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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PROSPECTS FOR GROWING DEVELOPMENT OF COOPERATION OF AZERBAIJAN AND BULGARIA

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ABSTRACT

The main aim this article is to study some issues of the relationship between the countries of Azerbaijan and Bulgaria in the context of cooperation in the field of economic and energy security. During the study, methods were used for content analysis of international documents, facts and events in international relations. The novelty of this study is an extensive study of the formation of relations of cooperation between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria, where it gradually grew to the level of strategic partnership. It is noted that the increasing role of Azerbaijan in ensuring the energy security of European countries has significantly increased its importance in the region. In conclusion, it is noted that in the modern period, Azerbaijan is the main initiator in the region of strategically important projects with oil and gas fields. In this regard, the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, in order to ensure their energy interests, began intensifying their cooperation with Azerbaijan more intensively. In this context, a special role is given to the strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria.

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INTRODUCTION

In the modern period of globalization, where it is impossible to avoid the process of mutual influence, amazing events occur. In particular, processes in the field of energy and geopolitical security encourage historically hostile countries to cooperate. Of course, Bulgaria is not one of those countries that has ever been at war with Azerbaijan. On the contrary, our countries perceive each other as closely cooperating partners. Relations between Bulgaria, as a southeastern Balkan state and Azerbaijan, have a rich history, and these relations cover culture, art, science, and other areas.

METHODS AND MATERIAL

The poems of the outstanding great Azerbaijan poet Nizami Ganjavi were translated and published in Bulgarian in the 19th century, and at the same time the works of the classics of Bulgarian literature - Ivan Vazov, Hristo Botev, Emilian Stanev and many others were read, we love in Azerbaijan [1]. Bulgaria is one of the states that were the first to recognize the state independence of Azerbaijan. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on June 5, 1992 [2]. The first official visit of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev was to Bulgaria on June 29-30, 1995. During the visit, the President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev touched upon the history of Azerbaijan-Bulgaria

relations, discussed the general bases and perspectives of bilateral relations and narrated on the consequences of the Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan. The Bulgarian President defended Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and peace policy. [3, Part II, p.144]. In his speech at the Bulgarian People's Assembly, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan put into the picture the domestic and foreign policy of Azerbaijan by remarking the importance of Bulgaria's participation in discussion of the country's reforms and issues regarding occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas as a result of Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan, organization of the OSCE peacekeeping forces [4, IV book, pp.31-32]. At the end of the visit, a 26-item treaty on friendship and cooperation between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria was signed. The treaty envisages promoting relations on the basis of territorial integrity of the states, inviolability of borders, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference in internal affairs, and the restriction of arms and armed forces in Europe. According to the agreement, the parties undertake to create the essential conditions for the study, preservation and development of the language, religion and cultural freedom of the Azerbaijanis living in Bulgaria and the Bulgarians living in Azerbaijan, to develop economic relations and to cooperate within international organizations [3, Part II p.145]. This visit provided a robust political and legal foundation for further development of relations. The new stage in relations was laid on December 2-3, 1999, with the first official visit of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Petr Stoyanov to the Republic of Azerbaijan. At the meetings between the two presidents, the head of state, Heydar Aliyev highly evaluated

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Bulgaria's integration into the European Union and declared that Azerbaijan was moving in this direction [Book 17, XXIII book, pp. 143-148].

DISCUSSION

“Bulgaria is located in Eastern Europe, Azerbaijan is also a European country and is the farthest in Europe. We are very close to each other, and therefore our cooperation in the European area will undoubtedly be of great importance both for Azerbaijan and for Bulgaria” [4]. It should be noted that on the eve of the Bulgarian President's visit to Azerbaijan, in December 1999, the Bulgarian Embassy in Azerbaijan began to function. During the visit of Peter Stoyanov to Azerbaijan on December 2, 1999 a joint declaration was signed between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria. In the declaration, the parties reaffirmed their commitment to democratic reform, respecting and protection of human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, and the fulfillment of all obligations arising from the fundamental documents of the United Nations and the OSCE and declared their determination in the construction of legal democratic statehood. The parties will promote development of political dialogue at various levels, including inter-parliamentary relations, and will hold consultations on bilateral and international issues. Both countries emphasized the need for continuation of the processes aimed at promoting lasting peace, unity and co-operation with the countries in the South Caucasus region, the importance of peaceful resolution of conflicts and the prevention of creation of new trouble areas. The parties remarked the importance of the documents adopted at the OSCE Istanbul Summit to promote security and stability in Europe in the 21st century. In this context, they reaffirmed their support for a strong and comprehensive political resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in accordance with paragraph 20 of the OSCE Istanbul Summit Declaration dated of November 19, 1999 [5]. With the development of diplomatic and political relations, the establishment of the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Bulgaria has become a necessity. The law on establishment of the embassy of Azerbaijan in Bulgaria was signed on April 16, 2004 [6]. The President Ilham Aliyev signed a decree regarding appointment of Emil Zeynalov, as Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Republic of Bulgaria on February 3, 2005 [7]. Thus, the diplomatic relations between the two countries were established at the initial stage, the embassies began to operate in both countries, the strategic directions of the foreign policies of Bulgaria and Azerbaijan were determined, and the decision was made to deepen joint cooperation on the basis of common interests.

Deepening of political relations with Bulgaria: Political relations between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria began to develop at a new stage following the coming of President Ilham Aliyev to power in 2003. On October 7-8, 2004 the President of the Republic of Bulgaria Georgi Parvanov hold an official visit to the Republic of Azerbaijan. During his meeting with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, the two countries expressed their intention to further develop the existing ties. During the Bulgarian President's visit, the parties signed a joint declaration, new agreements in the field of health, economy and transport [8]. During the visit, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev and the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Georgi Parvanov signed the Joint

Statement on October 7, 2004. According to the declaration, both sides considered improvement of the legislative base, signing of agreements on cooperation in the field of culture, science, education, social insurance and interaction of citizens. The document highlights efficiency of improvement of bilateral and multilateral actions against international terrorism, trafficking in weapons of mass destruction, illicit trafficking of drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors, transnational organized crime, human and arms trafficking. The Azerbaijani side highly appreciated the negotiations for the accession of the Republic of Bulgaria to NATO and the European Union. The President of the Republic of Bulgaria reaffirmed his willingness to share the experiences of Bulgaria and its state institutions in the process of preparation of Azerbaijan for broad integration into European and Euro-Atlantic organizations. As the members of OSCE, the parties welcomed the acceleration of the negotiation process for the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as well as the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group and its co-chairs to resolve the conflict [9]. The first official visit of President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev to Bulgaria was on September 23-24, 2005. At a one-on-one meeting between the presidents of the two countries, President Ilham Aliyev said there were potential opportunities for cooperation, including high-level economic relations with Bulgaria at the regional and international levels. Touching upon the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Bulgarian President said that they would continue to support Azerbaijan's fair position. During the visit, the Governments of the two countries signed a Memorandum on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, an Agreement on Simplified Visa, a Memorandum of Understanding on deepening customs cooperation, as well as training and professional development of the staff. [8].

The President of Azerbaijan stated that the signed document on Euro-Atlantic integration was of great importance, that both countries play an important role in ensuring peace and security in various parts of the world and that political interests overlap [10]. One of the most important documents signed during the visit on September 23, 2005 was the Joint Declaration of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the President of the Republic of Bulgaria. The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the President of Bulgaria stated in the Declaration the importance of intensifying of cooperation between the parliaments of the two countries, joint activities under the NATO Partnership for Peace and Action Plan on private cooperation presented by Azerbaijan and states the importance of taking additional measures to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the OSCE's Minsk Group and by its co-chairs [11]. One of the important documents signed between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria on September 23, 2005 was the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. They will cooperate in strengthening of the institutional structure of European integration, namely the implementation of the law, as well as training of civil servants and ensuring their skills development program, enlightening the general public about the EU process and European integration and cooperate in the field of public awareness through joint consultations, conferences, initiatives and other activities [12]. The Bulgarian-Azerbaijani relations also developed at the intergovernmental level. On November

12-13, 2007 the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria S. Stanishev paid an official visit to the Republic of Azerbaijan. The President Ilham Aliyev noted that the partnership between our countries within a number of international organizations, including the European Union, had been developing dynamically, and Bulgaria had always felt the support of the New Neighborhood Policy. Touching upon the mutual visits of the heads of state, the Bulgarian Prime Minister stressed the importance of these visits in the development of political relations, noting the importance of further strengthening of economic cooperation [13, 27 book, p. 198]. Meetings between the heads of state were held not only during official visits, but also on the basis of business relations. On March 10-12, 2008 President of the Republic of Bulgaria Georgi Parvanov paid a working visit to the Republic of Azerbaijan. The President Ilham Aliyev stressed the need for the EU to continue its efforts to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: "A clear and clear message must be sent to the occupied state that, Nagorno-Karabakh will never be independent and no country will recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh." [14, 2008. Part Two, p. 104].

The Bulgarian President said that in the Balkans they still did not recognize Kosovo as an independent state, the position declared by the European Union was a special case and that it could not be a precedent for other conflicts. He stressed the importance of the Kosovo problem not only in terms of self-determination, but also in terms of regional security [14, 2008. Part Two, pp.104-107]. Inter-parliamentary relations between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria, cooperation in the legislation sphere and exchange of experience were at a high level. On September 27-30, 2004, Chairman of the Milli Mejlis, M. Alasgarov visited Bulgaria, and on November 24-25, 2006, Chairman of the People's Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, G.Pirinski visited Azerbaijan, on May 19-21, 2008 official visits of the speaker O. Asadov visited to Bulgaria and Chairman of the Bulgarian Parliament Mrs. Tschacheva visited the Republic of Azerbaijan on May 13-15 and November 27-28, 2012 and all these visits served as high indicator of relations in this area [2]. On January 22, 2009, President of the Republic of Bulgaria Georgi Parvanov paid one more working visit to the Republic of Azerbaijan. During the meetings, the parties discussed the issues of economic, political and cultural relations between the two countries, as well as the successful development of bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria in political, economic, humanitarian and other areas [12]. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev paid a working visit to the Republic of Bulgaria on November 13, 2009. During the meeting between the heads of state it was noted that cooperation with Bulgaria was an active factor in deepening and strengthening cooperation between Azerbaijan and the European Union [13, XXXVIII book, pp.298-304].

During the years of investigation, mutual cooperation had been developing, mutual trust and confidence in the relationship had flourished. On November 14-15, 2011 President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Georgi Parvanov paid an official visit to the Republic of Azerbaijan. At the meeting between the heads of state, the President Ilham Aliyev said that relations with Bulgaria played an important role in the development of relations between Azerbaijan and the European Union and the Euro-Atlantic structures, also in the development of regional cooperation in the Caspian Sea. The parties discussed the

issues of energy cooperation between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria. During the visit, President Ilham Aliyev awarded the Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov with the "Heydar Aliyev" order. President Georgi Parvanov also presented the country's highest award - the Order of Stara Planina to the President, Ilham Aliyev [14, 48 book, p.289]. Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov paid a working visit to Azerbaijan on January 15, 2018. During the extended meeting, the parties exchanged views on political, economic and energy cooperation [15]. The exchange of views among government officials, their common position and interests signifies a high potential for bilateral relations.

Conclusions

In general, Azerbaijan's relations with Bulgaria are developing on the basis of strategic partnership. Azerbaijan intends to benefit from the experience of this country being a member to NATO and the European Union. Increasing the role of the Caspian Sea in ensuring energy security of European countries has also increased the importance of Azerbaijan, which has become a major initiator of strategically important projects with oil and gas fields. Azerbaijan was trying to use the territory of the Eastern Balkans to transport its hydrocarbon resources to Europe. The implementation of these interests required the development of political relations and dialogue. Along with successful development of relations with Bulgaria at the interstate, intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary levels, personal relations of heads of both states have been exemplary. Bulgaria participates in Azerbaijan's strategic projects and Azerbaijan has elevated its relations with Bulgaria to the level of a strategic partner country.

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