

PROSPECTS FOR COMPREHENSIVE COOPERATION BETWEEN UZBEKISTAN AND AZERBAIJAN

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Abstract: This article examines the shared historical heritage of the peoples of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan and analyzes the contemporary processes of cooperation between the two countries in the political, economic, cultural, and humanitarian spheres. It also explores the prospects for integration within the framework of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and highlights the convergence of common values that underpin bilateral relations. The study emphasizes the growing importance of Uzbekistan – Azerbaijan cooperation in strengthening regional stability, economic development, and international partnership.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, political cooperation, Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), economic integration, international relations.

Introduction

In recent years, relations between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have advanced to a qualitatively new stage. Both countries have been actively pursuing measures aimed at strengthening mutual political trust, expanding trade and economic cooperation, and deepening cultural ties.

Historically, the peoples of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have shared common linguistic, religious, cultural, and civilizational values. These long-standing bonds have provided a solid foundation for the development of close bilateral relations. In Uzbekistan, Azerbaijani Culture Days have been regularly organized, while in the city of Baku, various conferences and cultural events dedicated to Uzbek literature and heritage have been held. Such initiatives contribute significantly to enhancing mutual understanding and strengthening people-to-people connections between the two nations.

The Azerbaijani people emerged as a distinct ethnic community between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. A review of the history of Azerbaijan reveals that, following nearly six centuries of Sasanian and Arab rule, the emergence of local states and dynasties – such as the Sajids, Shirvanshahs, Salarids, Ravidids, Shaddadids, and the Sheki principality – played a significant role in shaping the region's political and cultural identity.

At the same time, the establishment of Islam as the dominant monotheistic religion throughout the country contributed substantially to the ethnic evolution of the Azerbaijani people, fostering the development of a common language, shared cultural traditions, and a unified sense of identity. These processes laid the foundations for the formation of the Azerbaijani nation and its distinctive cultural heritage.

The peoples of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have maintained strong cultural, economic, and political ties since ancient times. Connected through the historic Silk Road, the two nations have shared longstanding relations that have encompassed not only trade and commerce but also the fields of science, education, and culture.

These historical connections facilitated the exchange of goods, ideas, knowledge, and cultural values, contributing to the development of close and mutually beneficial relations between the two peoples. As a result, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have preserved a common historical legacy that continues to serve as an important foundation for contemporary cooperation and partnership.

Main Part

The geographical location of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan as natural centers of the Caucasus and Central Asia has been one of the key factors bringing the states established by our peoples closer together throughout history.

For example, during this period, the Cimmerians, Scythians, and Saka tribes migrated from the Altai region. Some of these groups settled in the territory of present-day Uzbekistan, while others continued their movement westward, entering Azerbaijan from the north through Crimea and the Greater Caucasus Mountains. Uzbek scholars have demonstrated that a significant portion of these tribes passed through the territory of modern Uzbekistan, particularly the Tashkent oasis, during the era known as the “Great Migration of Peoples”.

In ancient times, the northern regions of Azerbaijan were home to Cimmerian, Scythian, and Saka political entities, and Massagetae tribes also inhabited these areas. Consequently, numerous archaeological remains and cultural artifacts associated with the Cimmerians, Scythians, Sakas, and Massagetae have been discovered in both Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that legends concerning the Massagetae queen Tomyris and her victory over the Persian king Cyrus II occupy an important place in the historical traditions and sources of both Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. These shared historical narratives reflect the deep-rooted cultural and civilizational connections that have linked the peoples of the two regions since antiquity.

Both regions were, at certain periods of their history, part of the sphere of Hellenistic civilization, a fact clearly reflected in their numismatic, coroplastic, glyptic, and architectural heritage. Sogdian trading colonies were established across a vast territory stretching from the borders of China to the Caucasus Mountains and the shores of the Black Sea, facilitating extensive commercial and cultural exchanges.

As the Orientalist scholars Y. Buryakov and A. Gritsina have noted, “Every country and every people involved in the system of international trade and communication naturally contributed to the development and transmission of both material and spiritual cultures. In this process, the interaction between the peoples of Europe and Asia became one of the principal factors of historical development”.

By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the formation of the Azerbaijani Turkic people had largely been completed. The consolidation of the Uzbek Turkic people also took place during roughly the same period. One of the most prominent figures of this era was the last Khwarazmshah, Jalaladdin, who mounted a determined resistance against the Mongol invasions. Following his eventual defeat, he retreated to Azerbaijan, where he undertook efforts to restore several cities that had been devastated by the Mongols.

In his correspondence with local rulers, Jalaladdin emphasized the historical and cultural bonds between the peoples of the region, writing:

“By the grace of Allah, there exists unity among our peoples in trade, society, and religion. The person most deserving of your respect and friendship is the one who addresses you through a common language and a shared faith”.

This statement reflects the enduring sense of cultural affinity, linguistic kinship, and religious solidarity that historically connected the peoples of Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

The languages of our peoples belong to the Turkic language family. Azerbaijani is classified within the Oghuz branch, while Uzbek primarily belongs to the Karluk branch. Despite these

linguistic distinctions, the two languages share a common Turkic heritage and reflect centuries of historical and cultural interaction.

The peoples of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan are distinguished by their long-standing relations of friendship, rooted in deep historical ties. From ancient times, their interactions were strengthened through trade, cultural exchange, scientific cooperation, and political relations.

In antiquity, the territories of present-day Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan were connected by the Great Silk Road, which facilitated commercial activity, cultural interaction, and social exchanges between the two regions. The ancient states of Sogdiana, Khwarazm, and Bactria, located within the territory of modern Uzbekistan, maintained economic and diplomatic relations with the political entities that existed in the region of present-day Azerbaijan.

During the period of the Achaemenid Empire, both territories were incorporated into a common political framework, which further strengthened their economic and cultural connections. These relations continued to develop throughout the medieval period. Between the ninth and twelfth centuries, under the Seljuk and Khwarazmian states, cooperation between the regions of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan expanded beyond the economic sphere and acquired significant scientific and cultural dimensions.

In particular, with the flourishing of Islamic civilization in the medieval East, scholars, intellectuals, and artists from both regions actively engaged in mutual exchanges and collaboration, contributing to the advancement of science, literature, philosophy, and the arts across the broader Muslim world.

The cities of Bukhara, Samarkand, and Urgench in Uzbekistan, as well as Ganja, Baku, and Shamakhi in Azerbaijan, emerged as prominent centers of learning, science, and culture. The intellectual contributions of such distinguished scholars as Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, and Ibn Sina exerted a profound influence on the scientific and cultural development of both Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

By the sixteenth century, relations between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan became somewhat more complex due to the military and political confrontations between the Shaybanid and Safavid dynasties. Nevertheless, cultural and economic ties continued to flourish despite these geopolitical tensions. The two peoples maintained active commercial exchanges through various crafts and industries, including jewelry making, silk production, carpet weaving, and other forms of traditional handicrafts.

The relationship between our peoples has consistently been shaped by shared aspirations and common values. Similar traditions and ideals in literature, art, trade, scholarship, and intellectual life have served as enduring bonds that unite our perspectives despite geographical distance. These common cultural and civilizational foundations continue to provide a strong basis for cooperation and mutual understanding between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan in the modern era.

In 2010, the Azerbaijan Cultural Center named after Heydar Aliyev was established in Uzbekistan, and its official opening ceremony was attended by the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev. The Center operates with the aim of promoting and studying Azerbaijani culture, as well as fostering cultural, literary, scientific, and educational ties between the two countries and peoples, while further strengthening existing relations.

High-level meetings between the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, together with agreements aimed at enhancing strategic partnership, demonstrate the continuity and growing depth of political cooperation between the two states.

Economic cooperation has also expanded significantly in recent years. Bilateral trade turnover exceeded USD 181 million in 2022. Uzbekistan primarily exports pharmaceuticals, automobiles, and cotton-based products, while Azerbaijan supplies oil, natural gas, and construction materials.

Furthermore, the development of regional transport corridors – particularly the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor) – has provided Uzbekistan with enhanced opportunities to access European markets through Azerbaijan, thereby increasing the strategic importance of bilateral cooperation in trade and logistics.

These developments illustrate that Uzbekistan – Azerbaijan relations are no longer limited to historical and cultural ties but have evolved into a multifaceted strategic partnership encompassing political, economic, transport, and humanitarian dimensions.

The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) is a regional intergovernmental organization established in 1985, bringing together ten member states with the objective of promoting economic cooperation and regional integration. Within the framework of the ECO, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan actively participate in a number of strategic initiatives and agreements related to transportation, energy, trade, and regional connectivity.

During Uzbekistan's chairmanship of the ECO in 2021, several regional projects and development initiatives were proposed, aimed at strengthening economic integration, improving transport infrastructure, and enhancing cooperation among member states. These efforts underscored Uzbekistan's commitment to advancing regional partnership and sustainable development within the ECO framework.

A significant milestone in bilateral relations was achieved when the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, signed the Treaty on Allied Relations and adopted the decision of the first meeting of the Supreme Interstate Council. These developments elevated bilateral cooperation to a qualitatively new level and demonstrated the mutual commitment of both countries to deepening their strategic partnership across political, economic, and humanitarian spheres.

In the presence of the heads of state, the following documents were signed:

- An Intergovernmental Agreement on Labor Activity and the Protection of Citizens' Rights;
- A Cooperation Program between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs for 2025–2026;
- An Action Plan for the Further Expansion of Trade, Economic, and Investment Cooperation;
- Protocols on cooperation in the fields of preschool education, vocational education and training, specialized secondary education, higher education, and science;
- A Roadmap for Cultural and Humanitarian Cooperation for 2024–2026;
- An Action Plan for Cooperation in the Tourism Sector for 2024–2026;
- A Cooperation Program for 2024–2026 between the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
- A Protocol on Cooperation between the Center for Advanced Training of Lawyers under the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Justice Academy of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
- A Cooperation Agreement between the National Guard of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
- A Protocol on Cooperation between the forensic examination centers of the two countries.

According to official reports, trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan increased by approximately 20 percent from the beginning of 2025. At the same time, joint projects have continued to expand in such sectors as mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, agriculture, and tourism. These developments demonstrate the growing dynamism of bilateral economic

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relations and reflect the commitment of both countries to strengthening long-term strategic cooperation across multiple sectors.

At the IDEX-2025 International Defence Exhibition, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan signed a military-technical cooperation roadmap, further expanding bilateral collaboration in the field of defense and security. In addition, a legal cooperation program for 2025-2026 was approved, strengthening institutional ties and cooperation in the justice sector.

Conclusion

The study of historical relations between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan is significant not only from an academic perspective but also in practical terms. In recent years, political, economic, and cultural cooperation between the two countries has intensified considerably. Their collaboration within the framework of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) has further enhanced their role as influential actors in regional affairs.

In conclusion, it can be argued that, in the context of contemporary global geopolitical developments, relations between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan are steadily advancing toward a higher level of strategic partnership. High-level meetings between the leaders of the two states, the signing of numerous bilateral agreements, the implementation of joint projects, and the promotion of regional initiatives all demonstrate that bilateral relations rest upon a strong and sustainable foundation.

From this perspective, cooperation between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan today and in the future carries strategic importance not only for regional stability, economic development, and prosperity but also for the advancement of the broader Turkic world and the preservation and enrichment of the shared heritage of Muslim civilization.

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