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GEORGIA AND AZERBAIJAN - GEOPOLITICAL ALLIES

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Introduction. Georgian-Azerbaijani relations are one of the key factors influencing regional politics and security issues in the South Caucasus. They seriously affect energy trade, including the transport and transit sector - a priority area of cooperation between Baku and Tbilisi - and are reflected in the general situation in the region. In this regard, it is necessary to mention first of all the Baku-Supsa and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipelines, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline and the Kars-Akhalkalaki railway.

Our peoples are united by centuries-old good-neighborliness, mutual respect and friendly relations. Relations between our countries have reached the level of strategic partnership today. Georgian-Azerbaijani relations are developing in all spheres, be it politics, economics, energy, transport, culture, education, military and other spheres.

Keywords: *Azerbaijan, Georgia, cooperation, Geopolitical union, Strategic partnership*

After the restoration of state independence, the Republic of Azerbaijan began to pay great attention to the establishment and development of relations with neighboring Georgia in its foreign policy. It should be noted that the length of the state border between the two countries is 480 km. Even before the collapse of the USSR, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Azerbaijan in an appeal adopted on October 30, 1991 expressed confidence that Georgia would take an active part in the creation of a united and prosperous Caucasian home. On the same day, a statement was adopted recognizing the state independence of Georgia. ⁷ Thus, the first measures were taken in the direction of developing interstate relations. On December 16, 1991, the Parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan approved the agreement on friendship, cooperation and

good-neighborliness with Georgia submitted by the President of the country.

During this period, the internal political situation in Georgia worsened: the country was on the brink of civil war. This situation did not correspond to the interests of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Therefore, on December 25, the Supreme Council adopted an appeal to the Georgian people. This document expressed hope that the Georgian people, in the name of their peaceful and happy future, would achieve unity and solidarity through dialogue. Azerbaijan declared its readiness to mediate in achieving a national truce in Georgia. However, establishing stability in Georgia turned out to be a difficult process.

On November 18, 1992, diplomatic relations were established between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Georgia. This marked the beginning of a new stage in the relations between these countries. A number of factors contributed to the establishment and successful development of relations, which was quite natural. First of all, these countries were neighbors, i.e. they were close geographically. Georgia was a window to Europe for Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan, in turn, was a window to Asia for Georgia. For a long time in their history, the territories of both countries were part of Tsarist Russia, and then the USSR. The cultures of both peoples are close. The relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia, established in accordance with international norms and based on a balance of interests, were not directed against one or a group of countries. The uniqueness of the relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia was determined by historically established, modern and promising cooperation. Both countries and their peoples were united by historical traditions, political and geographical borders, and good neighborliness. The state independence of Georgia acquired great importance for Azerbaijan. Certain forces in neighboring Armenia exerted pressure

on Georgia and made territorial claims against it. An Armenian battalion fought against Georgia in Abkhazia. Armenian separatism was growing in Georgia itself. For Georgia, cooperation with Azerbaijan was one of the factors stimulating its socio-economic development. Georgian government and political figures clearly indicated that the successful implementation of political and economic reforms in their country was impossible without the support of Azerbaijan. One cannot ignore the fact that over half a million Azerbaijanis lived in Georgia, and Georgians lived in Azerbaijan. They influenced the state of relations between the countries.

On January 27, 1993, a decision was made to establish an embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Tbilisi. This decision gave impetus to a qualitative improvement in relations.

With the election of Eduard Shevardnadze to the post of chairman of parliament, the Georgian leadership began to pay special attention to relations with Azerbaijan. In February 1993, Eduard Shevardnadze visited Azerbaijan. During the visit, the most important issues of bilateral relations were discussed. As a result of the negotiations, a document on cooperation between the parliaments of the two countries was signed. On February 3, a treaty on friendship, cooperation and mutual security was signed. The treaty was ratified by the Azerbaijani parliament on April 21. The period that has begun in the relations between the countries should be characterized as initial, as a period of formation.

Transition to a qualitatively new stage in relations. A qualitatively new stage in relations between the two countries began in mid-1993. In Azerbaijan, this was facilitated by Heydar Aliyev, who came to power. By this time, problems had accumulated between the two countries, caused by the collapse of the USSR and subsequent events in the region. They needed to be resolved taking into account the interests of both countries. For this purpose, in 1994, a delegation headed by Georgian Prime Minister Otar Patsatsia visited Azerbaijan. During the Azerbaijani-Georgian negotiations, issues of economic, political and

cultural cooperation were discussed. The parties agreed to expand mutual relations. Georgia began to pay more attention to relations with Azerbaijan. In February 1995, the Georgian embassy was opened in Baku. In the same year, Chairman of the Georgian Parliament Vakhtang Gogvadze, First Deputy Prime Minister Zviad Kervalashvili, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Interethnic Relations Sandro Kavsadze visited Azerbaijan, and problems of a bilateral and regional nature were discussed. On April 15, an agreement on cooperation and interaction was signed between the Ministry of National Security of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State Security Service of Georgia. These measures opened up new opportunities for the development of relations and created conditions for holding high-level meetings. Finally, a turning point occurred in bilateral relations. In March 1996, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan visited Georgia. The main goal of the visit was to strengthen and develop friendly relations, to get acquainted with the situation of Azerbaijanis living in Georgia and to provide them with assistance. At the same time, Azerbaijan began to seek the transportation of Caspian export oil through Georgia. Discussion of this problem was necessary. Azerbaijan paid special attention to Georgia for several reasons. As stated above, Georgia was a neighboring and friendly state for Azerbaijan. There were close historical ties between the two countries. Azerbaijanis lived in this country, for whom Georgia was their homeland, their ancestors lived on these lands, their historical roots were there. At the meeting of state leaders, an exchange of views on bilateral relations, on regional and international issues was held. The talks revealed the unity of views of both sides on the issues under discussion. As a result of the visit, a treaty on friendship, cooperation and strengthening of bilateral security consisting of 22 articles was signed. Thus, the treaty on friendship, cooperation and mutual security signed between these countries on February 3, 1993, lost its force. The new treaty gave a more qualitative character to Azerbaijani-Georgian relations.

The leaders of both countries also signed the «Declaration on Peace, Stability and Security in the Caucasus Region». This was the first significant document on this issue. Its significance was largely determined by the situation in the Caucasus, where destabilization and many unresolved conflicts reigned. The leaders of the two states believed it was necessary to make efforts to achieve peace, stability and cooperation in the region. The document they signed opened up opportunities for regional cooperation. It consolidated the provisions of the declaration signed in 1996 in Kislovodsk between the presidents of Azerbaijan, Russia, Georgia and Armenia on the establishment of peace in the Caucasus. During the visit, a document was signed on the transportation of Azerbaijani oil to the Black Sea through Georgia. The proposed oil pipeline corresponded to the economic interests of both countries; it served the interests of friendship and cooperation. According to President Heydar Aliyev, there was no loser from the decision to build the oil pipeline; everyone only benefited. This decision was historic. The Azerbaijani president delivered a speech at a special session of the Georgian parliament. He reminded the parliamentarians of the history of friendly relations between the peoples of the two countries, noted that on May 28, 1918, it was in Tbilisi that the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was proclaimed. In his speech, he spoke about the difficulties that Azerbaijan faced after restoring independence, the consequences of Armenian aggression and efforts to resolve the conflict. He also recalled that when discussing the Abkhaz issue at the CIS meetings, he was the first to support Eduard Shevardnadze. Heydar Aliyev noted the importance of the signed documents, and especially the document on the transportation of Azerbaijani oil to the Black Sea coast through the territory of Georgia. During the visit, the Azerbaijani embassy in Georgia was opened, and Gajan Gadzhiyev became the first ambassador of Azerbaijan to Georgia. A monument to the Prime Minister of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic Fatali Khan Khoyski, who was killed on June 19, 1920 in Tbilisi by an Armenian terrorist, was unveiled. Heydar Aliyev

delivered a speech at the opening of the monument. Then he met with Muslim Azerbaijanis in the Juma Mosque and inquired about their concerns. Focusing on the problem of oil transportation, he said: “Natural gas produced in Azerbaijan was first delivered to Georgia in 1959, and a gas flare was lit in Tbilisi for the first time. Today, when our states have become independent, by making a decision to transport oil produced from the rich oil fields of Azerbaijan through Georgia and building a large oil pipeline, we are further strengthening the friendship and brotherly relations between our peoples.” On March 9, President Heydar Aliyev met with representatives of Azerbaijanis living in Georgia at the State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater in Tbilisi. Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze also attended the meeting. Both the issues raised in the speeches of Azerbaijani activists and their reaction to the leader’s historic speech and what he said in that speech had great meaning and significance. Having recalled in his speech the history of friendship between the two peoples, the Azerbaijani President pointed to the fact of violation of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and Georgia, the military aggression of Armenia, reported on the efforts undertaken for a peaceful settlement of the conflict, and proposed to establish closer relations. The visit of the President of Azerbaijan to Georgia was of great historical significance. The negotiations and discussions were productive. The signed documents launched a new stage in the relations between these countries. The visit became a natural continuation of the relations between the Azerbaijani and Georgian peoples. Both sides sought to develop relations. This can be demonstrated by the significant visit of the President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze to Azerbaijan on April 18, 1997. The parties hoped that the visit would become another new stage in the relations, lead to further development of cooperation, strengthening of friendship and brotherhood between the countries. The issues of deepening relations, economic cooperation, conflict resolution in the region, primarily in the territories of Georgia and Azerbaijan, were discussed at the negotiations. The heads of state

emphasized the importance of establishing stability in the region.

It should be noted that by this time 32 documents on bilateral relations had already been signed. Thus, the number of documents signed between Azerbaijan and Georgia reached 54. The documents concerned relations in the political, economic, cultural and humanitarian spheres. Of great importance was the declaration on the further development of strategic partnership, consisting of 15 articles. According to the President of Azerbaijan, the document met the national interests of both countries and their peoples. An agreement on cooperation in the oil and gas industry was signed between Azerbaijan and Georgia. The agreement provided for mutual cooperation in the development of hydrocarbon deposits and the transportation of these types of raw materials. This document was of great importance for the cooperation of the two countries in the matter of bringing energy resources to world markets. Intergovernmental agreements on cooperation in the field of culture and border issues were also signed. The visit was of great importance. First of all, the signed documents strengthened the foundations of bilateral relations. The unity of positions on bilateral and regional issues, cooperation on the problem of transportation of energy resources contributed to the strategic alliance of the two countries. After this event, both sides continued to work on strengthening the legal framework of relations. In this direction, on March 8, an agreement on strengthening friendship, cooperation and mutual security was signed in Tbilisi. On May 13, an agreement on regulating freight transportation was signed between Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Already at that time, Azerbaijan and Georgia, busy with the issue of energy transportation, were in the center of attention of the entire world. Some countries began to put pressure on Georgia. At that difficult time, Georgia needed political and diplomatic support. In this regard, on January 24, 1998, the President of Azerbaijan made a business visit to Georgia. The visit was timed to coincide with the 70th anniversary of E.

Shevardnadze. The leaders of the two countries exchanged views on a range of issues, including the relations between their countries. At the meeting, E. Shevardnadze told the President of Azerbaijan: «Your wise policy has played a major role ... in strengthening the historical friendly relations between our peoples and in the constantly developing cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia.» In resolving international and regional issues, Azerbaijan and Georgia were guided by the norms of international law and supported the policy of peace. They spoke from a single position in the CIS and international organizations. In previous years, both countries had experienced many difficulties. In his speech at the celebration of E. Shevardnadze's 70th birthday, Heydar Aliyev spoke about the friendship between their peoples, support in restoring Georgia's territorial integrity, and a qualitatively new level of relations between the two countries after the restoration of independence, which he was very happy about. Agreements on the transportation of oil produced in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea through Georgia displeased Russia. In February 1998, an attempt was made on E. Shevardnadze's life. Only chance helped him stay alive. Attempts at such assassinations did not affect Georgia's political course. Azerbaijan's support also played a major role in this.

In April 1999, a major event in the history of the two countries and the entire region took place. The land terminal in Supsa and the Varna-Poti-Batumi ferry route were opened, ensuring the export of oil produced in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian to the West. President Heydar Aliyev participated in the opening ceremony. As Georgian researcher Vladimir Papava wrote, the foundations of the economic partnership between Georgia and Azerbaijan, after the restoration of their independence, were laid by the construction of the Baku-Supsa and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipelines, as well as the construction of the South Caucasus Pipeline for pumping gas produced at the Shah Deniz field. As is known, despite the fact that the documents on the construction of the BTC oil pipeline were signed, the issue of transit tariffs

remained unresolved. Georgia put forward certain conditions, insisted on high transit tariffs. From an economic point of view, these conditions were unacceptable. Meetings of delegations of both countries were held to resolve the issue. A visit to Georgia was also made by Valeh Askerov, who supervised this issue at SOCAR. The Azerbaijani side tried to sign a commercial agreement on the construction of the pipeline as quickly as possible. Delays in the construction of the pipeline did not meet the interests of any state participating in the project. The solution to this issue became a requirement of that time. Therefore, on March 22-23, 2000, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev made an official visit to Georgia. The program of the visit included discussions of various issues on relations in the political and economic spheres.

The Department of Azerbaijani Language and Literature was opened at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of the Ilia Chavchavadze Tbilisi State Pedagogical University. Once a week, a half-hour program was broadcast in Azerbaijani. Under state tutelage, the weekly newspaper «Gurjustan» in Azerbaijani was published. In cities and regional centers of compact settlement of Azerbaijanis, newspapers in their native language began to be freely published. In Tbilisi, there was a Cultural Center of Azerbaijanis, as well as the house museums of M. F. Akhundov, J. Mamedguluzade, N. Narimanov. In 1997, a department for Azerbaijan was opened under the Union of Writers of Georgia. The President of Georgia signed a decree on the restoration of the Azerbaijan Drama Theater in Tbilisi and on the allocation of 10 places at the Tbilisi University of Theater and Cinema for the training of Azerbaijanis. All this had a serious impact on the relations between the two countries. The visit began with a one-on-one meeting of government leaders. For two hours, the presidents discussed in detail the issue of oil transit tariffs through Georgia. The presidents agreed to sign commercial agreements and submit these documents to their parliaments in April-May for ratification. This was the most important of the resolved issues. Both countries were interested in the comprehensive

development and deepening of the Trans-Caspian cooperation process in transporting energy resources to international markets. An exchange of views on the development of political, economic and social processes in these countries also took place. At the same time, the presidents discussed issues of further development and deepening of bilateral cooperation and current regional and international issues of mutual interest. Everything testified to the high level of bilateral relations based on strategic partnership. The parties demonstrated mutual interest in creating independent, sovereign, democratic Azerbaijan and Georgia in accordance with international law, as well as in developing a qualitatively new level of interstate relations in the 21st century. They believed that strengthening cooperation between their countries was of great importance for promoting the implementation of the historical law of creating a Europe without dividing borders in the 21st century, ensuring the foundations of stability in the region in the realities of new international conditions and the process of forming a new security system. Compliance with the principles of state sovereignty, legal equality, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, peaceful resolution of disputes, as well as other generally recognized norms and principles of international law could ensure peace and security in the South Caucasus region. Discussion of security issues in this region was of great importance for Azerbaijan and Georgia. This was explained primarily by the fact that militant separatist forces were operating in both countries. Therefore, it was extremely important for both countries to maintain and strengthen political stability. The state leaders of Azerbaijan and Georgia condemned acts of aggression aimed at forcibly changing the internationally recognized borders of the countries of the region, creating a threat to their security and territorial integrity, human rights and fundamental freedoms, the principles of democracy and universal values, all forms of militant separatism and terrorism. Azerbaijan and Georgia have demonstrated their will to fight these threats together. It should be noted that

the documents previously signed between the two countries – the Treaty on Strengthening Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Security of March 8, 1996, the Declaration on Peace, Security and Cooperation in the Caucasus Region of March 8, 1996, the Declaration on Further Deepening the Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Georgia of February 18, 1997 – laid the foundations for relations between the two countries. All this created the necessary conditions for the preparation of a fundamental document aimed at ensuring peace and security in the South Caucasus region. From this point of view, the proposal put forward at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul on the Security and Cooperation Pact in the South Caucasus and the results of this meeting were significant. The Charter on European Security and other documents adopted at this meeting, providing for the strengthening of security and stability in Europe in the 21st century, were of great importance. Azerbaijan and Georgia intended to continue to cooperate in the UN, OSCE, Euro-Atlantic Cooperation Council, Council of Europe, CIS and other international organizations and forums.

The effectiveness of the new European security structure depended, first of all, on the proper implementation of the commitments undertaken by all states, on the development of mechanisms for interaction between the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the Euro-Atlantic Cooperation Council, the European Union, NATO, and the UN. The Presidents of Azerbaijan and Georgia expressed their support for the earliest possible implementation of the UN and OSCE documents on the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia. They were confident that these conflicts should be resolved based on respect for and observance of the sovereignty of states, their territorial integrity, and the inviolability of borders. This provided reliable guarantees for ensuring peace, stability, and trust between the states of the South Caucasus. Of utmost importance was the implementation of joint effective measures to accelerate the full-scale operation of the Eurasian Transport Corridor, restore the Great Silk Road, and implement the

TRACECA programs. The leaders of the two states emphasized the importance of delimitation and demarcation of interstate borders and the need to continue the work of state commissions. The parties expressed their determination to implement measures to promote the development of mutually beneficial cooperation in all areas of the economy, as well as to ensure favorable conditions for this. Of great importance was the observance of the rights and protection of the interests of Azerbaijanis living in Georgia and Georgians living in Azerbaijan. The presidents of the countries considered care for them as an important part of their state policy. Heydar Aliyev reported on the acceptable conditions created for the cultural development of Georgians living in Azerbaijan. Eduard Shevardnadze pointed out the existence of «broad opportunities and prospects in relations based on sincere friendship, good neighborliness and strategic partnership.» Then the negotiations of the delegations continued in a broader format, all aspects of relations between the two countries were discussed and the will to deepen cooperation was expressed. Upon completion of the negotiations, a signing ceremony was held. A statement of the two leaders was adopted. Speaking after the signing ceremony, Heydar Aliyev and Eduard Shevardnadze highly appreciated the negotiations. On March 22, Heydar Aliyev met with representatives of the Georgian public. He awarded Eduard Shevardnadze with the highest award of the Republic of Azerbaijan – the Istiglal (Independence) Order. The award was presented for significant contribution to the emergence and strengthening of friendship between the Azerbaijani and Georgian peoples, for efforts to develop relations into strategic partnership. The award ceremony took place on the eve of the presidential elections in Georgia scheduled for April 8, and this was very meaningful. In all his speeches in Georgia, the Azerbaijani leader openly supported the election of Eduard Shevardnadze for a second presidential term. During the visit, Heydar Aliyev met with members of the Georgian parliament. In his speech to the parliamentarians, he pointed out the importance of inter-parliamentary cooperation.

This visit, which was of great importance, had a positive impact on the development of bilateral relations. Cooperation became even stronger. On August 15, 2001, Georgian Foreign Minister Irakli Menagarashvili arrived in Baku. The purpose of his visit was to prepare and discuss issues related to the upcoming visit of Eduard Shevardnadze to Azerbaijan. He was received by Heydar Aliyev, who outlined the prospects for the development of relations between the two countries.

During the preparation of Eduard Shevardnadze's visit, events that shook the entire world took place. On September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks were committed in the United States. They also had an impact on Azerbaijani-Georgian relations. A few days after these events, on September 29, Eduard Shevardnadze's official visit to Azerbaijan began. At a joint meeting, both state leaders condemned the terrorist attacks committed in the United States. They noted the great importance of the ongoing TRACECA program, the restoration of the Great Silk Road, the export of energy resources produced in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea to world markets, and in this regard, the implementation of the BTC main export oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline project, and an exchange of views on the peaceful settlement of conflicts in the South Caucasus and ensuring security in the region took place. Then, at a meeting of the delegations in full force, the parties discussed bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest. Relations between the countries rested on a solid foundation. The heads of state declared their readiness to take an active part in the discussion of efforts in the fight against terrorism and condemned the terrorist attacks in the United States. They also noted the inadmissibility of document substitution, the need to resolve conflicts within the UN and OSCE, and the exceptional importance of the full-scale operation of the Europe-Asia transport corridor. Delimitation and demarcation of the border between Azerbaijan and Georgia were also of great importance. Therefore, the state leaders believed that the work of the relevant commissions should be continued. The issue of the situation of Azerbaijanis in Georgia and Georgians in Azerbaijan was discussed, the protection of

their rights and freedoms, and care for them were recognized as an important area of state policy in their countries. Issues of strengthening economic cooperation were also discussed. In this regard, the construction of oil and gas pipelines was of great importance. Following the talks, a ceremony of signing bilateral documents was held. An agreement was signed on the transit, transportation and sale of natural gas in the territory of Georgia and the Republic of Azerbaijan and beyond through the South Caucasus Pipeline System. The heads of state signed a joint statement. The visit of the President of Georgia to Azerbaijan was of great importance. The negotiations were held in an atmosphere of mutual understanding. The documents contributed to the integration of Azerbaijan and Georgia with Western countries. The programs that were implemented were of great importance from the economic and social points of view and were aimed at resolving problems and were important for strengthening independence. Cooperation between the two countries also began to strengthen in other areas. In particular, on March 26, 2002, the Chairman of the State Border Protection Department Valeri Chkheidze visited Azerbaijan. During the visit, three documents were signed. These documents were supposed to facilitate the transition of the population of the border regions to both sides. Defense Minister David Tevzadze, who arrived in Baku on April 11, held talks on regional security issues, including the parties' capabilities to create stability in the region, as well as the security of the pipeline passing through the territory of Azerbaijan and Georgia. The defense ministries were entrusted with the protection of this pipeline.

This was one of the arguments for military cooperation. Military cooperation also included airspace control and exchange of experience in personnel training. The issue of training Georgian officers in Azerbaijan was also discussed. David Tevzadze was received by Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev. The importance of strengthening military relations was emphasized at the meeting. It was previously noted that regional security issues occupied an important place in relations between the two countries. Thus, at the meeting in Trabzon on April 29-30, 2002, the presidents of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia had two main tasks: expanding cooperation and strengthening security.

The agreement between Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia on combating terrorism, organized crime, smuggling, and ensuring the security of oil and gas pipeline routes, signed on April 30 as a result of the meeting, met the goal of ensuring peace and security. The heads of state adopted a statement on the results of the meeting. The meeting and the signed documents were of great importance. Thus, the presidents of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia laid the foundation for joint cooperation in the fight against terrorism, organized crime and smuggling. At the same time, they demonstrated their full determination regarding the main export oil pipeline BTC. Shortly after, on December 16, 2002, the Defense Ministers of Azerbaijan and Georgia signed a 12-article agreement on military cooperation. The parties agreed to cooperate in the field of military development, military-economic, military-scientific, military-legal activities; in military training and retraining of personnel, military-technical assistance to the development of air defense enterprises, in the development, production, supply, operation, modernization and repair of weapons and military equipment; on cooperation within the framework of NATO's Partnership for Peace program and within the framework of GUUAM in the fight against international terrorism, in holding bilateral and multilateral exercises to protect oil and gas pipelines and in other areas. In general, in 1991-2003 Among the issues discussed between the two countries were the export of Azerbaijani oil and gas to world markets through Georgia, security, the fight against terrorism, economic, scientific, technical, cultural and humanitarian cooperation. During these years, having gone through a difficult and contradictory path of development, the relationship was raised to the level of a strategic ally.

In 2009, the Consulate General of Azerbaijan was opened in the Georgian city of Batumi, and in 2013 - the Consulate General of Georgia in the city of Ganja.

There is active cooperation between our countries at the parliamentary level. Both countries have friendship groups and working groups in their legislative bodies. Last year, the Chairman of the Milli Majlis Sahiba Gafarova made an official visit to Georgia. And the Chairman of the Georgian

Parliament Sh. Papuashvili visited our country in May of this year to participate in a special meeting dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the national leader Heydar Aliyev.

Azerbaijan and Georgia have experience of mutual support for each other within the framework of international organizations. During the voting at the UN General Assembly sessions held on September 3, 2020, June 17, 2021 and June 8, 2022, on the resolution «On the situation of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia (Georgia) and South Ossetia (Georgia)», Azerbaijan supported the adoption of this document.

Our countries regularly conduct visits of high-ranking officials, which is a clear indication of the high level of bilateral relations.

Relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia in the economic sphere are also at a high level. The Joint Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation has been operating since 2004. The commission holds regular meetings, the last one was held in Tbilisi on December 15 last year.

In 2022, the trade turnover between the two countries amounted to 771 million US dollars, and the bilateral trade balance was positive for Azerbaijan in the amount of 500 million US dollars. In January-August of this year, bilateral trade turnover exceeded 612.87 million US dollars, and the positive balance of bilateral trade amounted to 444 million US dollars.

There are 815 commercial entities with Georgian capital registered in Azerbaijan, 533 of which are active. In total, Georgia has invested 279 million US dollars in Azerbaijan, while Azerbaijan has invested 3.4 billion US dollars in Georgia.

The location of both countries on the historic Silk Road and the implementation of large-scale joint energy and transport projects have increased the volume of cargo flow through our region many times over.

The implementation of large-scale global energy and transport and communications projects (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, etc.) within the framework of successful regional

cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia contributes to regional peace and stability.

Considering the relations between the two countries, cooperation in the humanitarian sphere should be especially emphasized. Speaking about cooperation in this area, it is necessary to especially note the numerous projects implemented in Georgia by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation. There is a street and park named after Heydar Aliyev in Tbilisi, and a monument to the national leader has been erected. This once again shows the great importance the great leader attached to relations with Georgia. The national leader described the relations between the peoples of the two countries as follows: «The Azerbaijani and Georgian

peoples are happy to be neighbors. Our ancestors established these contacts, and today it is our duty to develop this cooperation and pass it on to future generations.» Georgia also has the Heydar Aliyev Tbilisi State Professional Azerbaijani Drama Theater, the ERA Theater, and the recently created Beez Children's Theater. As mentioned above, Tbilisi also has the M.F. Akhundzade Museum of Azerbaijani Culture. This museum unites the house museums of M.F. Akhundzade, J. Mammadguluzade, and N. Narimanov. Azerbaijan and Georgia are strategic partners. This creates an opportunity for developing cooperation and further strengthening ties in all areas.

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МАРИНА ИЗОРИЯ

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ГРУЗИЯ И АЗЕРБАЙДЖАН - ГЕОПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ СОЮЗНИКИ

Резюме

Грузино-азербайджанские отношения — один из ключевых факторов, влияющих на региональную политику и проблемы безопасности на Южном Кавказе. Они серьезно воздействуют на торговлю энергоресурсами, в том числе на транспортно-транзитную сферу — приоритетную сферу сотрудничества между Баку и Тбилиси — и отражаются на общей ситуации в регионе. В этой связи следует упомянуть прежде всего о нефтепроводах Баку — Супса и Баку — Тбилиси — Джейхан, о газопроводе Баку — Тбилиси — Эрзерум и железная дорога Карс — Ахалкалаки.

Наши народы объединяют многовековые добрососедство, взаимоуважение и дружеские отношения. Отношения между нашими странами сегодня достигли уровня стратегического партнерства. Грузино-азербайджанские отношения развиваются во всех сферах, будь то политика, экономика, энергетика, транспорт, культура, образование, военная и другие сферы.

Ключевые слова - Азербайджан, Грузия, сотрудничество, Геополитический союз, Стратегическое партнерство