties. The unwavering efforts of both nations reflect mutual trust and a shared vision for peace and prosperity, both regionally and globally. This partnership stands as a model for how countries with different cultures and histories can collaborate through mutual respect and common goals. Importantly, the role of National Leader Heydar Aliyev in shaping and developing Azerbaijan–Israel relations is undeniable. His visionary leadership laid the foundation for this enduring partnership and ensured its continuous growth. Under his guidance, Azerbaijan not only prioritized sovereignty but also recognized the strategic value of strong international alliances—especially with Israel

EARLY DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS

Following its declaration of independence on October 18, 1991, Azerbaijan promptly set a strategic objective to establish a significant influence in the international arena. Merely two months subsequent to its independence, on December 25, 1991, Israel became the second country after Turkey to officially recognize Azerbaijan's sovereignty. This early recognition constituted a pivotal milestone in Azerbaijan's foreign policy and served as a catalyst for the development of diplomatic relations between the two states. Consequently, on April 7, 1992, Azerbaijan and Israel formally established diplomatic relations, marking the inception of a durable and mutually beneficial partnership. The establishment of these diplomatic ties enhanced Azerbaijan's stature and significance on the global stage. This partnership with Israel not only fortified Azerbaijan's diplomatic position but also laid the groundwork for cooperation in key domains such as security, trade, and technology. Since 1992, both nations have collaborated across various sectors, deriving reciprocal benefits from shared interests and mutual support. As bilateral relations continue to evolve progressively, Azerbaijan's principal challenge remains the consolidation of its international relations while ensuring global security and prosperity.

Israel's recognition of Azerbaijan shortly after its independence was particularly consequential, as it represented one of the earliest instances of Israel establishing formal diplomatic relations with a Muslim-majority country following Turkey and Egypt. This development was a strategic maneuver by Israel aimed at demonstrating its capacity to forge partnerships with Muslim-majority nations and mitigating its regional isolation. Azerbaijan's geographical proximity to Israel's regional adversary, Iran, further underscored the strategic importance of this alliance. Although Israel established an embassy in Baku as early as 1993, Azerbaijan initially exercised caution, conducting diplomatic and economic exchanges through informal channels, such as Azerbaijani Airlines offices in Israel. This prudent approach gradually evolved into a deeper and more strategic relationship, reflecting growing mutual trust and cooperation.

Heydar Aliyev played a significant role in the formation of Azerbaijan's relations with Israel not only in the political and economic spheres but also in the development of educational and humanitarian cooperation. During his leadership, particularly between 1993 and 2003, Azerbaijan's foreign policy was oriented toward integration with the West, and within this framework, the development of relations with Israel was actively encouraged. In the field of education, Heydar Aliyev's role was primarily characterized by the creation of an institutional and political foundation for cooperation. As a result of his policies, opportunities for scientific exchange, academic collaboration, and student mobility between Azerbaijan and Israel expanded. During this period, the groundwork was laid for the establishment of initial contacts between Azerbaijani higher education institutions and Israeli universities. Moreover, by strengthening policies of multiculturalism and religious tolerance in Azerbaijan,

Heydar Aliyev supported the development of the Jewish community, thereby fostering a favorable environment for educational and cultural exchange. Jewish schools and cultural centers operating in Azerbaijan also developed within this context. During Heydar Aliyev's visit to Israel in 1997, issues related to cooperation in education and culture were discussed, which subsequently contributed to the establishment of inter-university links. Additionally, during his tenure, the educational infrastructure of the Jewish community in Azerbaijan was supported. In particular, in places such as Qırmızı Qəsəbə, the functioning of Jewish schools was preserved and further developed, strengthening the social basis of humanitarian and educational ties with Israel. In the early 2000s, the emergence of opportunities for Azerbaijani students to pursue education in Israel, especially in fields such as technology and agriculture, can also be regarded as a result of the foreign policy course initiated by Heydar Aliyev. Although many concrete programs were expanded in later years, the legal-diplomatic framework, language instruction, and the initial stages of academic cooperation were effectively established during his leadership. Overall, Heydar Aliyev's role in the field of education is characterized less by the direct implementation of specific programs and more by strategic vision and political support. He laid the foundation for Azerbaijan-Israel scientific and educational cooperation, creating the basis for its further deepening in subsequent years.

A significant advancement in bilateral relations was achieved in July 2021, when Azerbaijan inaugurated a Trade and Tourism Representative Office in Tel Aviv. This office was subsequently upgraded to become Azerbaijan's first official embassy in Israel, formally inaugurated on March 29, 2023. This formalization symbolizes decades of diplomatic progress and a shared commitment to further deepen bilateral cooperation.

Azerbaijan's unique multicultural environment plays a pivotal role in fostering its relationship with Israel. Unlike many post-Soviet states, Azerbaijan is distinguished by the absence of antisemitism and by the presence of a longstanding Jewish community actively engaged in public, cultural, and political spheres. Notably, the Mountain Jews residing in the Red Settlement of the Guba region have inhabited the area for centuries, enriching Azerbaijan's cultural mosaic. Their historical and cultural ties to Israel have served as an important bridge facilitating strengthened bilateral relations, particularly in the spheres of trade, security, and technology. The Jewish community's active involvement has promoted mutual understanding and cooperation, thereby reinforcing Azerbaijan's reputation as a model of coexistence and inclusivity. Today, this community continues to contribute significantly to Azerbaijan's diversity and to the enhancement of its partnership with Israel (Azadgil, N. 2023. p.38-44).

THE EVOLUTION OF AZERBAIJANI-JEWISH RELATIONS AND THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH ISRAEL

The longstanding friendship and cooperation between Azerbaijanis and Jews constitute the foundation of their

profound historical relationship. For centuries, Azerbaijan has served as a significant refuge for Jewish communities, where they have not encountered antisemitism, enabling them to thrive both ethnically and religiously. The absence of discrimination has facilitated the preservation of unique Jewish traditions and their active participation in Azerbaijan's political, socio-economic, and cultural spheres. Their contributions have been instrumental in enhancing the values of diversity and inclusion within Azerbaijani society. Currently, the Jewish communities residing in Azerbaijan continue to receive protection and support from the Azerbaijani state and government, reflecting the country's enduring commitment to tolerance and peaceful coexistence. This tolerant approach has not only fostered the flourishing of Jewish culture but also strengthened bilateral ties between Azerbaijan and Israel. The advocacy and support provided by Jewish communities in Azerbaijan are highly valued by Israel and Jewish communities worldwide, thereby reinforcing the positive and expanding humanitarian relations between the two peoples. This enduring partnership exemplifies the power of mutual respect and understanding, creating a model of peaceful coexistence that transcends borders and cultures.

According to various scholarly studies, Azerbaijan historically constitutes the homeland of the so-called "Caucasian Mountain Jews"—Jews of Persian origin whose history dates back approximately two millennia, having begun to settle in Azerbaijan during the early fifth century. During the Russian imperial era, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Ashkenazi Jews also began to migrate to Azerbaijan. Their numbers increased significantly during World War II, as many Ashkenazi Jews sought refuge in Azerbaijan from Nazi persecution (Sloame, J. 2012).

The indispensable role and efforts of Azerbaijan's national leader, Heydar Aliyev, have substantially contributed to the advancement of relations between Azerbaijan and Israel to their present level. It is important to emphasize that Heydar Aliyev played a crucial role in establishing and developing Israeli-Azerbaijani relations. His visionary policies and strategic leadership laid the foundational framework for these diplomatic ties. Over time, these relations have been progressively strengthened. Under Aliyev's guidance, Azerbaijan focused on safeguarding its sovereignty while cultivating robust, multifaceted partnerships with key international allies. Israel, in particular, emerged as a principal partner benefiting from Aliyev's diplomatic foresight and acumen. Aliyev recognized that cultivating close ties with Israel would unlock opportunities across various sectors, including trade, security, technology, and cultural exchange. His strategic policies enabled Azerbaijan to diversify its international alliances and enhance its global influence through its relations with Israel. Thanks to Aliyev's leadership, Azerbaijani-Israeli relations have evolved into a strong and enduring strategic partnership that continues to develop and yield mutual benefits. The progression of bilateral relations under Aliyev's leadership has positioned Azerbaijan as a significant actor in regional and global affairs. Strengthening relations with Israel has contributed to Azerbaijan's security, economic prosperity, and diplomatic outreach, thereby enabling it to more effectively assert its influence in international politics.

Today, the legacy of Heydar Aliyev's policies continues to shape Azerbaijan's relations with Israel, ensuring that the partnership remains dynamic and advantageous for both nations. Aliyev's leadership was pivotal in laying the groundwork for a profound and mutually beneficial alliance, a legacy that continues to underpin Azerbaijan's robust ties with Israel.

Since regaining its independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has diligently worked to establish itself as a major regional power while simultaneously endeavoring to reclaim territories occupied by Armenia. In pursuit of these objectives, Azerbaijan has confronted not only territorial disputes but also external pressures from regional powers such as Russia and Iran. Against this complex geopolitical backdrop, Heydar Aliyev undertook significant strategic initiatives in Azerbaijan's foreign policy that substantially improved the country's prospects. Recognizing the importance of expanding alliances, Aliyev sought to deepen relations with Western countries and Israel, understanding that such partnerships would reinforce Azerbaijan's regional influence and safeguard its national interests. Aliyev's decision to engage more deeply with the West and Israel represented a turning point in Azerbaijan's foreign policy, opening new avenues for economic, technological, and security cooperation. The partnership with Israel, in particular, has provided Azerbaijan with considerable support in security, defense, and technological advancement. This strategic alignment has not only aided Azerbaijan's efforts to regain occupied territories but also played a vital role in securing its sovereignty and enhancing its position within the broader regional geopolitical framework.

Heydar Aliyev is widely regarded as a central figure in shaping Azerbaijan's foreign policy, especially in the post-Soviet period. His leadership facilitated Azerbaijan's navigation through a period of profound political and economic transformation and enabled the country to assert itself on the international stage. Aliyev's foreign policy approach was characterized by pragmatism and a comprehensive understanding of complex regional and global dynamics. He adeptly managed relations with major global powers—including Russia, Iran, and Western states—while maintaining Azerbaijan's sovereignty. One of the paramount achievements of Aliyev's presidency was the establishment and deepening of relations with Israel. This partnership has progressively strengthened, particularly in the domains of security, energy, and technology, and is recognized as a key element in the strategic dynamics of the region. It was Aliyev's foresight and diplomatic skill that ensured Azerbaijan's stable global position and laid the foundation for a lasting partnership, establishing Israel as a significant ally. The relations developed under Aliyev's leadership continue to play a central role in shaping Azerbaijan's foreign policy and international relations.

Aliyev incorporated the principle of tolerance as a foundational element in the state-building process of modern, independent Azerbaijan. This principle extended beyond fostering respect and understanding toward non-Muslim communities to embrace diverse religious beliefs, ethnic groups, and cultures, thereby ensuring that all communities felt valued within the nation. A salient example of this approach was the special attention devoted to the

Jewish community. Under Aliyev's leadership, Azerbaijan became a model of peaceful coexistence among different religious groups, including Jews, free from discrimination or marginalization. This tolerant ethos cultivated an environment of mutual respect, strengthening internal unity and positioning Azerbaijan as a global exemplar of interfaith harmony.

It is noteworthy that Jews born and living in Azerbaijan, as well as those who emigrated to Israel, have consistently regarded Azerbaijan as their homeland, exhibiting profound affection and loyalty. This sentiment is reflected in individuals and representatives of the Jewish diaspora, both within Azerbaijan and abroad. Thanks to the high values embedded in Azerbaijan's state-building process and the respect accorded to Jewish communities, Heydar Aliyev is remembered as a great friend of both the Jewish people and Israel. The establishment and development of relations between Azerbaijan, the State of Israel, and Jewish lobbies are closely linked to his leadership. Due to the tradition of tolerance instituted by Aliyev, Jews in Azerbaijan enjoy an atmosphere of deep friendship and brotherhood and consider Azerbaijan their homeland. The respect and reverence extended to Jews, alongside other ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, are direct outcomes of Aliyev's exemplary policies of tolerance (İsrail Təhlükəsizlik Akademiyası, 2022).

Although Azerbaijan's relations with Israel during the Soviet era were limited and indirect, the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the emergence of independent South Caucasus states marked a significant turning point in Azerbaijan's diplomatic history. The dissolution of the Soviet Union enabled Azerbaijan to regain sovereignty and pursue an independent foreign policy. This newfound autonomy allowed Azerbaijan to prioritize its national interests and establish direct diplomatic relations with compatible countries, including Israel. This shift in foreign policy priorities facilitated more formal and direct engagement with Israel, previously constrained by Soviet political dynamics. Enhanced relations with Israel opened new opportunities across sectors such as security, technology, and trade, enabling Azerbaijan to present itself as a dynamic and active international actor and to expand its global cooperation. Through engagement with Israel, Azerbaijan has strengthened its regional and international influence, laying the groundwork for a long-term, multifaceted partnership that continues to flourish today.

THE HISTORICAL AND STRATEGIC EVOLUTION OF AZERBAIJAN-ISRAEL RELATIONS: FROM FRIENDSHIP TO STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Initially, Azerbaijan, like many other post-Soviet countries, was cautious in its relations with Israel due to the complex geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East and the significant influence of neighboring states. Azerbaijan's newly independent status required careful handling of regional and international relations, balancing the interests of powerful neighbors and global powers. In addition,

Azerbaijan's geographical proximity to Iran made any direct diplomatic engagement with Israel sensitive and cautious. However, Azerbaijan's large oil reserves and strategically important geographic location quickly attracted the attention of the international community, including Israel. As Israel sought to expand its energy resources and influence in the region, Azerbaijan emerged as a valuable partner. Recognizing the potential mutual benefits of cooperation, Israel began to view Azerbaijan not only as an energy partner but also as a major actor in the South Caucasus region. In turn, Azerbaijan realized that partnership with Israel could provide it with significant advantages in many areas, especially in security, technology, and economic growth. This developing relationship became increasingly beneficial for both countries. While Azerbaijan's energy resources provided Israel with access to vital resources, Azerbaijan in turn gained access to Israeli expertise in areas such as technology, military cooperation, and security. This partnership created a unique balance, where both countries were able to strengthen their regional positions while contributing to each other's economic and security goals. Over time, these relationships have evolved into strong and strategic ties that continue to develop in various sectors.

The strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Israel, established during the leadership of Heydar Aliyev, has become a cornerstone of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. It was in the late 1990s that a significant shift in Azerbaijan's diplomatic orientation occurred, and Heydar Aliyev emphasized the importance of strengthening relations with Israel. Israel's technological expertise and regional influence played an important role in reshaping Azerbaijan's foreign policy. Such a step-in policy was associated with several main goals, primarily the desire to strengthen Azerbaijan's security, expand economic ties, and consolidate national sovereignty. Israel's advanced military technologies and experience in combating terrorism, especially during the Second Karabakh War, offered Azerbaijan the necessary opportunities to protect its sovereignty and solve regional security problems. In addition, this partnership opened doors for Azerbaijan to access advanced technologies in various industrial sectors, from energy to agriculture and infrastructure development, and created the opportunity to implement some mutually beneficial projects. The exchange of knowledge and technologies in sectors such as renewable energy, water management, and agricultural innovation also created conditions for the development of Azerbaijan's economy. Israel's influence in the region has helped elevate Azerbaijan's position in global diplomacy, open new avenues for cooperation, and increase its geopolitical influence.

The continued development of Azerbaijan-Israel relations reflects a convergence of shared goals in security, stability, and economic development. With Azerbaijan's energy wealth and Israel's technological prowess, the two nations have forged a partnership that goes beyond mere economic exchange. This partnership continues to grow, strengthening Azerbaijan's position as a regional power while contributing to both countries' long-term goals in energy, defense, and global diplomacy. Today, the Azerbaijan-Israel alliance is a powerful example of how mutual interests informed by

visionary leadership can create lasting, strategic partnerships that reshape national and regional trajectories.

Azerbaijan's energy resources play a crucial role in securing Israel's energy supply and strengthening its energy security. By reducing its dependence on traditional energy sources, Israel has been able to secure an energy supply that is vital to its long-term economic and geopolitical interests. Energy cooperation between Azerbaijan and Israel has enabled Israel to access alternative energy sources, ensuring the sustainability of its economy and reducing its dependence on other regional suppliers. Azerbaijan gains access to Israel's world-leading technologies, while Israel, in turn, secures valuable energy resources that enhance its security and economic stability. As a result, the strategic partnership between the two countries has deepened over the years, and both peoples have benefited significantly from the cooperation. This cooperation continues to play a crucial role in the broader regional dynamics and helps both countries strengthen their positions on the global stage.

After the national leader Heydar Aliyev came to power in 1993, special attention was paid to Azerbaijani-Israeli relations. The national leader, who played an important role in the expansion of cooperation between the two states and emphasized that relations between Azerbaijan and Israel have deep roots, highlighted that Jews have lived in Azerbaijan for centuries as equal citizens, and Azerbaijanis have never viewed them as representatives of a foreign nation. He also drew attention to the fact that Jews living in Azerbaijan have made significant contributions to the development of the country's science, culture, healthcare, economy, and industry since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, leaving an indelible mark. In this regard, Heydar Aliyev said: "These facts demonstrate the existing friendship and relations between Israel and Azerbaijan and between Azerbaijan and Jews all over the world. We want these relations to develop in the future, and we are taking and will take the necessary measures to make this happen. I hope that Israeli-Azerbaijani relations will expand further and be mutually beneficial for both sides." (Aliyev, H.Ə. 2009).

It should be noted that the meetings of the heads of state of Azerbaijan and Israel have played an important role in the development of relations between the two peoples. High-level discussions held at various international events have created a platform for addressing important issues for both countries, including humanitarian concerns, security, and economic development. National Leader Heydar Aliyev, his competent successor President Ilham Aliyev, and Israeli leaders have held many dialogues, strengthening political and diplomatic relations between the two countries. One of the main outcomes of these meetings has been the flourishing of Azerbaijani-Israeli humanitarian relations. Both states have worked together to address pressing humanitarian issues, focusing on the well-being of their citizens and broader regional stability. This cooperation has been marked by a spirit of mutual respect and collaboration that reflects the shared values and interests of the two countries.

As these relations continue to develop, there is great potential for future cooperation in various sectors. The strengthening relations between Azerbaijan and Israel create a solid foundation for expanded cooperation in areas such as

humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and joint initiatives for social development. In addition to humanitarian efforts, both countries are well-positioned to strengthen security and economic cooperation, creating a broader framework for mutual benefit. The ongoing high-level relations and strong diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Israel indicate a promising future for bilateral cooperation. In the mid-1990s, relations between Israel and Azerbaijan became stronger as both countries worked hard to build strategic partnerships and maintain consistent, high-level communication. Azerbaijan's national leader Heydar Aliyev played a key role in developing these relations by meeting with several Israeli prime ministers to strengthen diplomatic and economic cooperation. It is worth noting that Prime Ministers Yitzhak Rabin, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Ehud Barak were key Israeli leaders who participated in discussions that helped lay the foundation for relations (Haaretz. 2014).

In August 1997, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Baku for a short working visit, which marked a significant milestone in the expansion of bilateral relations. The visit further strengthened the growing diplomatic relationship between the two peoples, focusing on shared interests such as energy cooperation, security, and regional stability. The strategic alignment between Israel and Azerbaijan continued to develop in the following years, paving the way for deeper engagement across a variety of sectors. The visit of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Baku on August 29, 1997, was a significant milestone in the development of strong bilateral relations between Israel and Azerbaijan. During this stop, President Heydar Aliyev and Netanyahu discussed potential areas for future collaboration, including energy, science, technology, agriculture, medicine, trade, and telecommunications. The discussions also highlighted regional developments and the importance of cooperation between the two countries. Over time, these ties continued to flourish, with a total of 28 diplomatic and official state exchange visits between 1999 and 2014. These exchanges spanned numerous sectors, such as agriculture, economic development, medicine, transportation, and tourism, underscoring the multifaceted nature of their partnership (Murinson, A. 2014. p.15).

Furthermore, the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to Baku on February 15, 2010, reinforced the significance of the ongoing relationship between Israel and Azerbaijan, reaffirming their shared commitment to reciprocal cooperation. Continuing the strategy laid down by Heydar Aliyev, President Ilham Aliyev has further strengthened Azerbaijan-Israel relations through high-level diplomatic visits. President Ilham Aliyev's reception of Israeli President Shimon Peres in Baku in June 2009 was a significant step in strengthening ties between the two countries. The visit highlighted increased cooperation in various areas, including trade, defense, and technology. The strategic partnership continued to flourish with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Baku in December 2016, which further strengthened bilateral cooperation.

In addition, in 2014, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon paid an official visit to Azerbaijan and emphasized the importance of defense and security cooperation between the two countries. In response, Azerbaijani Defense Minister Zakir Hasanov visited Israel in September 2017 to discuss

issues of mutual interest, including security, military technology, and regional stability. These exchanges reflect the continued commitment of both peoples to developing a deep and multifaceted relationship based on shared interests and mutual respect. Through such high-level visits, diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Israel have continued to strengthen, and the conditions have been created for future cooperation in key areas (Eurasia Daily Monitor. 2017).

The rapid development of the Azerbaijan-Israel relationship is deeply rooted in history, as explained by Vafa Guluzade, a former chief foreign policy advisor to President Heydar Aliyev. Guluzade emphasized that the mutual respect and affection between the two nations has a strong historical foundation. Azerbaijan's leadership has long been committed to opposing any form of anti-Semitism, especially in the post-Soviet space, where such issues were often prevalent. Azerbaijan's proactive stance against anti-Semitism and its long-standing tradition of tolerance toward Jewish communities have been instrumental in fostering robust ties with Israel. This shared commitment to combating discrimination and promoting inclusivity has laid the groundwork for the positive diplomatic and economic relations that have flourished between the two countries. Viewed through this historical lens, the Azerbaijan-Israel relationship stands as one built on mutual respect, common values, and a shared vision for peace and cooperation. President Heydar Aliyev emphasized the historical importance of the friendship between Azerbaijan and Israel in his diplomatic efforts. In a speech addressed to Israeli diplomats, Heydar Aliyev stated, "The friendship between Azerbaijan and Israel has deep roots. For centuries, Jews have lived continuously in Azerbaijan as equal citizens. Azerbaijanis have never regarded them as foreigners." (Aliyev, H. 2000).

President Heydar Aliyev delivered a speech on the presentation day of the book "Heydar Aliyev: Features of a Political Portrait," published in Israel with the support of the Jewish Citizens' Society, one of the associations created by Jews who immigrated to Israel from Azerbaijan. He expressed his desire to develop relations with Israel further. Since Heydar Aliyev's first presidency, Azerbaijani-Israeli relations have reached their peak, attaining the level of strategic partnership. The first official visit between the two countries took place on December 6, 1993, when Israeli MP Efraim Sneh met with Heydar Aliyev. Eliezer Yotvat, the first Israeli ambassador to Azerbaijan, presented his credentials to Heydar Aliyev on March 22, 1994, and began his work. The National Leader of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, always kept Israel in mind and acted cautiously, not getting too close. That is why this policy was also called the "silent but deep" political line. Thus, on January 28, he met with the Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in Davos, and on November 2, 1996, he met with the Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu in Lisbon (Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin İşlər İdarəsi. 2012). On April 30, 1998, the national leader, speaking at a banquet dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel, emphasized the cultural and historical similarities, noting that both peoples were subjected to genocide (Aliyev, H. 1998).

Israel and Azerbaijan also maintain strong cooperation on security issues. In October 2001, President Heydar Aliyev met with Israel's Ambassador, Eitan Naeh, affirming that "their positions in the fight against international terrorism... were identical." (Khalifa-Zadeh, M. 2023. p.64). Heydar Aliyev, speaking about the relations between the two countries, noted that "Representatives of Jews living abroad often visit our country. There are ample opportunities for continuous development of relations between our countries. It is crucial to further expand these relations." (Aliyev, H. 1999).

Under the leadership of President Ilham Aliyev, who successfully continues the political course of the National Leader Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijan's foreign policy has led to close cooperation between Azerbaijan and Israel in areas such as energy, defense, national security, healthcare, agriculture, information technologies, tourism, and more.

"I am confident that this visit will give an impetus to the development of friendly relations between our countries." These words were spoken by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, during a high-level meeting with the President of the State of Israel, Isaac Herzog, in 2023 (Səs Media Holding. 2023)

In terms of military cooperation, Azerbaijani leaders first realized that the country's army was far behind enemy forces in terms of weapons, military equipment, and training during the armed conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. This awareness led to efforts to seek assistance from arms companies in the same country as the globally renowned Israeli army to rapidly restructure and arm the army (Abadi, J. 2014. p.11-12). One of the reasons why Israel was chosen as a source country was the country's expertise on the subject, as well as the fact that the US, which is in a position to supply weapons, included Azerbaijan among the banned countries under the influence of the Armenian lobby.

Considering that another source country, Russia, continued to supply \$1 billion worth of weapons and military equipment to Armenia, including Mig-29 fighter jets, Krug missiles, Grad multiple missile systems, and S-300 missile systems, while the ban, which started in 1993 and lasted for about 10 years, was ongoing, it becomes clear that Azerbaijan did not have many options other than Israel (Çağaptay, S. & Murinson, A. 2005). During an official visit to the United States in 1997, the National Leader Heydar Aliyev met with pro-Israeli lobby groups and asked them to support Azerbaijan (Aliyev, H. 1997). The success of these demands became clear when Article 907 of the "Freedom Support Act," which restricted aid to Azerbaijan, was eliminated in 2002 at the initiative of US President Bush, and it was revealed that the role of Jewish organizations in this could not be denied (Pashayev, H. (2003). After all these meetings, Heydar Aliyev made serious attempts to amend Article 907. Thanks to his successful policy with lobbies, many American Jews wrote letters to members of the Senate demanding its amendment. On December 3, 1999, Israeli Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh, who visited Azerbaijan, also emphasized that they would do their best for this (Cabbarlı, H. 2005. p.376).

CONCLUSION

The relationship between Azerbaijan and Israel serves as a notable example of successful diplomacy founded on mutual respect, shared values, and strategic cooperation. Rooted in a history of peaceful coexistence and tolerance, this partnership has grown into a multifaceted alliance across sectors such as energy, defense, technology, and agriculture. It highlights the ability of both nations to address regional challenges and complex global dynamics through collaboration. The longstanding presence of the Jewish community in Azerbaijan and the country's active stance against anti-Semitism have laid a solid foundation for bilateral relations. Under the leadership of National Leader Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijan's multicultural policy promoted inclusive participation of Jewish citizens in national life. Moreover, the country's strategic foreign policy, aiming to build alliances with the West and Israel, significantly shaped post-independence relations. Over the years, the partnership has advanced in critical areas like defense, economic development, and regional security. Azerbaijan's energy resources have contributed to Israel's energy security, while Israeli technological and military expertise has supported Azerbaijan's national defense and modernization efforts. Cooperation in defense systems and counterterrorism strategies has strengthened Azerbaijan's capabilities amid regional threats. This alliance has also fostered progress in agriculture, technology, and infrastructure, with knowledge exchange promoting economic growth and innovation. Their complementary strengths have reinforced both nations' positions regionally and globally. High-level diplomatic visits have deepened relations and set the stage for future cooperation. Under President İlham Aliyev's leadership, building on Heydar Aliyev's legacy, Azerbaijan-Israel ties remain a cornerstone of foreign policy, adapting to emerging global challenges and opportunities. Looking ahead, the partnership promises further growth. Shared values of tolerance, peace, and mutual benefit, supported by strategic leadership, continue to guide their collaboration. Despite geographic and cultural differences, relations between Azerbaijan and Israel are grounded in both pragmatic interests and enduring friendship.

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