



# AZERI OBSERVER

International magazine

SUMMER  
2024

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UNDP Resident Representative in Azerbaijan

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# BULGARIA-AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS: STRONG COMMITMENT AND PROMISING PROSPECTS

Mr. Rouslan Stoyanov,  
Ambassador of Bulgaria to Azerbaijan



IN AN INTERVIEW FOR AZERI OBSERVER, MR. ROUSLAN STOYANOV, THE AMBASSADOR OF BULGARIA TO AZERBAIJAN, HIGHLIGHTED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RECENT RECIPROCAL VISITS BY THE PRESIDENTS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES, WHICH INCLUDED KEY OUTCOMES SUCH AS THE SIGNING OF THE JOINT DECLARATION ON STRENGTHENING THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND OTHER AGREEMENTS IN TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION AND ENERGY COOPERATION. THE AMBASSADOR NOTED A SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN BILATERAL TRADE AND POINTED OUT THE POTENTIAL FOR EXPANDING TRADE IN VARIOUS SECTORS, INCLUDING FOOD, PHARMACEUTICALS, AND CONSTRUCTION. HE ALSO EXPRESSED OPTIMISM ABOUT BULGARIA'S ROLE AS A TRANSIT HUB FOR AZERBAIJANI GAS TO EUROPE WHILE BEING SUPPORTED BY MODERNIZED INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE SOLIDARITY RING INITIATIVE. LOOKING AHEAD, THE AMBASSADOR ANTICIPATED FURTHER HIGH-LEVEL VISITS AND CONTINUOUS DIALOGUE TO SUSTAIN THE MOMENTUM IN BILATERAL RELATIONS.

BY ELENA KOSOLAPOVA

AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

**Question:** *Last year, the presidents of Azerbaijan and Bulgaria exchanged visits, and in May 2024, the Bulgarian President visited Baku again. What were the key outcomes and highlights of these visits? How do you envision these visits shaping the future trajectory of diplomatic ties between our two nations?*

**Answer:** Bulgaria and Azerbaijan have been historically connected through sincere friendship and mutual respect since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992. This is also evidenced by the active high-level political dialogue exchanged in recent years. This political dialogue and the active development of the bilateral legal base confirm our mutual desire for fruitful cooperation and contribute to maintaining favorable conditions for the development of our relations. With the signing of the Declaration on Strategic Partnership during President Aliyev's visit to Bulgaria in 2015, the two sides expressed their common desire to deepen bilateral relations and bring them to a strategic level.

The political dialogue between Bulgaria and Azerbaijan was very active in 2023. In March, we were happy to welcome the President of Bulgaria, Rumen Radev, to Baku when he participated in the X Global Baku Forum and had a discussion with the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev. In April, President Ilham Aliyev and a high-level delegation visited Sofia in connection with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding to promote cooperation between the system operators of Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and the state oil company of Azerbaijan, SOCAR, under the Solidarity Ring (STRING) Initiative. They also attended the official opening of the SOCAR office in our capital. Both Presidents met once again and had an exchange of views in December 2023 when they attended the inauguration ceremony of the Bulgaria-Serbia Gas Interconnector. In December, we also held very fruitful bilateral political consultations in Sofia between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria and Azerbaijan.

Parliamentary cooperation was also very active in 2023. In September, an Azerbaijani parliamentary delegation headed by Parliament Speaker Sahiba Gafarova visited Bulgaria. The intensive relations within the Interparliamentary Friendship Group Bulgaria-Azerbaijan are productive as well. This dynamic based around political dialogue between the two countries in just a one-year period is evidence of the common will of

both sides to keep bilateral relations a priority in their foreign policy. This is the case for Bulgaria and I believe for Azerbaijan as well.

In the first half of 2024, the above-mentioned intensive dialogue continued. On March 4, the President of the National Assembly of Bulgaria, Rossen Jeliaskov, visited Azerbaijan upon the invitation of Sahiba Gafarova, Spokesperson of the Azerbaijani Parliament. Before that, Bulgaria participated in the Tenth Ministerial Meeting of the Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council and the Second Ministerial Meeting of the Green Energy Advisory Council, which was held in Baku on March 1. On May 7-8, President Rumen Radev made an official visit to Azerbaijan upon the invitation of President Ilham Aliyev. During the visit, a number of documents were signed, including the Joint Declaration on Strengthening the Strategic Partnership between the two countries, which underscores the ongoing commitment to enhancing the bilateral relations between our nations; the Code Share Agreement between Azerbaijan Airlines CJSC and Bulgaria Air JSC; the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport of Azerbaijan and the Ministry of Innovation and Growth of Bulgaria on cooperation in the field of technological innovation; and the Memorandum of Understanding between SOCAR and Asarel Investment.

**Q.:** *Azerbaijan supplies about one billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas to Bulgaria per year. What do these supplies mean for the energy security of your country?*

**A.:** Of course, one of the major areas in our relations is energy. Azerbaijan is a strategic energy partner of Bulgaria and plays an important role in the diversification of natural gas supplies, thus contributing to our country's energy security. The foundation of gas cooperation between the two states was laid in 2013, when the Bulgarian gas company Bulgargaz signed a 25-year contract with the Shah Deniz consortium for the purchase of gas from this Azerbaijani gas condensate field in the Caspian Sea in the amount of 1 bcm of gas per year. Following the commissioning of the Greece-

‘AZERBAIJAN IS A STRATEGIC ENERGY PARTNER OF BULGARIA AND PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE DIVERSIFICATION OF NATURAL GAS SUPPLIES, THUS CONTRIBUTING TO OUR COUNTRY'S ENERGY SECURITY.’





Bulgaria interconnector in 2022, our country is now receiving in full the agreed quantities of Azerbaijani natural gas under the long-term contract. During the meetings between the presidents of our countries in May 2024, the results of gas supplies from Azerbaijan to Bulgaria in 2023 were announced: 1,250 bcm. By the end of this year, the volume of export supplies of Azerbaijani gas to Bulgaria will amount to 1.5 bcm. Azerbaijan has become an important and decisive partner for Bulgaria in the energy sector, and it plays an important role in diversifying Bulgaria's gas supply.

**Q.: Now Bulgaria is converting into a transit country for Azerbaijani gas pumped to other European countries. How do you see the prospects of cooperation in this regard?**

**'BULGARIA HAS ALWAYS SUPPORTED AND WILL CONTINUE ITS POLITICAL SUPPORT TO AZERBAIJAN'S PLANS TO INCREASE GAS SUPPLIES TO EUROPE, INCLUDING THROUGH OUR GAS TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE.'**

**A.:** We are working on other opportunities for the expansion of our relations in the energy sphere. Bulgaria has always supported and will continue its political support to Azerbaijan's plans to increase gas supplies to Europe, including through our gas transportation infrastructure. The highlights of the bilateral energy dialogue in 2023 were the signing of the memorandum of understanding to promote cooperation between the system operators of



Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Azerbaijani SOCAR under the Solidarity Ring (STRING) Initiative proposed by Bulgaria and supported by the European Commission, the opening of a SOCAR office in Sofia responsible for projects in the Western Balkans region, the talks on the possibilities of increasing the supply of Azerbaijani natural gas to Bulgaria and its transit, and the commissioning of the gas interconnector between Bulgaria and Serbia.

Today, Bulgaria has a modernized gas pipeline network, and it has turned into a regional gas transit hub with the capacity to transport gas from different sources, including Azerbaijan, to the Balkans, further into Central and Western Europe, and also to Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine. This is a concrete result of our cooperation and a logical outcome of our very strong bilateral relations. This also provides undeniable benefits to Azerbaijan, which serves as an important factor for European energy security for many years to come.

**Q.: Last year, Azerbaijan, Romania, Georgia, and Hungary – together with Bulgaria and the EU – signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the creation of the Green Energy platform. What does your country expect to get from this project?**

**A.:** Bulgaria supports Azerbaijani initiatives for the export of low-carbon and renewable energy resources (such as hydrogen gas and relevant mixes) to Europe in response to the EU's Green Deal Initiative. My country is also interested in cooperation on the Black Sea Energy undersea electric cable project that provides for the transfer of green energy from the Caspian Sea to Europe. Bulgaria joined Hungary, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Romania in signing the Declaration of Intent for Green

**‘BULGARIA SUPPORTS AZERBAIJANI INITIATIVES FOR THE EXPORT OF LOW-CARBON AND RENEWABLE ENERGY RESOURCES (SUCH AS HYDROGEN GAS AND RELEVANT MIXES) TO EUROPE IN RESPONSE TO THE EU'S GREEN DEAL INITIATIVE.’**

Energy Cooperation at the Fifth Ministerial Meeting on the green energy development and transmission project, which was held in Budapest in November 2023. Bulgaria appreciates the support of Azerbaijan on this issue. The undersea cable is just one of many opportunities to influence efforts to achieve climate goals and truly sustainable development. Bulgaria can significantly add value to the project thanks to its electricity grid, high-capacity connections with neighboring countries, its well-developed electricity market, the ability to invest in renewable projects, and growing demand for green energy.

Everyone needs to be more involved and collaborative in projects like these. The potential is there, and I am confident that a proactive and positive approach will pay off in the not-too-distant future in terms of a better environment, greater energy security, and a better life for our citizens.

**Q.: Do you see prospects for cooperation within the Middle Corridor? What opportunities does this project open up for your country?**

**A.:** We see opportunities for intensifying bilateral cooperation in the fields of transport and communication. The Bulgarian side sees potential along the lines of the policy of connectivity between Europe and Asia and the realization of the Trans-Caspian International Transport

Route, also known as the Middle Corridor. Bulgaria is ready to cooperate with Azerbaijan to ensure that both countries fully participate in this important project for the transfer of cargo from Asia to Europe, and vice versa. The port operator in Bulgaria, Port Burgas, has been appointed as a member of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route Association. As far as I know, China, the EU, the US, and Turkey are all expressing a desire to develop this route.

The EU also actively finances the development of the Middle Corridor. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has invested 100 million euros in Kazakhstan's railway infrastructure. The European Investment Bank has provided a one billion euro loan for the construction of a 150-kilometer railway line in Georgia. According to a study carried out by the European Commission, significant investments of 18.5 billion euros must be made in order to be able to transport about 130,000 containers along the Middle Corridor within 13-14 days by 2040; the euros are also needed to harmonize customs fees between countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

**Q.: What initiatives or projects are underway to enhance trade ties between Bulgaria and Azerbaijan?**

**A.:** Apart from energy, both countries understand that the existing levels of trade and investments do not fully correspond to the high level of political cooperation. Therefore, we see a potential that is not sufficiently utilized. More visible results are needed, and a lot has to be done in order to obtain the mutual benefits both our countries deserve. Overall, there has been an increase in the volume of trade between Bulgaria and Azerbaijan over the past two years, despite some discrepancies between the statistical data between our two countries. In 2022, bilateral trade between Bulgaria and Azerbaijan tripled compared to 2021, reaching \$419 million; Azerbaijani imports to Bulgaria were \$394 million, compared to \$74 million in 2021. The significant growth is due to the start of gas deliveries from the beginning of 2021 under the contract between Bulgargaz and SOCAR. From January to June 2023, bilateral trade amounted to \$204 million, having grown by 221% compared to the same period of 2022. Bulgarian exports to Azerbaijan amounted to \$17 million and grew by 24.3%; Azerbaijani imports to Bulgaria reached \$187 million, compared to \$49.8 million during the same period of 2022.

Possible directions for trade cooperation with Azerbaijan can be sought in the supplies of goods and equipment for the food industry, wine and soft drinks, perfumes and cosmetics, medicines, garments, shoes, furniture, sanitary equipment, building materials, electronic and electrotechnical goods, electric motors, machines, lifting vehicles, and more. The Azerbaijani side has also shown interest in cooperation in agriculture and forestry. Construction is another promising area for trade and economic cooperation, given the large-scale internal investment program implemented by Azerbaijan, which foresees the construction of a number of infrastructure sites of national importance, including railway and road infrastructure, a new port in Baku, and residential, office, and business buildings, among other sites.

Investments currently remain an underdeveloped direction in the bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria. We are confident that, based on the significant potential, the representative office of SOCAR in Sofia could contribute to the further deepening of our bilateral relations. In the spring of 2023, SOCAR received a ten-year license to trade natural gas in Bulgaria; that license, in addition to the signing of the Memorandum between the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan and Asarel Investment, are both steps toward strengthening economic ties between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria. There is potential in the sector of innovations, new technologies, and artificial intelligence. In this context, a Memorandum of Cooperation between the relevant Ministries of Bulgaria and Azerbaijan was signed aimed at fostering cooperation in the field.

**Q.: This year, Bulgaria joins the Schengen area. How will this change our tourism cooperation?**

**A.:** Bulgaria has always been a popular tourist destination due to its golden beaches on the Black Sea coast, mountainous landscape, and many historic sites. Many Azerbaijani citizens and their families prefer to visit the cities of Sofia, Plovdiv, Veliko Tarnovo, and Varna or to go skiing at popular winter resorts such as Borovets, Bansko, and Pamporovo. According to the official information by the Ministry of Tourism of Bulgaria, the number of tourists from Azerbaijan who visited my country in 2023 exceeded 5,000. Every year, the Embassy of Bulgaria in Azerbaijan issues more than 2,000 visas for citizens of Azerbaijan. A number of them are transit visas for Azerbaijani citizens travelling to Ukraine by car. This means that a significant proportion of the Azerbaijani tourists visiting Bulgaria did so with Schengen visas, which are valid for the territory of Bulgaria.

As you mentioned, this year, we witnessed a historic moment of the expansion of the Schengen area, for which we have been waiting and we have been ready for a long time. On December 30, 2023, the European Council unanimously agreed to accept Bulgaria and Romania into the Schengen area. Controls at air and sea borders were lifted as of March 31, 2024, and discussions on a further decision to lift controls at land borders continue in 2024. This access to the Schengen area will have implications for Azerbaijani citizens too. They will continue to take advantage of the opportunity to obtain visas under a facilitated visa regime according to the EU-Azerbaijan Agreement on Visa Facilitation, which has been in force since 2014. They can continue to visit Bulgaria with their valid one-entry visa or multiple Schengen visas. The newest development is that Azerbaijani citizens who have a valid Schengen visa issued by the Bulgarian embassy after March 31, 2024, can visit other Schengen countries too, but only if they travel there by plane. In this

**• AZERBAIJANI CITIZENS WHO HAVE A VALID SCHENGEN VISA ISSUED BY THE BULGARIAN EMBASSY AFTER MARCH 31, 2024, CAN VISIT OTHER SCHENGEN COUNTRIES TOO, BUT ONLY IF THEY TRAVEL THERE BY PLANE. •**

regard, the relaunching of the twice-per-week direct flight between Sofia and Baku in the beginning of June this year will certainly contribute to the promotion of business contacts, to the increase in the number of tourists from both countries, and to the activation of people-to-people contacts. To this end, a code-sharing agreement was concluded between our national air carrier Bulgaria Air and AZAL, which will open direct flight between the two countries. This was one of the documents signed in the presence of the Presidents of Bulgaria and Azerbaijan, during the official visit of the President of Bulgaria to Azerbaijan on May 7–8.

**Q.: What steps are being taken to facilitate people-to-people connections between Bulgaria and Azerbaijan, such as educational and cultural exchanges?**

**A.:** Both sides positively assess the development of bilateral relations in the fields of education, science, culture, and sports. We have two language centers – the Center for the Study of the Bulgarian Language at the

Baku Slavic University and the Center for the Study of the Azerbaijani Language at the Sofia University. The relevant legal basis exists in the form of agreements and memorandums for cooperation between universities that have been signed. So, there are good opportunities for admission of Azerbaijani students to study in Bulgarian universities. In the field of culture, there are also opportunities to activate cooperation between institutions by expanding the spectrum of events and initiatives.

**Q.: At the end of last year, our countries signed a memorandum of cooperation in the fields of youth and sports. What is the plan of action in this sphere?**

**A.:** Yes, the memorandum of cooperation in the field of youth and sports was signed between the Ministers of Youth and Sports of Azerbaijan and Bulgaria, Farid Gaibov and Dimitar Iliev, during President Iliev’s visit to Azerbaijan in December 2023. Sports cooperation will be implemented by promoting the exchange of experience between coaches, experts, specialists, and researchers in the fields of high-performance sports, sports for all, sports science and medicine, sports law, and anti-doping. An exchange of visits by senior officials and experts was also agreed upon, as well as the promotion of cooperation between the sports federations of the two countries, which will provide mutual support and cooperate within international organizations and forums. Sports infrastructure available in Azerbaijan was presented to the Bulgarian delegation, and the importance of the facilities built by the government for young people in recent years was highlighted. Together with his Azerbaijani colleague,

**‘AZERBAIJAN AND BULGARIA POSITIVELY ASSESS THE DEVELOPMENT OF BILATERAL RELATIONS IN THE FIELDS OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, CULTURE, AND SPORTS. WE HAVE TWO LANGUAGE CENTERS – THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE BULGARIAN LANGUAGE AT THE BAKU SLAVIC UNIVERSITY AND THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AZERBAIJANI LANGUAGE AT THE SOFIA UNIVERSITY.’**

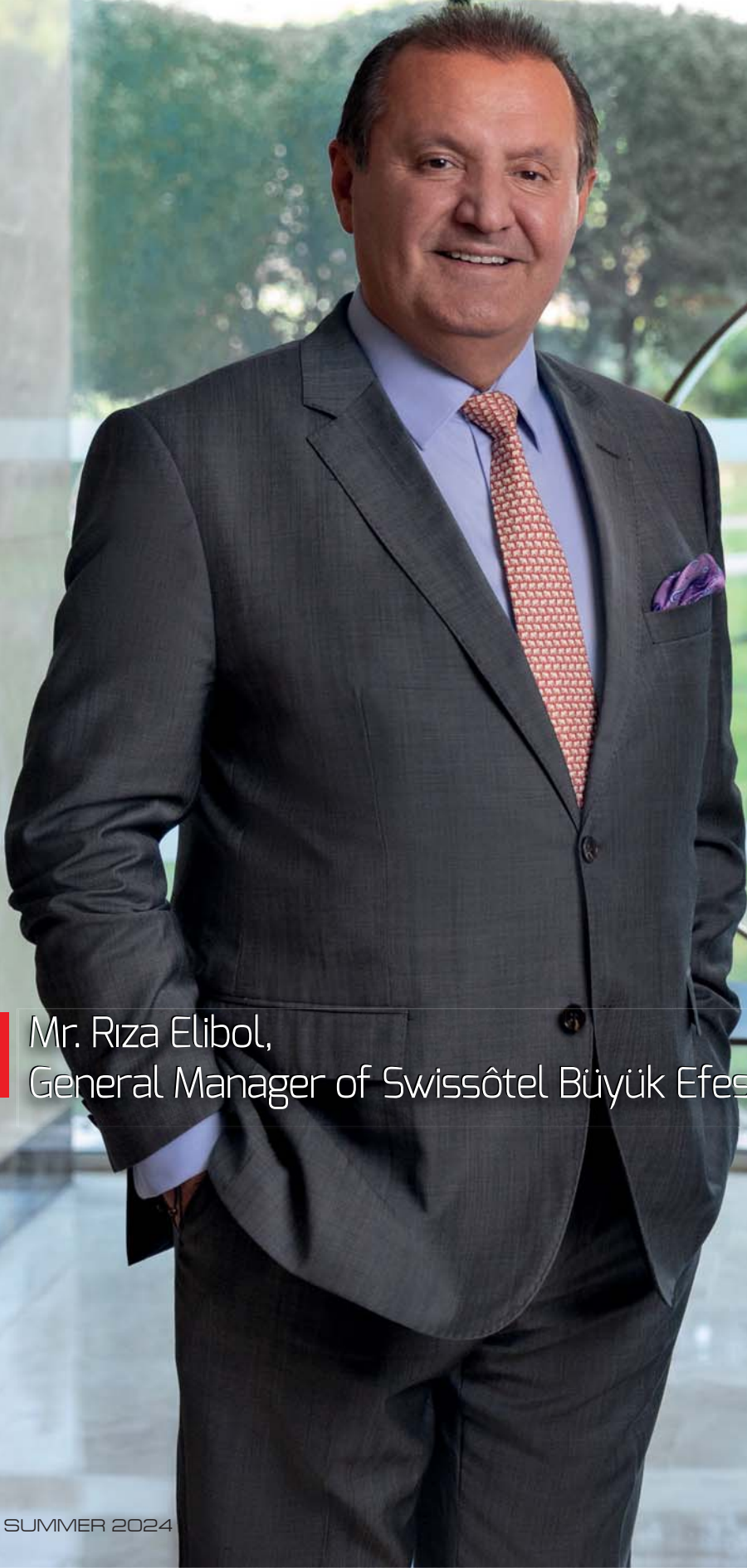




Minister Iliev also participated in the VI Forum of the Solidarity of Azerbaijani Volunteers, which was held at the Baku Congress Center under the patronage of the United Nations. The plan of action in the field of youth and sports is very rich and diverse, entailing visits of senior officials and experts of both countries, the participation of athletes in mutual training camps for specific sports, the participation of officials and sports federation representatives in conferences and similar events, and the participation of athletes in international competitions held in both countries. During his official visit in May 2024, President Rumen Radev had the opportunity to visit the National Gymnastics Arena in Baku, where he met with Minister of Youth and Sports Farid Gayibov and Deputy Minister Mariana Vasileva. Mr. Radev also met with Bulgarian athletes and sports personalities engaged in Azerbaijan.

**Q.: Are there any high-level visits between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria scheduled for this year?**

**A.:** This year, we intend to maintain the dynamics of the bilateral dialogue. In addition to the above-mentioned visits to Azerbaijan by the President of Bulgaria and the Speaker of the National Assembly of our country, this year, we are working on the preparation of a visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria (postponed from January) at the invitation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Jeyhun Bayramov. During this visit, the third session of the Bulgaria-Azerbaijan Strategic Dialogue is to be held. Members of the Interparliamentary Friendship Group with Azerbaijan in the National Assembly of Bulgaria also visited Baku at the beginning of July this year and took part in the Sixth meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation. Last but not least, I would like to mention that we are expecting a high-level Bulgarian delegation to participate in the 29th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29), which will be held in Baku in November 2024.



Mr. Rıza Elibol,  
General Manager of Swissôtel Büyük Efes İzmir

# SWISSÔTEL BÜYÜK EFES İZMİR: THE INTERSECTION OF ART AND LUXURY

IN THE HEART OF İZMİR, WHERE THE AEGEAN WAVES KISS THE SHORE, SWISSÔTEL BÜYÜK EFES İZMİR OFFERS A HARMONIOUS BLEND OF SWISS PRECISION AND TURKISH HOSPITALITY. MR. RIZA ELIBOL, THE GENERAL MANAGER OF THE HOTEL, REVEALS THE MAGIC BEHIND THIS ENCHANTING DESTINATION OF ANCIENT SITES AND VIBRANT COASTAL RESORTS, HINTING AT THE SECRETS BEHIND THE HOTEL'S ALLURE. HE CELEBRATES THE ESSENCE OF SWISSÔTEL BÜYÜK EFES İZMİR, WHERE ELEGANCE, ART, AND NATURE CONVERGE, DISCUSSES THE HOTEL'S COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY – BLENDING LUXURY WITH ECO-FRIENDLY PRACTICES – AND EXPLAINS HOW A VAST COLLECTION OF ART TRANSFORMS A STAY IN THE HOTEL INTO A CULTURAL JOURNEY.

## AZERI OBSERVER EDITORIAL STAFF

**Question:** *İzmir is one of the top tourist destinations in Türkiye. What attracts both foreign and Turkish travelers to this city?*

**Answer:** İzmir has a magnificent location at the western edge of Türkiye. This beautiful city offers visitors many options for unique experiences, drawing one into a world of modernity and traditions that refreshes the human spirit. İzmir's appeal lies in its rich blend of historical, cultural, and natural attractions. First and foremost, the city is home to remarkable historical sites like Ephesus, Pergamon, the Agora of Smyrna, and Historical Kemeraltı Bazaar – all of which take visitors on a fascinating journey through ancient civilizations. The beautiful Aegean coastline is another major draw, with stunning beaches and charming coastal resorts such as Çeşme and Alaçatı, perfect for relaxation and watersports. The city's culinary landscape is equally compelling, featuring delicious local specialties along with fresh seafood that takes visitors on a gastronomic journey thanks to İzmir's Michelin-starred culinary spots. Additionally, the city has a mild Mediterranean climate, making it an ideal year-round destination. The bustling markets, particularly Kemeraltı Bazaar, provide a lively shopping experience that blends traditional and modern offerings. All these factors, along with the city's welcoming atmosphere, make İzmir a top choice for both foreign and Turkish travelers.

**Q.:** *Swissôtel Hotels & Resorts are known for genuine Swiss hospitality, while Türkiye is famous for its warmth and friendliness. How do you ensure that guests experience a blend of these qualities during their stay at Swissôtel Büyük Efes İzmir?*

**A.:** Swissôtel Hotels & Resorts offer the freshness and vitality of alpine energy while maintaining its roots in the tradition of Swiss hospitality. Swissôtel aims to give its guests peace of mind to explore the world, discover life's true rewards, and embrace opportunities to "live it well." At Swissôtel Büyük Efes İzmir, we poise ourselves as an exclusive haven of Swiss hospitality by embracing all of these values on our property. From the moment you enter the hotel, sincere Alpine friendliness and Turkish warmth accompany you every



minute of your stay. Enhancing the quality of life of our guests is at the heart of everything we do. Firstly, we ensure that each of our rooms is a serene retreat for our customers' holidays or business stays in İzmir, offering outstanding comfort. This begins with a warm welcome, where we greet guests with traditional Turkish hospitality that shows them that Swissôtel Büyük Efes İzmir is their "home away from home." Every staff member is always ready to help with a smile, eager to assist with any request. We also incorporate Swiss precision and efficiency into our operations, ensuring that all aspects of our guests' stays are seamless and hassle-free. Cultural integration is another vital aspect of our approach. We blend Turkish hospitality with Swiss standards by incorporating local touchpoints in both our rooms and restaurant services, showcasing the rich Turkish heritage. Lastly, we actively seek and act upon guest feedback to continuously improve our services. This commitment to excellence ensures that

we maintain high standards of hospitality that reflect both Swiss and Turkish qualities.

**Q.: Swissôtel Büyük Efes İzmir boasts a significant permanent collection of artworks. Which pieces are the most remarkable? How do they enhance the overall guest experience?**

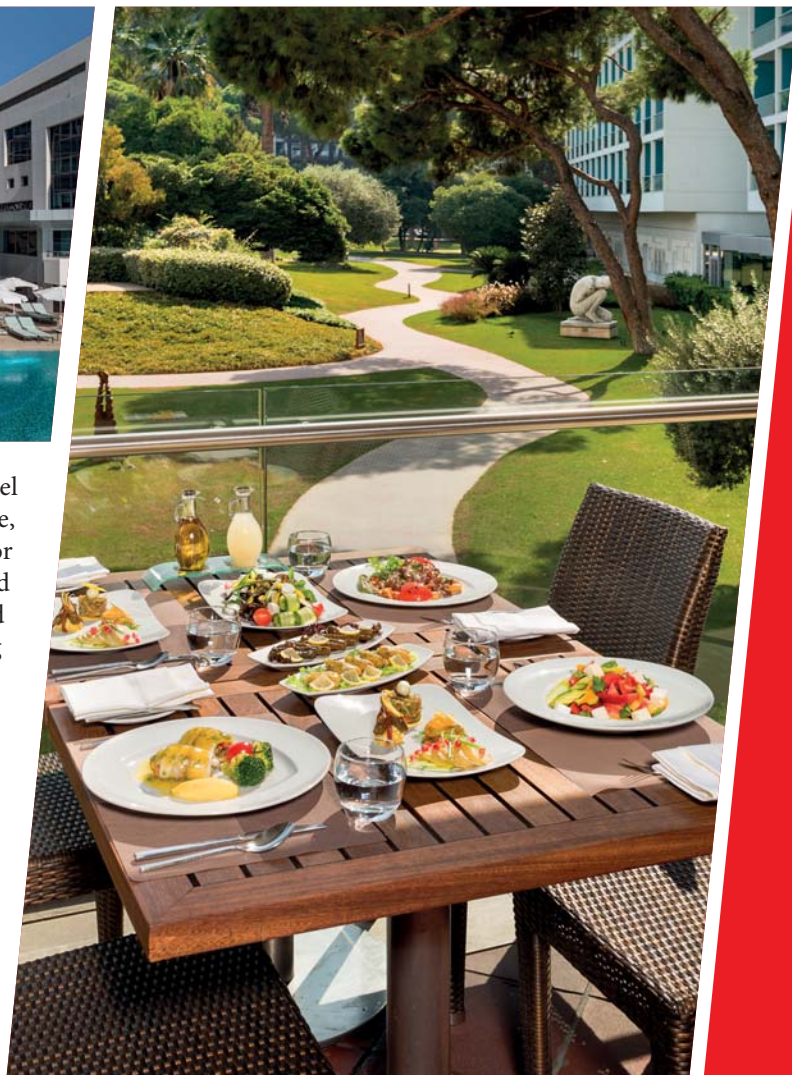
**A.:** The legacy of art and history has always been an integral part of our hotel. Guests at Swissôtel Büyük Efes İzmir are invited to enjoy an immersive experience in the world of contemporary art, as the entire hotel resembles a modern art gallery. Upon entering Swissôtel, guests are greeted by over 800 artworks, including the renowned 2.5-meter-tall Cavalier sculpture by the world-famous Colombian artist Botero, artwork by Rabarama (Paola Epifani) titled Guillotine, Lorenzo Quinn's Love sculpture, and Antony Gormley's pieces. Works by Türkiye's leading modern artists – such as Bedri Rahmi Eyuboglu, Atilla Galatalı, and Varol Topaç – are also showcased throughout the complex.





This art collection not only adorns the hotel walls but also enriches İzmir's cultural landscape, establishing Swissôtel Büyük Efes İzmir as a hub for art enthusiasts in Türkiye. With the traditionally held Büyük Efes Art Days, various art galleries, artists, and art professionals showcase art pieces to both staying guests and visiting art enthusiasts. The artworks create a complementary and enriching atmosphere, enhancing the overall guest experience. As guests explore the hotel, they experience a profound encounter with art, immersing themselves in the captivating world of contemporary artworks. Our collection not only provides a place to stay but also offers an opportunity to discover and experience art, significantly elevating guest satisfaction.

**Q.: What unique features do the hotel's rooms and venues offer that blend elegance with contemporary functionality?**





**A.:** Our rooms are designed to offer guests an elegant and comfortable experience, whether they're enjoying views of our lush gardens or the serene sea. Our Swiss Advantage rooms are a perfect blend of comfort and modern design since they feature cutting-edge technology and amenities tailored specifically for today's discerning business travelers and leisure guests. Each room is generously sized at over 27 square meters and comes complete with a balcony that overlooks our beautiful gardens and the vibrant cityscape. Our Swiss Executive rooms go above and beyond, providing all the business essentials found in Swiss Advantage rooms along with the option to enjoy stunning views of the sea, gardens, or city. Our suites are the epitome of luxury, ranging from 58 to 85 square meters, each featuring a balcony with garden views, spacious living areas, and an array of top-tier amenities and services. And for those seeking the ultimate in luxury, our Presidential Suite offers an expansive 170 square

meters of space, providing breathtaking views of both the sea and gardens. This impressive option truly represents the pinnacle of comfort and luxury at our hotel.

We also stand out with our meeting, event, and conference offerings, featuring 19 meeting and conference rooms that can accommodate up to 2,000 guests. Our rooms are suitable for a wide array of functions, including board meetings, conferences, product launches and multi-purpose exhibition halls. We also host grand-scale events in our ballrooms as well as weddings in multiple locations of our guests' choosing. We offer enchanting experiences both in our ballrooms and captivating gardens, providing an elegantly decorated and unique atmosphere as one of the most sought-after wedding locations in İzmir.

**Q.:** *Can you tell us more about the sustainability initiatives at Swisôtel Büyük Efes İzmir? How do you balance luxury with sustainability?*



of exceptional quality. Aquarium Mezzes & Grill welcomes guests with delectable appetizers and grilled dishes prepared with meticulous care. Located on our terrace with a unique bay view, our Italian restaurant Scappi transforms authentic Italian flavors into exceptional dining experiences, all accompanied by delightful melodies and a selection of exquisite beverages and cocktails from the impressive bar. We infuse passion, impeccable presentation, distinctive flavors, and the renowned Swissôtel quality into every dish and drink we serve.

**Q.: Can you elaborate on the signature rituals offered at Pürovel Spa & Sport? How do they combine Swiss, Middle Eastern, and Far Eastern**

**techniques?**

**A.:** Pürovel philosophy draws inspiration from the origins of wellbeing, utilizing nature's resources (such as alpine air and the changing seasons of the Swiss mountains) to invigorate clients. With its stylish and contemporary environment and its well-designed modern sports training facilities, Pürovel aims to help customers rejuvenate and revitalize both soul and body in harmony with nature. Pürovel's essential oils, organically produced in Switzerland, complement Far Eastern treatment techniques. Both philosophies converge on aspects such as relaxation and renewal, balancing energy flow, and the use of natural products, creating a harmonious blend. These two approaches converge on the concept of vitality, offering customers a unique experience to nourish their souls.

**Q.: With so many beautiful places in and around İzmir, how does your team help guests explore the local attractions?**

**A.:** İzmir is gloriously situated on the western edge of Türkiye, offering visitors numerous options for unique experiences. Swissôtel Büyük Efes İzmir resides at the heart of this beauty, overlooking the Kordon on the Aegean Sea. Within walking distance from the Commercial Center, Kemeraltı Old Bazaar, İzmir Cultural Park, and the Archaeological Museum, our hotel provides easy access to the attractive city center for leisure time activities.

We deeply appreciate the allure of our city and its surroundings, rich in cultural and natural attractions. Our dedicated team is committed to ensuring that every guest has a memorable experience exploring İzmir. We offer personalized recommendations and insights into local attractions, which include historical landmarks, scenic spots, and vibrant markets. Additionally, our concierge service is always available to arrange tours, provide transportation options, and offer insider tips to help guests make the most of their stay. Whether it's helping visitors discover ancient ruins, indulge in local cuisine, or simply enjoy the beautiful coastline, we strive to enrich our guests' journeys with authentic experiences that showcase the best of İzmir.

**A.:** We bear the responsibility of creating a world that future generations can inhabit while still ensuring the comfort of our guests. At Swissôtel Büyük Efes, we prioritize sustainability and maintaining our commitment to the environment and society. Through our dedication, we take steps to minimize our environmental impact by using eco-friendly materials and promoting energy and water conservation. At Swissôtel, the main and fundamental principle of our Environmental Management System is the zero-waste policy. As one of the few institutions in our region that generates its own electricity using natural gas, we are continuously committed to reducing the consumption of natural resources and achieving energy savings through the implementation and improvement of efficiency in energy-consuming equipment.

Our food policy reduces waste and adopts an environmentally conscious approach with natural products. We contribute to a sustainable future by using various plants in our kitchen, reclaimed through compost soil from the "Chef's Garden" located at our hotel. This year, we were awarded the Green Key certificate, a prestigious recognition of sustainability in the hospitality industry for our eco-friendly programs. By integrating sustainable practices into our operations, every stay at Swissôtel Büyük Efes İzmir is not only luxurious but also environmentally responsible. We strive for excellence while embracing a sustainable approach focused on guest satisfaction.

**Q.: What is the philosophy behind the food and beverage offerings at Swissôtel Büyük Efes İzmir?**

**A.:** At Swissôtel Büyük Efes İzmir, we strive to offer an exquisite gastronomic experience through our in-house restaurants, bar, café, and Swiss Gourmet delights. We focus on providing exclusive cuisine that caters to all tastes and appetites. It's important for us to offer a variety of delicacies while still harmonizing our traditional influences with global culinary trends. At Café Swiss, our chefs showcase the finest examples of Turkish and European cuisines. The restaurant is open for breakfast, brunch, and lunch, featuring live cooking stations that are part of a stunning show kitchen. Swiss Gourmet specializes in homemade chocolates and cakes

# GSMA M360 EURASIA 2024

## CATALYZING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN BAKU

BY ELENA KOSOLAPOVA  
AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

On May 15 and 16, Baku was home to the GSMA M360 Eurasia 2024 for the second time. This prominent event was organized by the GSMA, a global organization representing the interests of mobile network operators worldwide. The conference was held with the support of the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and host sponsored by Azericell, Azerbaijan's leading mobile operator. The event brought together representatives from 237

companies from industries such as mobile, telecom, and others, as well as key political and regulatory figures from the region. The edition saw attendance from 49 countries and territories, with 30% of attendees being senior decision-makers, highlighting the event's broad influence and appeal.

The agenda of M360 Eurasia 2024 was focused on accelerating the ongoing digital transformation across CIS countries and neighboring regions. Key topics of discussion included the digitalisation of everything, next-generation networks, and the role of generative AI. The goal of such discussions

DEPUTY MINISTER OF DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORT, SAMIR MAMMADOV, UNDERSCORED THE AZERBAIJANI GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO DIGITALIZATION: "AZERBAIJAN HAS PREPARED A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY RELATED TO DIGITALIZATION. THE STRATEGY INCLUDES THREE PILLARS: DIGITAL GOVERNMENT, SOCIETY, AND BUSINESS. OUR GOAL IS TO EXPAND THE SCOPE OF DIGITALIZATION BASED ON THIS STRATEGY. RELIABLE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR TRANSFORMATION SHOULD BE BUILT IN AZERBAIJAN; PROGRESS IS BEING MADE IN THIS PURSUIT, AND I THINK THAT MORE POSITIVE RESULTS WILL BE ACHIEVED AS A RESULT OF JOINT ACTIVITIES."





was to explore how the mobile industry can forge cross-industry partnerships to prepare for the AI revolution.

Anticipating COP29, which will also be hosted in Azerbaijan in November this year, the event also underscored its commitment to the ESG agenda, emphasizing the convergence of digitalization and climate action.

The conference highlighted the transformative power of digital connectivity and its potential to catalyze regional growth. Industrial and governmental leaders discussed strategies to build advanced networks, accelerate digitization, and harness generative AI, positioning Eurasia at the forefront of innovation.

The participants also explored the sweeping impact of generative AI across the digital landscape. Tech visionaries discussed opportunities for innovation and efficiency while addressing challenges related to ethical use, data privacy, and security. Another session delved into how cross-sector collaboration is key to equipping tomorrow's workforce with the necessary skills for a digital-first world. Discussions included innovative approaches to education and training merging technical savvy with creativity and empathy, as well as ensuring that professionals thrive amidst rapid technological advancements. Another topic on the agenda was addressing the

dual challenge of expanding broadband access and managing surging mobile data traffic. With mobile technology playing a critical role in connecting over five billion people daily, the dialogue emphasized the need for policies that ensure timely and affordable spectrum access that fosters a vibrant digital economy.

In the frame of ESG agenda, the second day of the conference highlighted the need to manage Scope 3 emissions, adopt circular economy principles, and enhance disclosure rates, the discussion called for a united industry effort toward net-zero commitments, leveraging digital innovation for environmental stewardship.

Discussions examined the breakthroughs in telco architecture necessary to meet surging connectivity needs; such discussions focused on zero-touch, self-managing networks, and leveraging AI for smarter network management, all of which highlighted the role of cloud, edge, and satellite connectivity in enhancing network sustainability and efficiency. During this session, Azercell presented its ESG strategy, highlighting the company's key activities in these areas.

With its strategic discussions and collaborative spirit, M360 Eurasia 2024 has contributed to a common agenda for creating brighter, more connected future in the region.

CEO OF AZERCELL TELECOM LLC, ZARINA ZEYNALOVA: "AZERBAIJAN'S SELECTION AS THE HOST FOR THE GSMA M360 EURASIA EVENT FOR THE SECOND TIME REFLECTS THE COUNTRY'S LEADING ROLE IN DRIVING INNOVATION AND DIGITAL PROGRESS IN THE REGION. THIS DECISION RESONATES WITH AZERBAIJAN'S RAPID SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ITS STRONG COMMITMENT TO EMBRACING INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES."

GSMA'S CHIEF REGULATORY OFFICER, JOHN GIUSTI: "AS INDUSTRY AND SOCIETY ACROSS EURASIA TRANSFORM AT AN UNPRECEDENTED PACE, OUR CONNECTED ECOSYSTEM NEEDS A PLACE TO EXPLORE THE LATEST TECHNOLOGIES, IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES, AND MEET WITH THOSE SHAPING THE DIGITAL ECONOMY FOR THE REGION. M360 EURASIA IS THAT PLACE, AND BAKU PROVIDES THE PERFECT VENUE FOR REGIONAL BUSINESSES TO EXPLORE GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES OR FOR GLOBAL COMPANIES TO EXPAND ACROSS EURASIA."

Ms. Alessandra Roccasalvo,  
UNDP Resident Representative in Azerbaijan

# UNDP REPRESENTATIVE ENVISIONS AZERBAIJAN'S SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

IN A CONVERSATION WITH ALESSANDRA ROCCASALVO, THE UNDP RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE IN AZERBAIJAN, WE DELVED INTO THE ORGANIZATION'S REMARKABLE JOURNEY IN THIS COUNTRY OVER THE PAST THIRTY YEARS. MS. ROCCASALVO SHARED WITH AZERI OBSERVER HOW THE UNDP HAS SEAMLESSLY ALIGNED ITS STRATEGIES WITH AZERBAIJAN'S NATIONAL PRIORITIES, ADAPTING TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND GEOPOLITICAL CHANGES AND EMBRACING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS. HIGHLIGHTING KEY ACHIEVEMENTS, SHE EMPHASIZED THE UNDP'S PIVOTAL ROLE IN MINE ACTION, GENDER EQUALITY, AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION. ROCCASALVO ALSO EXPLAINED HOW UNDP HAS BEEN A STEADFAST PARTNER IN FOSTERING SOCIAL COHESION AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, ESPECIALLY FOR DISADVANTAGED GROUPS. AS AZERBAIJAN PREPARES FOR COP29, THE UNDP CONTINUES TO SUPPORT THE NATION'S AMBITIOUS GOALS, ENSURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

**BY ELENA KOSOLAPOVA**  
AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

**Question:** *Could you share some key achievements of the United Nations Development Programme in Azerbaijan over the past three decades? How have the organization's priorities in the country evolved during this time?*

**Answer:** The UNDP country programme evolved over the last three decades in line with the national strategy and the United Nations Azerbaijan Cooperation Framework. That is only natural given recent socio-economic and geo-political developments as well as the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The current Country Project Document (2021–2025) prioritizes mine action; support of social cohesion and community building for the relocation of IDPs and refugees, gender equality, and the economic empowerment of disadvantaged groups; continued support of digitalization; and green and circular economy, adaption to climate changes, and innovative financing methods. You will find that those areas mirror the national development priorities of Azerbaijan.

Let me focus on two examples. Before the war in Ukraine, the landmine contamination in Azerbaijan was considered the highest in the world. Mine action is an important cornerstone of UNDP's portfolio. We focus on working together with ANAMA (the Mine Action Agency of Azerbaijan) on capacity building, strategy setting, and legal framework, as well as education of the public and capacitation of mine clearance teams. At the request of ANAMA, we brought forward the establishment of the first-ever all-women demining teams, which have been trained, accredited, and deployed to the field. UNDP's mine action is well-recognized by the Azerbaijani Government. UNDP is the only international organization in the coordination committee for mine action comprised of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Presidential Administration, and ANAMA. In addition to ongoing activities, the Government has requested our input and assistance in a new strategic roadmap focused on broader international public relations and the establishment of a Center of Excellence on Mine Action. We are proud to be a reliable partner to Azerbaijan. In 2023, the Government has shown unprecedented commitment and ownership by adopting a national SDG18 that includes action to combat the threat of mines for safe return, resettlement, rehabilitation, prosperity, and peace in all of Azerbaijan, including the Karabakh region.

UNDP is also working with vulnerable communities in 15 regions through comprehensive services provided by Women Resource Centers, including Community

Resource Hubs and local partners to support employment, rural development, and energy access. UNDP will further focus on the establishment of new Community Resource Centers with the continuous aim to support women, youth, and IDP families through various services and tailor-made activities.

Finally, I would also mention the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) project financed by the Green Climate Fund. This project will support the Government of Azerbaijan to facilitate the development of the NAP. It will also improve climate change adaptation actions in three priority sectors identified by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan through stakeholder consultations: water, agriculture, and coastal areas. The NAP-readiness support aims to increase climate resilience and adaptation capacity in three priority sectors through the implementation of actions that will reduce or eliminate barriers for an effective adaptation process at the national and local levels. The primary beneficiaries are the national government, specifically agencies in the three priority sectors, as well as local communities.

**Q:** *How does UNDP help Azerbaijan integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into its national development plans and policies?*

**A:** Thankfully, our partnership with Azerbaijan is a very fruitful and open partnership. The Government of Azerbaijan has included the principles behind the SDGs in its national strategies; for instance, the documents "Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development" and the "Strategy of Socio-Economic Development for 2022-2026" both highlight a vision of a dynamic, inclusive society grounded in social justice as one of the country's five priority directions through 2030. In alignment with this vision, Azerbaijan has prioritized SDG targets and indicators related to inclusive economic growth and social inclusion, comprising 88 targets and 119 indicators across all 17 SDGs. Additionally, Azerbaijan has introduced a national SDG18 specifically focused on mine action.

**'UNDP IS WORKING WITH VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES IN 15 REGIONS THROUGH COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES PROVIDED BY WOMEN RESOURCE CENTERS, INCLUDING COMMUNITY RESOURCE HUBS AND LOCAL PARTNERS TO SUPPORT EMPLOYMENT, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AND ENERGY ACCESS.'**







First ever women deminers in Azerbaijan recruited by ANAMA as part of the UNDP-implemented capacity building initiative.

UNDP has supported Azerbaijan by completing the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) in collaboration with the National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development under the Ministry of Economy. Eighty-six countries around the world have begun creating INFFs. This collaborative effort included conducting

meetings and capacity-building activities on green economy, INFF implementation, fintech solutions, and green investments. Moving forward, UNDP will continue to assist the Government in implementing INFF policy recommendations and development priorities through SDG-aligned financial instruments and strategies. This

support aims to facilitate the achievement of sustainable development goals in Azerbaijan. In fact, Azerbaijan's delegation will present the SDG investor maps created within the INFF during the High-Level Political Forum in New York this July.

**Q.: Can you talk about UNDP's role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Azerbaijan? What projects are you working on in this area?**

**A.:** UNDP works on gender equality in all regions of the world. Thanks to this longstanding support, we have managed to assist countries make progress toward gender equality and women's empowerment and toward a more equitable and just society. In 2022, we launched Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025 to help countries accelerate progress over the next four years in the pursuit of gender equality and global Sustainable Development Goals. This strategy puts gender equality at the heart of UNDP's efforts for a better and just world.

In Azerbaijan, we have established excellent cooperation with the State Committee for Family, Women, and Children Affairs as well as with international donors, which has resulted in the establishment of 15 Women's Resource Centers/Community Resource Hubs in rural and urban areas, as well as conflict-affected regions. The main purpose of the Women's Resource Centers (WRCs) is to provide a space where rural women can develop, gain new knowledge, share ideas, and network. The Centers help to strengthen rural women's entrepreneurial skills and advance their competitiveness in the labor market, empowering them to overcome the many socio-economic challenges faced by women living in rural areas. The target audience of the Centers includes women with disabilities, gender-based violence survivors, and survivors of the recent conflict. To date, we have registered over 8,700 WRC members and have offered free training courses to over 7,000 women in areas such as human and economic rights, business development, accounting, vocational education, financial literacy, and computer science. Furthermore, we have provided some 850 women with equipment to start their own businesses, and 460 women are currently employed as a result. We have also offered psychological, legal, and social advisory support to over 8,200 women.

This model is successful in that it will be expanded to community resource centers, providing services to other interested audiences, such as rural young women and men. We promote the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) in the private sector to ensure gender equality in workplaces. So far, we have engaged 32 private companies to become WEP signatories by signing the UN Global Principles. By being WEP signatories, companies demonstrate their commitment to gender equality on a corporate level. Companies are not doing this as part of their corporate social responsibility commitments, but rather as part of their wider business strategy.

**Q.: What specific initiatives has UNDP launched to support youth engagement and development in Azerbaijan?**

**A.:** United Nations Volunteers (UNV) works with UNDP to support youth inclusiveness and sustainable development. The UNV programme has a wide range of

**IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, UNDP DESIGNS AND IMPLEMENTS INNOVATIVE INITIATIVES TO ENABLE SOCIALLY EXCLUDED PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES, SUCH AS YOUTH, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, WOMEN LIVING IN RURAL TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVES BY ENSURING THEY HAVE EQUAL ACCESS TO QUALITY SERVICES.**

mechanisms to find and deploy national talents from throughout Azerbaijan within the United Nations System, whether it's searching inside or outside of the country for youths, specialists, experts, and community volunteers. Its unique mandate combines diverse areas of education, health, food security and agriculture, social protection, migration, business start-ups, conflict resolution, climate change, green economy, agriculture, gender equality, and accelerator labs. All of this involves the participation of youth and people with disabilities, creating career opportunities for volunteers from diverse localities, backgrounds, and ages, giving them access to evidenced-based solutions from UN global practices, including former-Soviet Union countries.

In 2023, UNV achieved a historical milestone in Azerbaijan, attracting a record number of UN Volunteers. Since last year, 45 UN Volunteers actively served in Azerbaijan for UNDP, UNICEF, and WHO, comprising 27 national and 18 international volunteers. This diverse group is made up of 50% men and 50% women. In 2023, 17 Online Volunteers (OVs) have been recruited so far: six by WHO, nine by UNDP, and two by UNV. The primary areas of support provided by OVs include translation, proofreading, design, copyediting, social media monitoring, and report editing for various UN entities in Azerbaijan. UNDP actively engages talented young Azerbaijani citizens as UN Volunteers within its programmes and initiatives, deploying them to support various projects, and fully supports the mandate of UNV.

**Q.: Could you give some notable examples of innovative initiatives by UNDP that have helped socially excluded people and communities in Azerbaijan improve their lives?**

**A.:** In partnership with the government and community-based organizations, UNDP designs and implements innovative initiatives to enable socially excluded people and communities, such as youth, people with disabilities, women living in rural to improve their lives by ensuring they have equal access to quality services. UNDP globally has invested in over 100 acceleration labs – spaces where people with a high degree of innovation and experimentation potential come together to develop solutions outside the box. For instance, we have organized Inclusivity Hackathons to tackle the challenges of people with disabilities via innovative solutions.

In addition, during COVID-19 we have developed a series of solutions aimed at ensuring access to healthcare in rural areas. Our digital trainings for girls in rural areas and the digital connections we forge for women entrepreneurs in the regions have helped them to expand their client



**‘AZERBAIJAN HAS A STRATEGIC ROLE TO PLAY IN THE GLOBAL FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE, GIVEN ITS GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION AND ENERGY RESOURCES. THE COUNTRY CAN SIGNIFICANTLY CONTRIBUTE BY HARNESSING ITS RENEWABLE ENERGY POTENTIAL – PARTICULARLY IN SOLAR AND WIND POWER – TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS.’**

bases. Over the years, we have worked on a wide range of innovative initiatives, including mobile applications, pilot training programs, specialized schools, legislative changes, and infrastructural improvements. Together with the government and donor partners, we have established the country’s first Inclusive Art School for people of all abilities, improved local infrastructure in Baku and rural regions, and ensured gender-sensitive service delivery by conducting training for state agencies. This initiative was taken over by the government and is still running! We contributed to amendments in the Labor Code to reduce the number of jobs prohibited for women, supported rural

women in producing their first fashion collections and expanding beyond their regions, and promoted active participation of women and girls in STEM. Additionally, we empowered young people to innovate in tackling climate change, building inclusive societies, and adapting to future job markets through one-stop-shop platforms, hackathons, ideathons, social theaters, and collective intelligence exercises.

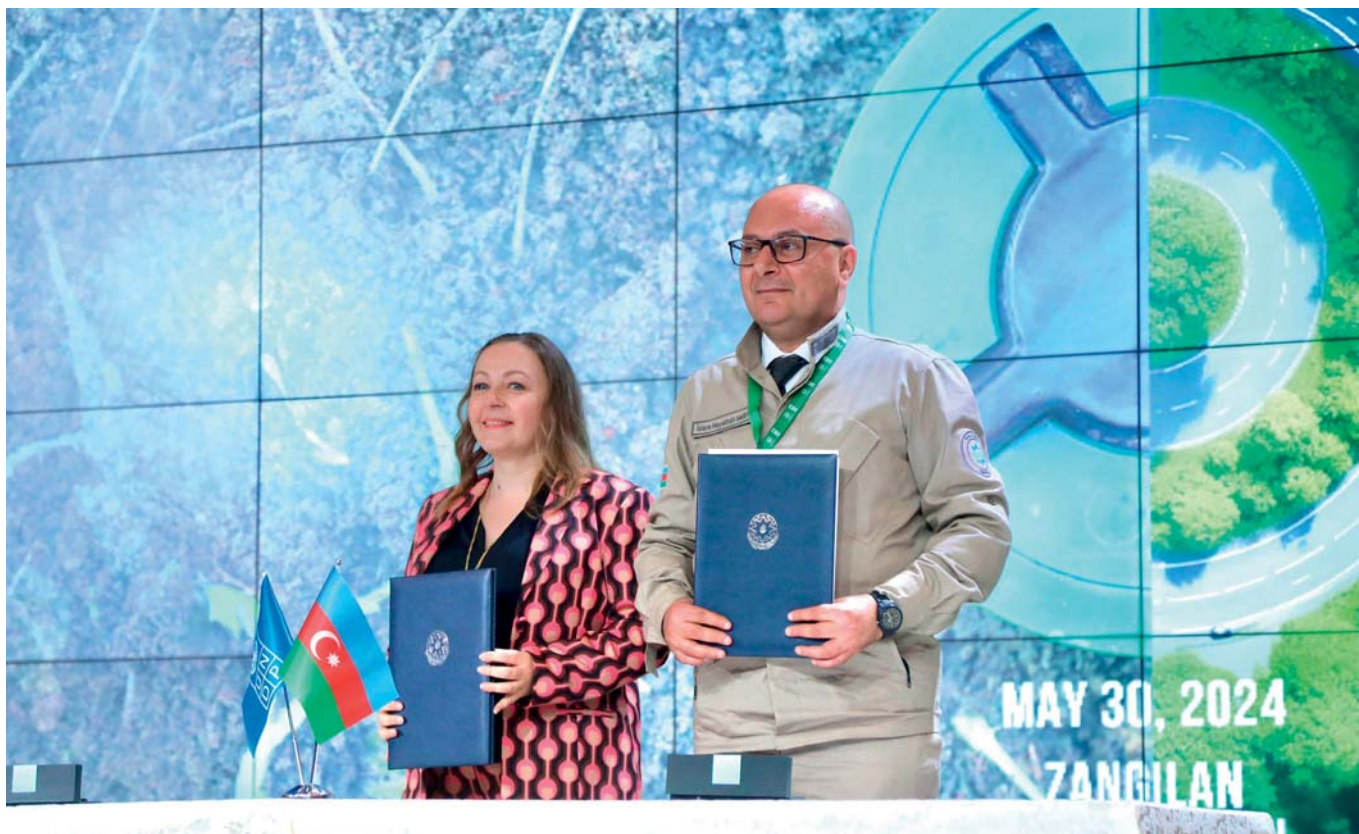
**Q.: Recently, UNDP and ANAMA signed a Statement of Intent to establish the ANAMA-UNDP International Center of Excellence and Training for Mine Action in Azerbaijan. What kind of support will UNDP provide for this project?**

**A.:** UNDP’s support for this project will encompass a range of activities in line with government priorities. UNDP will aid in conducting a robust feasibility study to support the establishment of the mine action Center of Excellence. The study will include a detailed assessment and analysis of the regulatory requirements, organization structure, ideal location, financial resources, and operational modalities, as well as in areas like design, implementation, and sustainability plans. UNDP will also assist in mobilizing resources, providing technical expertise, and establishing partnerships with other mine action entities for the successful establishment, operationalization, and management of the Center of Excellence. The Center will provide opportunities for developing, testing, and applying innovative methodologies and technologies, such as the use of demining machines, drones, satellite imagery, and artificial intelligence (AI) (among other strategies) in the mine action sector. By providing these types of support, UNDP helps the ANAMA-UNDP International Center of Excellence and Training for Mine Action to become a leading institution in the mine action sector that is capable of addressing current and future mine action in a more sustainable, environmentally friendly, safe, and cost-effective manner.

**Q.: What role do you think Azerbaijan can play in the global fight against climate change? How can UNDP support these efforts?**

**A.:** Azerbaijan has a strategic role to play in the global fight against climate change, given its geographic location and energy resources. The country can significantly contribute by harnessing its renewable energy potential – particularly in solar and wind power – to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Azerbaijan’s efforts can include transitioning to a low-carbon economy, improving energy efficiency, and investing in green technologies. UNDP can support Azerbaijan in these pursuits by providing technical assistance, fostering capacity building, and facilitating policy development.

Additionally, UNDP can assist Azerbaijan in accessing international climate finances and implementing sustainable practices across various sectors, ensuring that climate action is integrated into national development plans. During the meeting with the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, Mr. Achim Steiner, earlier this year, Mr. President Ilham Aliyev noted that the green transition is one of the priority areas for the country. The Head of State said that the renewable



UNDP and ANAMA signed the Statement of Intent on establishment of the International Centre of Excellence.

and green energy potential of the country exceeds 200 gigawatts, adding that Azerbaijan will have the opportunity to produce five megawatts of renewable energy resources in the near future. In this context, the President emphasized that Azerbaijan took the initiative to form a renewable green energy corridor that links the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. According to the President, cooperation with the countries of the region is underway in this regard. Therefore, Azerbaijan's green transformation aligns perfectly with the concept of hosting COP29, and the country will serve as a good example to the international community.

**Q.: How is UNDP planning to cooperate with Azerbaijan for the upcoming COP29 conference?**

**A.:** In preparation for the upcoming COP conference, UNDP is working closely with the Government of Azerbaijan to enhance its climate action framework. This event is a platform where world leaders, government officials, scientists, global companies, and NGOs come together to discuss global climate issues. The United Nations Development Programme is sharing its experience in this field with the Government of Azerbaijan in the lead up to the conference. I am sure that the decisions made during COP29 in Baku will be of historical importance in preventing the consequences of climate change; the conference will surely go down in history just like the Baku Finance Agreement.

The UNDP climate portfolio helps the Government to take action against climate change. It supports Azerbaijan in implementing the Paris Climate Agreement and improving climate policies and legislation. Additionally, its ambition is to limit climate change's impact on citizens' lives and make them more resilient to it. The scope of the

initiative was defined in cooperation with the Government of Azerbaijan.

**Q.: How does UNDP's involvement in the COP conference align with its broader objectives in Azerbaijan, particularly regarding sustainable development and climate resilience?**

**A.:** UNDP has been working with COP Presidencies and governments for decades to achieve global climate goals aligned with national priorities. UNDP works with all stakeholders for Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which are nationally owned climate plans and strategies. The NDCs and Sustainable Development Goals have linked together to ensure that the economic, social, and environmental systems of a country are resilient against systematic risks when climate change has a multiplier effect. Key pillars of UNDP's Climate Promise include ambitious NDC targets, the financially and technically feasible accelerated implementation of climate plans, and whole-society involvement for future decisions. UNDP's engagement in the COP29 is deeply intertwined with its broader objectives, particularly concerning the sustainable development and climate resilience of Azerbaijan.

**‘IN PREPARATION FOR THE UPCOMING COP CONFERENCE, UNDP IS WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF AZERBAIJAN TO ENHANCE ITS CLIMATE ACTION FRAMEWORK. THIS EVENT IS A PLATFORM WHERE WORLD LEADERS, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, SCIENTISTS, GLOBAL COMPANIES, AND NGOS COME TOGETHER TO DISCUSS GLOBAL CLIMATE ISSUES.’**



UNDP undertakes the initiatives among schoolchildren to raise awareness about the pressing challenges posed by climate change.

By collaborating and supporting the COP29 Presidency, UNDP reinforces its commitment to advancing the SDGs in Azerbaijan through linking the SDG13 on climate action with other SDGs. UNDP's initiatives focus on building climate-resilient communities, promoting sustainable land and water management, and supporting the transition to a green economy. The insights and partnerships gained from the COP help align national efforts with global best practices, ensuring that Azerbaijan's development path is sustainable and climate resilient. Azerbaijan's new NDC and initial National Adaptation Plan will be key milestones – not just in terms of showing leadership to other countries during the COP29, but also in turning a new page in the green transition of the national development paradigm. UNDP Azerbaijan will continue working with all stakeholders for Azerbaijan's sustainable future.

**Q.: Can you share any partnerships or collaborations that UNDP is currently developing in preparation for the COP conference?**

**A.:** In preparation for the COP conference, UNDP is actively developing and strengthening partnerships with various stakeholders, including government agencies, community-based organizations, academia, and the private sector. These collaborations aim to create a unified and robust national climate agenda. For instance, UNDP is working with the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources to enhance policy frameworks and with local NGOs to ensure grassroots-level engagement and awareness.

Additionally, UNDP is partnering with international organizations to bring in global expertise and resources, facilitating knowledge exchange and capacity enhancement. These partnerships are crucial for presenting a coherent and ambitious climate strategy at the COP conference and for driving long-term sustainable development in Azerbaijan. Through its Climate Promise 2025, UNDP

partners and collaborates with all UN agencies in the UN System for ambitious, accelerated, and inclusive NDCs. The Climate Promise 2025 was launched on April 23 with the UN Secretary General's call for supporting countries to meet the 1.5 target of the Paris Agreement. It is the biggest UN support for NDCs, involving the UN Secretary General and the UNDP Administrator inviting everyone to join Climate Promise 2025 for a successful COP29 and beyond.

**Q.: Could you share more about UNDP's strategies for fostering economic development in Azerbaijan?**

**A.:** UNDP is implementing a varied portfolio across many different development areas. The country office has over 80 staff members and employees helping the country and its people to advance the 2030 Agenda and fulfill the promise to leave no one behind. I will describe some critical interventions below.

We are also implementing interventions on rural development through establishing a modern and competitive fruit and vegetable value chain. UNDP Azerbaijan has been instrumental in bridging employers and job seekers through the online platform PROGRAM by prioritizing closing the gap in youth unemployment. We have leveraged synergies through our integrated platform approach to boost employment and skills development in the formal labor market through the modernization of vocational education. UNDP worked with its government counterparts and broadened its engagement with the private sector to support micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises. In 2023, 49% of applicants seeking legal aid were women, highlighting an increasing demand. Furthermore, the country office enhanced its commitment to the Women in STEM mentorship program, reaching out to over 150 participants. As a result of UNDP's continuous efforts, 20 private companies signed on to the Women Empowerment Principles in 2023. UNDP has been leading a modernization of the ICT infrastructure,



UNDP Azerbaijan takes a stand against gender-based violence within the 16 days of activism campaign.

innovation, and digital transformation in selected areas (e.g., architecture, healthcare, upcycling, and others). Together with the Accelerator Lab, our programme team has mainstreamed innovation in designing and implementing programmes to co-create faster and more integrated results.

**Q.: How does UNDP measure the impact and success of its various programs and initiatives in Azerbaijan?**

**A.:** UNDP has a robust framework to measure the impact of its various programs and initiatives and to track progress effectively in Azerbaijan. Central to this approach is the ongoing Country Programme Document (2021-2025), which is approved by the UNDP board. It is also aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. The UNDP country office is in its fourth year of successfully implementing the Country Programme Document. Annually, UNDP monitors the outcome, output results, and indicators across thematic areas such as sustainable growth, governance, and environmental sustainability. This year, the UNDP will initiate the Independent Country Programme Evaluation in the country. The UNDP Independent Evaluation Office undertakes evaluations in countries embarking on new programming cycles. Evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations serve as inputs for the new UNDP Country Programme in line with national priorities.

**'UNDP HAS A ROBUST FRAMEWORK TO MEASURE THE IMPACT OF ITS VARIOUS PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES AND TO TRACK PROGRESS EFFECTIVELY IN AZERBAIJAN.'**

**Q.: On a personal note, how challenging is it for a woman to build a career in the UN?**

**A.:** I joined UNDP about 20 years ago. Even back then, the organization was actively recruiting for gender parity, albeit the higher-level positions were predominantly held by men. A career in diplomacy – whether as an international civil servant or in a national diplomatic service – is exciting but also challenging, especially for families. Living in many places is very enriching, but the frequent moving can also be uprooting. For me, the most important support always came from my family, who stood by my side and cheered me on. I also owe a lot to my mentors, both men and women, who helped me grow over the years, gave valuable feedback, and challenged me to take on complex assignments. Over the years, I had the privilege of serving in Indonesia, Afghanistan, and Pristina/Kosovo, as well as Sudan and in our New York headquarters. My last assignment was on loan to the Executive Office of the Secretary General in New York, where I worked directly for Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohamed. Before UNDP, I was in the private sector, both in India and Germany. Now I will be staying in Baku for some years!

# GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT: DEVELOPMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF AZERBAIJANIS WORLDWIDE

## ◀ AZERI OBSERVER EDITORIAL STAFF

When discussing the important efforts of the diaspora for the Motherland, two areas are commonly emphasized: first, the return of people who have emigrated to other countries (in other words, reversing the brain drain) and second, the creation of a special system that ensures compatriots living abroad can still contribute significantly to their ancestral homeland. Azerbaijan's ever-evolving diaspora policy creates favorable conditions for the development of both directions.

In recent years, large projects implemented by the State Committee for Work with Diaspora have resulted in a noticeable centralization in the activities of Azerbaijanis around the world. The establishment of Coordination Councils and the increase in the number and quality indicators of Azerbaijani Houses have significantly boosted the efficiency of Azerbaijani communities abroad. The victory in Karabakh and the organization of regular visits by community members and foreigners to the territories liberated from Armenian occupation have positively impacted the activities of the diaspora and increased the intensity of informing the global public.

After the historic victory in Karabakh, Azerbaijanis around the world celebrate May 28th, Azerbaijan's Independence Day, with even greater enthusiasm. This year, Azerbaijani compatriots organized numerous events to mark Independence Day, successfully drawing the attention of local communities to significant historical events in the country's history. Across the United States, various European countries, Central Asian countries, Arab countries, Russia, and Georgia – in short, all around the world – the diaspora organized grand ceremonies and concert programs for Independence Day. These events informed public figures, members of the diaspora, and local communities about the country's historical facts and modern, developing Azerbaijan.

One of the notable events was the ceremony of raising the Azerbaijani flag in front of important political centers in various countries on Independence Day, which were attended by local legislative bodies, the public, and diaspora representatives. The ceremonial raising of the Azerbaijani flag in front of Parliament buildings in various states of the United States, in cities across Canada, and in Australia demonstrated the strength of pride associated with Independence Day. For instance, in Regina, the capital of Saskatchewan, Canada, a ceremony was held in front of the Regina City Hall on May 28th, Independence Day, where the Azerbaijani and Canadian national anthems were played and the tricolor flag was solemnly raised. The event was attended by the city's mayor, Sandra Masters, and members of the Legislative Assembly, Nicole Sarauer, Muhammad Fiaz, and

Jared Clarke. The Azerbaijani flag was raised for the first time in Saskatchewan last year to commemorate the 105th anniversary of the country's independence.

On the occasion of Independence Day, a ceremony was held to raise the National Flag of Azerbaijan in the famous City Hall center of Hamilton in Canada. As part of the ceremony and for the first time in the city of Hamilton, a meeting was held with representatives of the Azerbaijani community, providing detailed information about the foundation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the first secular democratic state in the Muslim East, and introducing the pearls of Azerbaijani culture – dance and music – to the local community. This exchange of information went down in history as a memorable feat of diaspora activity.

It is also fitting to highlight a few other examples. In Belgium, the Brisbane City Hall was illuminated with the colors of the Azerbaijani flag on May 28th. In Canada, the Niagara Falls were once again lit up in the colors of the tricolor flag, a spectacle that has become a tradition and continues to draw significant interest from the local community.

In short, as in previous years, Independence Day was celebrated with great enthusiasm worldwide. Various competitions, tournaments, artistic programs, and exhibitions were organized to celebrate this remarkable day. For instance, in the ancient Odd Fellow Palace in the center of Copenhagen, Denmark, a concert by Azerbaijani eminent musician, renowned pianist, composer, and Honored Artist Emil Afrasiyab was held in celebration of Independence Day.

Numerous examples confirm the increasingly expansive political and cultural activities of the Azerbaijani diaspora, which has now become a "soft power" on the global stage. Strengthening the diaspora and transforming it into political and intellectual power is one of the priority areas for the Azerbaijani state, including the State Committee for Work with Diaspora, which implements the state's diaspora policy. To this end, the Committee carries out projects with specific targets, intensifies connections with the Azerbaijani communities abroad, and organizes open and in-depth exchanges of ideas in regular meetings with diaspora organizations.

During the visit of Fuad Muradov, Chairman of the State Committee for Work with Diaspora, to Italy, a meeting was held with the Azerbaijani community in the country. At the meeting, the Azerbaijani compatriots and representatives of the local community were provided with detailed information about the country's diaspora policy, Coordination Councils, Azerbaijani Houses, Azerbaijani-language weekend schools, Summer Camps for Diaspora Youth, the Brain Gain program, specialized forums organized by the Committee in foreign countries, and





Renowned surgeon originally from South Azerbaijan who now resides in the US, Shapur Ansari (R), shakes hands with President Ilham Aliyev on the sidelines of the international forum titled "COP29 and Green Vision for Azerbaijan" at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy on April 23.



The State Committee Chairman Fuad Muradov (L) presents renowned surgeon Shapur Ansari with the 100th Anniversary of Heydar Aliyev (1923-2023) jubilee medal, awarded by President Aliyev.

more. Recalling President Ilham Aliyev's recommendations to compatriots living abroad at the Fifth (Victory) Congress of World Azerbaijanis, the committee chairman noted that Azerbaijanis worldwide, including the community in Italy, remain loyal to the ideology of Azerbaijanism and actively participate in promoting the country's truths.

During the visit, the chairman of the committee met with Luigi Maria Vignali, Director General of the Directorate General for Italian Citizens Abroad and Migration Policies. Vignali emphasized that Azerbaijan is an important partner and friend for Italy and noted that a comprehensive diaspora infrastructure has been established to protect the interests and rights of Italians abroad and emigrants from Italy. The meeting highlighted the recent increase in the number of Azerbaijanis coming to Italy for educational purposes, leading to discussions

on issues of cooperation, exchange of experiences, and potential partnerships.

It is important to note that the Azerbaijani state always keeps the heirs of the Republic living abroad in focus, establishing close connections with them. The descendants of the republicans have been awarded various orders and medals multiple times by presidential decree. During Fuad Muradov's visit to Italy, his meeting with Daniel Kazim Bey, the descendant of Cahangir Bey Kazimbeyli, who served as an army officer in the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, further demonstrates the respect for roots and history, as well as the strong connections established with the descendants of the republicans living abroad. The Azerbaijani compatriots who have achieved success in Italy represent Azerbaijan with dignity and are integrated into society, further building cultural bridges between the two countries. The best example in this area can be considered the creative evening of the chairman of the Azerbaijani Cultural Association, Azeri, Mais Nuriyev, who is a choreographer and professor of the Academy of Dance "Aida and Orizon" in Milan and the Milan Conservatory; Nuriyev quickly became the center of attention of the Italian press. The cultural evening, the love of Italians for Azerbaijani culture, and the rich activity of Mais Nuriyev were widely covered in the "Homeland is Nearby" program, a joint project of Diaspor TV and Icimai TV channels. The show was broadcast on both TV channels.

The meeting held with the Azerbaijani community in Chisinau, the capital of Moldova, also included discussions aimed at organizing and deepening the activities of the diaspora. The Committee Chairman Fuad Muradov emphasized the symbolic significance of holding such a meeting on May 28th, Independence Day. He noted that Azerbaijanis around the world are now united "like a fist." Fuad Muradov discussed the work of the committee and highlighted the mechanisms of unity within Azerbaijani communities, focusing on the multifaceted



The ceremonial of raising the Azerbaijani flag was held in front of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, located in Toronto, Canada, on the occasion of May 28 - Independence Day.



May 28 - Independence Day was solemnly celebrated in Niagara Falls, Canada.

activities of the Coordination Councils and Azerbaijani Houses. The Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Moldova, Ulvi Bakhshaliyev, spoke about the indispensable role of the Azerbaijani diaspora in representing the country abroad and positively evaluated the activities of diaspora organizations in Moldova, explaining that such meetings contribute to strengthening the solidarity of Azerbaijanis living abroad.

The speeches highlighted the successful continuation of the diaspora policy initiated by National Leader Heydar Aliyev, the development of diaspora-state relations on solid foundations, and the history of May 28th as Independence Day, along with the progress of modern Azerbaijan.

The first broad meeting of Chairman of the State Committee for Work with Diaspora with representatives of the Azerbaijani community in Tokyo, Japan, should also be noted. The ambassador of Azerbaijan to Japan, Gursel Ismayilzade, noted the significance of bringing together the Azerbaijani community living in Japan. Chairman Fuad Muradov provided detailed information about the country's diaspora policy. The meeting concluded with answers to the community members' questions and an exchange of ideas about future plans.

During the State Committee Chairman's visit to Japan, several meetings were held that are expected to positively impact the development of relations between the two countries and the societal integration of the Azerbaijani compatriots living in the Land of the Rising Sun, enhancing their connections with various sectors of the Japan community. During his visit, Fuad Muradov was a guest at the home of Fuad Baghirov, an Azerbaijani living in Japan and a participant of the first Summer Camp for Diaspora Youth.

An unforgettable concert was held in Tokyo featuring Azerbaijani and Japanese artists living in Japan. The program included performances of Azerbaijani songs and dances by Azerbaijani dancers Minara Shukurova and Dilara Qaziyeva, Japanese artists Yamamoto Kyoko and Taiga, as well as the Otantik Bunka and Kelebek groups. The performances by Azerbaijani and Japanese dancers were met with applause from the audience. Another interesting cultural event was the concert of the Azerbaijani pianist Gulnara Safarova, who lives in Yokohama, Kanagawa province.

One of the most important aspects of today's diaspora policy is establishing close connections with representatives of nations that have friendly relations with Azerbaijan. This includes familiarizing them with the country's post-war development and the reconstruction efforts in Karabakh, as well as informing them about the disinformation spread by the Armenian diaspora. The visit to the city of Shusha by Vietnamese and Lao guests who studied in Azerbaijan 40 years ago is an example of such an initiative. Members of the Vietnam-Azerbaijan and Laos-Azerbaijan Friendship Associations condemned the acts of vandalism committed by Armenians in Shusha and praised the rapid restoration and reconstruction efforts in Karabakh. They expressed confidence that Shusha will become one of the most beautiful tourism centers in the future. The guests noted the significant differences between Azerbaijan 40 years ago and today.

The Vietnamese guests visited several state institutions and higher education institutions, and they had a meeting at the ruling New Azerbaijan Party. The visit was organized jointly by the State Committee and the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Vietnam.



During the visit of Fuad Muradov, Chairman of the State Committee for Work with Diaspora, to Italy, a meeting was held with the Azerbaijani community in the country.

Another memorable event in diaspora activities was the visit to Azerbaijan of Shapur Ansari, a renowned surgeon originally from South Azerbaijan who now resides in the US.

On April 23, Shapur Ansari participated in the international forum titled “COP29 and Green Vision for Azerbaijan” at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy (ADA), where he had a personal meeting with President Ilham Aliyev. Prior to the forum, he met with students and experts, including a meeting with ADA University Rector Hafiz Pashayev and the State Committee Chairman Fuad Muradov. During this meeting, the committee chairman presented Shapur Ansari with the 100th Anniversary of Heydar Aliyev (1923–2023) jubilee medal, awarded by President Aliyev.

Organizing visits to the country for both diaspora members and foreigners plays an invaluable role in conveying accurate information about Azerbaijan to the international community. A delegation from Maine, in the US, consisting of officials and prominent public figures, visited the liberated cities of Shusha and Lachin, demonstrating the importance of such meetings. During their visit, the guests closely observed the rapid restoration and reconstruction works in Shusha, the cultural capital of Azerbaijan. The delegation was acquainted with the conditions created for the new residents of Shusha and highly appreciated the efforts made. They also condemned the acts of vandalism committed by Armenians against cultural monuments and mosques in Shusha during the occupation. The guests visited the Vaqif Mausoleum, the Ganja Gates, the Bullet-Riddled Statues monument, Jidir Plain, and the Upper Govhar Agha Mosque.

The US delegation then traveled to Lachin, where they familiarized themselves with the conditions created for new residents, job opportunities, social security, and the ongoing reconstruction and restoration works in the region. In Lachin, they visited the Agro and Industrial Park, greenhouses, a farm, a furniture workshop, and the village of Sus. The residents invited the guests into their homes to show them the excellent conditions provided by the state. The beauty of Azerbaijan's nature and the hospitality of the local residents left a positive impression on the delegation.

The visit of the delegation from the Congress of Bukharian Jews from the US and Canada to Azerbaijan was another memorable event. The guests first visited the Alley of Martyrs in



During Fuad Muradov's (R) visit to Italy, his meeting with Daniel Kazim Bey, the descendant of Cahangir Bey Kazimbeyli, who served as an army officer in the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, further demonstrates the respect for roots and history.

Baku to pay tribute to the sons of the Motherland who sacrificed their lives for the independence and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, laying flowers on their graves in respect. They then visited the Icherisheher State Historical and Architectural Reserve, which is included in UNESCO's World Heritage List, including the Shirvanshahs' Palace Complex and the Maiden Tower. Here, they were acquainted with the national and cultural heritage of the country. The guests also visited the Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum, which preserves art samples and national heritage of carpets, the Military Trophies Park, and the Heydar Aliyev Center.

The delegation's visit to the liberated regions of Fuzuli, Shusha, and Lachin was also memorable. The delegation members noted that the extensive reconstruction efforts and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homelands in such a short time both comprise significant historical events for Azerbaijan.

The State Committee on Work with Diaspora provides various training and educational opportunities to members



The first broad meeting of the Chairman of the State Committee for Work with Diaspora, Fuad Muradov with representatives of the Azerbaijani community in Japan.



Azerbaijani musician living in Germany, Anar Bramo, became the winner of the V International Academy and Competition of Orchestra Conducting in Portugal.

of the overseas community to improve their skills, personal development, and careers. The professional training project for the compatriots studying in Poland with the support of the State Committee serves precisely these goals. The project was implemented at the Azerbaijan House located in Warsaw, and 50 students took part in the training. A positive outcome of the training was that, in a short period of time, two of these students were promoted to various positions at City Bank: one at Zeitgeist Asset Management and one at Solenis. The Scholarship Career Training project continues because it is important for finding a job, career and development of students living in Poland or planning to come to the country.

One of the important and very interesting points is that Azerbaijan Houses abroad create many opportunities not only for Azerbaijanis but also for foreigners. This is exemplified by Marvin Steinfurth, a US citizen who works in the Kvemo Kartli region of Georgia and studies Azerbaijani at the Alliance Youth Center, who said: “When I came to work in Georgia, I never imagined that studying Azerbaijani language would be important to me. I am learning this language for free at the Alliance Youth Center in Tbilisi.”

There are plenty of other examples like this. American citizens Kavin Rees, Alice Jackson, Austin Peck, and Sam

Ferguson are studying the Azerbaijani language at the Alliance Youth Center, sharing their positive opinions about the conditions created for them and the level of education. It should be noted that the Alliance Youth Center has been operating in Tbilisi since 2021 with the support of the State Committee on Work with Diaspora.

Speaking about the activities of Azerbaijani compatriots in Georgia, it is appropriate to pay attention to one more fact. The Sarvan folklore ensemble operating at the Azerbaijan House was successfully presented at the XXIV World Turkic Children’s Festival in Istanbul. The ensemble representing Georgia performed Azerbaijani national music and folk dances at the festival and was received with great applause.

In general, the representation of Azerbaijanis living in different countries in various areas is encouraging. Speaking of this, it is worth noting that the Azerbaijani musician Anar Bramo (Ibragimov) has been appointed chief conductor of the symphony orchestra of the Oberberg region of the federal state of North Westphalia, Germany. There is extensive information about this in the widely circulated German newspapers *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* and *Oberbergische Kultura*.

The multidirectional activities of the Azerbaijani diaspora – which are expanding every day – are always at the center of the attention of foreign media. As an example, we can look to the coverage by Korean media of the Azerbaijan Day event held at the INHA University related to the announcement of the city of Shusha as the “Cultural Capital of the Islamic World” for 2024. An article posted on the influential Korea Post website noted that the culture, national cuisine, and history of Azerbaijan were widely promoted at the event, held jointly with the State Committee on Work with Diaspora and the Azerbaijani Embassy in Korea.

Today’s deep and multifaceted diaspora policy of the Azerbaijani state is accompanied by successful outcomes. This policy expands the activities of Azerbaijani communities abroad, accelerates their integration into the societies in which they live, and helps strengthen their ties with the homeland. Thus, the strong Azerbaijani diaspora continues to grow stronger.



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[www.worldazerbaijanis.com](http://www.worldazerbaijanis.com)  
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Dünya Azərbaycanlılarının  
İnteraktiv Xəritəsi



DİASPOR TƏŞKİLATLARININ  
MƏRKƏZİ PORTALI





# AI CHANGING THE LABOR MARKET: PERSPECTIVES FOR AZERBAIJAN

◀ **BY FARID GATTAL**  
AZERI OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming business operations by automating tasks, analyzing data, and improving decision-making, significantly increasing operational efficiency. AI, including the much-hyped generative AI, is now being used in a wide range of industries, including information and communication technologies, legal services, finance, manufacturing, logistics

and transportation, entertainment, healthcare, and even fashion and agriculture. Together with the Internet of Things, Big Data, robotics, and other automation technologies, AI is a crucial part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in which we are now living. Like other industrial revolutions before it, the 4IR is bringing fundamental changes to our way of life and is certainly having a major effect on the labor market. While past automation mainly replaced physical work, the current spread of AI is enabling the automation of intellectual jobs.

This year, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) presented its first AI Jobs Barometer, which summarizes the findings of the company's research into AI's impact on the labor market. The study is based on the analysis of more than a half-billion job advertisements published in 15 economically developed countries across Europe, North America, and Asia, which together comprise over 30% of the world's GDP.

The report shows that AI adoption visibly increases efficiency. For instance, sectors with the highest AI penetration – those who are based on knowledge work, such as information and communication, professional services, financial services, etc. – see labor productivity grow fivefold. This naturally leads to a faster growth of the demand for specialists with IT skills than the number of jobs in general, and jobs requiring AI skills carry up to a 25% wage premium. However, the composition of this demand is also changing; while the number of jobs requiring AI skills grew 3.5 times faster than the total of all jobs, in most AI-exposed occupations (e.g., customer services and IT), the growth was 27% slower than the average.

Azerbaijan's industry is not as heavily penetrated by AI as the leading world economies studied in PwC's AI Jobs Barometer. Nevertheless, the country is making significant efforts to adapt its legislation and infrastructure to the Fourth Industrial Revolution standards. The sectors with the most promise for the implementation of AI-based solutions are considered to be oil and gas production, software development, automation of the work of government agencies and public services, online commerce, financial analysis, business process automation, and healthcare. The introduction of new technologies is inevitable, and the growth in the demand for the workforce with AI skills, as well as the share of jobs requiring AI skills, will follow a model similar to the trend identified by PwC's AI Jobs Barometer for leading countries.

A couple of years ago, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) researched the impact of the 4th Industrial Revolution on skills and jobs in Azerbaijan, with a focus on two industries: (1) agriculture and agro-processing and (2) transportation and storage. The study found that only 28% of firms in the agro-industry are using AI or understand the benefits of its adoption in their business, though this is expected to rise to 78% by 2025. The productivity of each worker in the sector can increase by 25% due to the introduction of 4IR technologies, including AI.

According to PwC's AI Jobs Barometer, these sectors have relatively low AI penetration and show lower productivity growth after AI adoption than finance and IT, but the ADB's study found that, in Azerbaijan, the impact of the increased productivity in new job creation will outweigh the effect of job losses due to automation caused by 4IR technologies. The distribution of jobs will also shift, where the proportion of manual jobs will decrease and the share of technical (e.g., IT support, engineering) and managerial jobs will increase. In line with this trend, AI skills will become more and more important to employers, so the education and training of workers will be a major concern.



Mr. Farid Gattal

**◀ AZERBAIJAN'S INDUSTRY IS NOT AS HEAVILY PENETRATED BY AI AS THE LEADING WORLD ECONOMIES STUDIED IN PWC'S AI JOBS BAROMETER. NEVERTHELESS, THE COUNTRY IS MAKING SIGNIFICANT EFFORTS TO ADAPT ITS LEGISLATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION STANDARDS. ▶**

A number of documents have been adopted in Azerbaijan that define the government's policies in the field of promoting AI skills, including "Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities of Socio-Economic Development and Socio-Economic Development





Strategy for 2021–2025,” “Strategic Roadmap for Development of Telecommunications and Information Technologies in the Republic of Azerbaijan,” “Strategic Roadmap for Vocational Education and Training in the Republic of Azerbaijan,” “National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of the Republic of Azerbaijan,” and “National Employment Strategy 2019–2030.” These policies focus on stimulating the adoption of 4IR (including AI) skills and worker reskilling by (1) incentivizing employers and workers to participate in skills development; (2) fostering close collaboration between the government, industry, and civil society to create relevant and effective nationwide training frameworks; (3) creating new flexible qualification pathways by establishing effective lifelong learning models and ensuring the relevance of education and training curricula to emerging skill needs; and (4) extending new technological benefits to all workers by providing training to women, people with disabilities, and other disadvantaged groups.

In addition to AI-related engineering courses in higher education institutions, there are many AI skills trainings in Azerbaijan organized by local and international private companies and government organizations (among them Artificial Intelligence Lab under the Ministry of Digital Development and Transportation, the Enterprise Azerbaijan StartUp School managed by the Center for Analysis of Economic Reforms and Communication, the Baku State Vocational Training Center for Tourism and Social Services, and the ASAN Innovative Development Center). These trainings are mainly aimed at students, young professionals, individual entrepreneurs, civil servants, and employees of private companies. People in Azerbaijan also have the opportunity to learn IT skills online

through various educational platforms, although virtually all of them are foreign and do not provide lessons in the Azerbaijani language.

Every two years, Oxford Insights publishes its Government AI Readiness Index, which includes a Human Capital indicator. This indicator shows whether the population has the right skills to support the technology sector and is calculated using the numbers of GitHub users and graduates in STEM, proportion of female STEM graduates, quality of engineering and technology higher education, and ICT skills. The 2023 Index gave Azerbaijan only 35.23 points in the Human Capital category, which is higher than the average for the South and Central Asia region but lower than its neighboring countries, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Iran, and Russia. Accounting for PwC’s AI Job Barometer indication that the demand for AI-skilled employees is growing very fast globally and considering the results of PwC’s 2024 Global CEO Survey, in which the majority of CEOs stated that adoption of AI increases the productivity of their workers, it’s clearly necessary for Azerbaijan to develop AI skills for its workforce not only in the obvious ICT and finance fields or the most profitable oil and gas sectors but throughout all the economy, as even the agricultural sector and its requirements for employees are affected by the 4IR and AI. Currently, the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy of Azerbaijan is in the final stages of preparation, so we can hope that it will address challenges related to the impact of AI on the labor market.

*Farid Gattal is the Head of Advisory Services at PwC Azerbaijan and ERP Leader for PwC Eurasia, with over 18 years of experience in digitalization and business transformation across various industries in CIS countries.*



ASPI WINERY



AZERBAIJAN

# SAVALAN

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Mr. Hisham Nagi,  
Egyptian Ambassador to Azerbaijan

The background of the page features a blurred image of a wooden bookshelf filled with books on the left side. On the right side, the flag of Azerbaijan is visible, showing its characteristic red, white, and green horizontal stripes with a blue eight-pointed star in the center. The text is overlaid on this background.

HIGH-LEVEL TALKS PROPEL  
**EGYPT-AZERBAIJAN**  
**PARTNERSHIP**

IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW FOR AZERI OBSERVER, MR. HISHAM NAGI, THE EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR TO AZERBAIJAN, DISCUSSES EGYPT'S PIVOTAL ROLE ON THE GLOBAL STAGE AND ITS STRATEGIC INITIATIVES FOR REGIONAL PEACE. HIGHLIGHTING EGYPT'S COMMITMENT TO INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, HE TOUCHES ON EFFORTS TO COMBAT TERRORISM, IMPROVE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, AND MEDIATE CONFLICTS, PARTICULARLY IN GAZA. THE AMBASSADOR ALSO UNDERSCORES THE DEEPENING TIES BETWEEN EGYPT AND AZERBAIJAN, WHICH HAVE BEEN MARKED BY RECENT RECIPROCAL VISITS AND NUMEROUS AGREEMENTS ENHANCING COOPERATION IN VARIOUS SECTORS. SHARING HIS PERSONAL EXPERIENCES, AMBASSADOR NAGI PRAISES AZERBAIJAN'S DYNAMIC PROGRESS AND POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE GROWTH. HIS OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK UNDERSCORES A PROMISING FUTURE FOR CONTINUED COLLABORATION BETWEEN EGYPT AND AZERBAIJAN.

BY ELENA KOSOLAPOVA

AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

**Question:** *As the Arab world's most populous nation and with such a strategic location between Europe, Asia, and Africa, what responsibilities does Egypt foresee for itself on the global stage?*

**Answer:** Internationally, Egypt is committed to combating terrorism and fostering good relations with all countries, including Azerbaijan. We collaborate with international organizations like the IMF and the European Union to improve our economy and support our neighbors, such as Sudan and Libya, in resolving their problems. We play an important role in regional matters, participating in ongoing negotiations involving Egypt, Qatar, and the United States to de-escalate tensions in Gaza; in this regard, we are working toward a ceasefire and a release of hostages between Israel and Palestine. Egypt has a history of helping to de-escalate tensions between Israelis and Palestinians. However, the current escalation is much more grave than previous instances, as it has already lasted for several months, and the number of killed is nearly 40,000 (which includes children, women, and the elderly). The El Arish airport in Egypt has been designated for receiving international humanitarian aid for Gaza.

Despite difficulties in delivering aid due to the escalation, we continue our efforts. Sometimes, perishable aid has even expired due to delays. We are persistently working on this issue, hoping to find solutions soon. Now we are working with Israelis, Palestinians, and partners from Qatar and the United States to release hostages and achieve a ceasefire. While progress has been slow, we remain hopeful that a compromise will be reached. It's a challenging task, given the catastrophic situation with high casualties and missing people.

**Q.:** *Recently, our president visited Egypt. Can you tell us about the outcomes of this visit? How has it contributed to our bilateral relationship?*

**A.:** This visit in June followed President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's visit to Azerbaijan in January 2023. These reciprocal visits have been successful in strengthening our political and economic ties, enhancing cooperation between our countries in various fields like pharmaceuticals, energy,

and transportation. We have signed seven MOUs, and a joint committee meeting is planned in Cairo later this year.

**Q.:** *Could you provide some information about our cooperation within international organizations such as the Non-Aligned Movement?*

**A.:** During Azerbaijan's chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement, we shared many common stances and supported Azerbaijan in many decisions and initiatives, including efforts to combat the pandemic. We also cooperate under the umbrella of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Azerbaijan's position during conferences, especially regarding conflict in the Middle East, has been clear and supportive, and we maintain ongoing communication through our missions and officials. Currently, we have a candidate for the head of UNESCO, Dr. Khaled al-Anani, the former Minister of Tourism and Antiquities. We are working with Azerbaijan to garner their support, and I believe he is well qualified for the position, having been endorsed by the Arab League and the African Union.

**Q.:** *How has the trade relationship between Egypt and Azerbaijan developed in recent years? What are the main items we trade?*

**A.:** Trade between our countries is not at our aimed-for optimum level; it is currently around \$34 million. We trade items such as plastic, nuts, ceramics, and electrical products. The Export and Investment Promotion Agency of Azerbaijan AZPROMO makes efforts to attract Egyptian companies to invest in liberated territories, and there are some initiatives encouraging Azerbaijani investments in Egypt.

**Q.:** *What are the potential sectors for investment cooperation between Egypt and Azerbaijan?*

**A.:** There are many potential sectors, such as investments in liberated areas in Azerbaijan and aluminum in Egypt. We are also focusing on pharmaceuticals and medication. Our joint committee will specifically focus on these areas to enhance cooperation.

**Q.:** *What support can businesses get from the embassy and other institutions to expand bilateral cooperation?*

**‘EGYPT HAS A HISTORY OF HELPING TO DE-ESCALATE TENSIONS BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS. HOWEVER, THE CURRENT ESCALATION IS MUCH MORE GRAVE THAN PREVIOUS INSTANCES, AS IT HAS ALREADY LASTED FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, AND THE NUMBER OF KILLED IS NEARLY 40,000 (WHICH INCLUDES CHILDREN, WOMEN, AND THE ELDERLY).’**





**A.:** We have strong cooperation between the embassy I head and the Azerbaijani Embassy in Cairo, and we have support from governmental institutions from both sides. The joint committee, headed by Egypt's Minister of International Cooperation Dr. Rania Al Mashat and

Azerbaijan's Digital Development and Transport Minister Rashad Nabiyev, plays a crucial role in enhancing our cooperation. Various Azerbaijani institutions are open to discussions, and we are working on regulations to facilitate trade and investment.

**Q.: What role does tourism play in the relationship between Egypt and Azerbaijan? Are there measures to facilitate easier travel and visa processes?**

**A.:** Tourism cooperation began before the pandemic with direct charter flights between Baku and Sharm el-Sheikh, which resumed in March 2022. We receive many Azerbaijani tourists in Sharm el-Sheikh and aim to extend their visits to Cairo and Luxor. We are also working on establishing a direct flight between Baku and Cairo. In 2023, a remarkable 12,858 people traveled from Azerbaijan to Egypt – 11,984 of which were there for tourism purposes. From January to March 2024, 1,362 Azerbaijanis visited Egypt, including 1,264 who came as tourists. Statistics of travelers from Egypt to Azerbaijan indicate 1,313 people from January to June 2024. In 2023, a total of 7,382 people traveled from Egypt to Azerbaijan, with 7,128 of them coming for tourism purposes. Obtaining Egyptian visas from the embassy is straightforward and easy, and you also can obtain visas in Sharm el-Sheikh upon arrival. We are advocating for visa exemptions, but it requires mutual agreement; currently, there are only exemptions for diplomatic passports.

**Q.: What kind of cooperation exists between Azerbaijani SOCAR and Egypt's State Oil Company? What does this cooperation mean for Egypt's energy sector?**

**A.:** SOCAR and our Ministry of Petroleum have cooperative initiatives focused on fertilizers. We also invite SOCAR to explore oil and gas opportunities in Egypt alongside other international companies. During President Aliyev's visit, an MoU was signed for renewable energy cooperation. We collaborate on green energy initiatives, particularly in the context of the COP international climate conferences. We anticipate Azerbaijan hosting COP29 in November, and we are in direct contact with their experts, offering our assistance based on our experience with COP27. We have established direct contact between the responsible teams in both countries. We are ready to assist Azerbaijan in any way for COP29. Our Minister of Foreign Affairs has already offered assistance to his Azerbaijani counterpart. Additionally, President Sisi has already accepted President Aliyev's invitation to attend COP29.

**Q.: What is Egypt's stance on the peace negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia?**

**A.:** We are supporting any initiatives to reach a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This is what our president mentioned during the press conference with President Aliyev in Cairo. I want to congratulate Azerbaijan for reclaiming four villages and the start of demarcations on

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**'SOCAR AND OUR MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM HAVE COOPERATIVE INITIATIVES FOCUSED ON FERTILIZERS. WE ALSO INVITE SOCAR TO EXPLORE OIL AND GAS OPPORTUNITIES IN EGYPT ALONGSIDE OTHER INTERNATIONAL COMPANIES.'**

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the border. Hopefully, this will be a step forward in resolving the conflict and reducing tension in the region. The region has a promising future, and now is the time to find a solution. I hope an agreement will be reached as soon as possible, and I look forward to

seeing the signing ceremony during my tenure.

**Q.: What is being done to promote people-to-people contacts and cultural connections between our countries?**

**A.:** We have a roadmap for cultural exchanges, including performances and the restoration of historical buildings. We also have initiatives like translating books between Arabic and Azerbaijani. For example, last year, the Azerbaijani embassy in Cairo organized a concert to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Azerbaijani National Leader, Heydar Aliyev. We had an Arabic center that attracted the attention of many people – students and otherwise – interested in learning Arabic. It is currently not operational, but we are working to relaunch it. We also have educational exchanges with Egyptian students coming to Azerbaijan to study medicine, pharmaceutical oils, and the maritime industry, as well as Azerbaijani students coming to Egypt to study the Arabic language. Recently, we received a correspondence from Cairo offering scholarships to Azerbaijani students. Azerbaijan, in turn, offers programs like AIDA in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and post-graduate studies at ADA University.

**Q.: What are your personal goals and priorities during your tenure as Ambassador to Azerbaijan?**

**A.:** From a professional standpoint, we've had several significant visits and exchanges. Our president visited here, and we received President Aliyev in Egypt. Additionally, the Speaker of Egyptian House of Representatives and the head of the Egyptian Senate have been here, while the speaker of the Azerbaijani Parliament visited Egypt. These bilateral visits have strengthened our relations. Many Egyptians have visited Azerbaijan, including a blogger who created positive publicity, raising Egyptian awareness about Azerbaijan.

**Q.: How do you find living in Azerbaijan?**

**A.:** As my spouse mentioned in an interview with your magazine last year, living here has been a beautiful and enriching experience. Even my son, who studies in Paris, loves Azerbaijan and frequently expresses a desire to possibly live and work here. I am

grateful to the Azerbaijani administration for their cooperation with our embassy and our administration. We look forward to further strengthening our ties and exploring more opportunities for collaboration.

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**'WE HAVE A ROADMAP FOR CULTURAL EXCHANGES, INCLUDING PERFORMANCES AND THE RESTORATION OF HISTORICAL BUILDINGS. WE ALSO HAVE INITIATIVES LIKE TRANSLATING BOOKS BETWEEN ARABIC AND AZERBAIJANI.'**

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# European Azerbaijan School: Educating for a Greener Future

THE EUROPEAN AZERBAIJANI SCHOOL (EAS) IS MAKING SIGNIFICANT STRIDES IN RAISING AWARENESS AMONG ITS STUDENTS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND THE URGENT NEED TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE, EFFORTS THAT RESONATE AS BAKU PREPARES TO HOST COP29. IN THIS CONTEXT, AZERI OBSERVER HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO INTERVIEW FRANCESCO BANCHINI, THE CEO AND DIRECTOR OF EAS, WHO SHARED HIS INSIGHTS ON HOW TO INTEGRATE ISOLATED EFFORTS, THEIR ROLE IN DRIVING THE CHANGE IN MINDSETS, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION IN SHAPING A GREENER FUTURE.

BY KELLY CHAIB DE MARES  
AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

**Question:** What impact does EAS aim to achieve with its environmental protection projects?

**Answer:** We firmly believe that changing the mindset in education, particularly among students, and transferring this mindset to other schools will have a massive impact worldwide. Imagine if we change one school and share the same values and expectations with other schools globally; we will have students

who believe in sustainable practices and who understand that, while we still need electricity, gas, and petrol for various purposes, reducing excessive consumption is crucial. This will ultimately lead to a significant transformation.

By gradually changing the mindset within different educational systems, we will create a substantial asset for the future. Scientists predict that the damage to our planet might be irreversible by 2050, leading to catastrophic outcomes. However, if we act now and leverage the power of education, our students will be making a significant positive change in 10 or 15 years.







The European Azerbaijani School campus in Badamdar

We need to move away from divisive thinking and unite in our efforts. Resistance to change is expected, but we need to confront it anyway. Our quiet voices can grow louder by starting small and gradually expanding our projects through partnerships with external agencies like embassies and private organizations. When undertaking our projects, we think broadly and aim for wide-reaching impacts. We aspire to create a massive change in education and, ultimately, in the world.

**Q.: We have heard of some impressive initiatives from EAS to catalyze educational development nationally and globally. These initiatives have involved establishing the Caucasus and Central Asia IB Association, organizing three editions of the Annual International Conference on Experiential Learning, integrating the Council of International Schools Board of Trustees, and conducting the workshop series “How to Become an IB Teacher” in collaboration with Azerbaijani universities. Are these the projects for influencing the educational mindset in Azerbaijan?**

**A.:** We are also partnering with the Ministry of Education to create high-quality education opportunities in rural public schools starting in September. The project is crucial because students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds in Baku have very different experiences compared to those from lower- and middle-class backgrounds in rural areas.

The government is selecting three schools for which we must develop a tracking system to showcase the positive results of our educational approach. During the one-year pilot project, the schools will participate in three parallel stages: training teachers, developing students’ skills, and providing vocational training.

We train teachers to adopt a student-centered approach, engaging their students in skill development rather than just content acquisition. With access to technology, students can easily find content online, so our goal is to cultivate essential skills for their future. At the same time, our efforts will target middle and high school students from grades 7 to 12, ensuring they receive comprehensive support and training.

Furthermore, as a testament to our collaborative spirit, we are the only school in Azerbaijan that offers a vocational program for the next three years in alignment with the government’s initiatives in certain areas. This unique opportunity allows us to extend our services to government schools free of charge. For instance, if a student aspires to become an electrician or plumber, we will provide the necessary training and certification recognized by both our school and the government.

With the positive outcomes we anticipate, the number of schools involved could increase. This expansion will necessitate increased teacher training, which will have the added benefit of creating a cycle of continuous improvement.

**Q.: It’s clear that the first Festival of Hope in the region, hosted by EAS in April, was a resounding success. This IB initiative effectively materialized by giving a platform to the young generation in Azerbaijan, with over 300 students discussing and designing action plans on pressing global issues. Please tell us more about the students’ action plans regarding climate change.**

**A.:** The idea started with the students during the Festival of Hope, and now they are working on developing it further. They need to create an action plan and put those actions into practice, and in this regard, we are supporting them by providing the necessary funds and resources.



The action plan discussed during the Festival of Hope on climate change focuses on addressing pollution and reforestation. In alignment with COP29, the students are exploring new ways to reduce pollution. As they plant trees, they are also investigating how to lessen the impact of oil and gas use. Currently, the students are developing a business plan to determine the necessary funding. They are considering whether to buy trees or partner with an external agency that can provide them.

**Q.: Now that we are following up with the Festival of Hope, please tell us about the action plans designed by the students on the other discussed topics: conflict resolution and gender equality.**

**A.:** As for the action plan on conflict resolution, they are already working with the UN, WWF, and other influential organisations to create opportunities for dialogue between countries in conflict, such as Russia and Ukraine, as well as Azerbaijan and Armenia. The students have the school's full support and are engaging in sessions with peers from other schools. They are planning to hold peaceful meetings and develop sustainable methods for conflict resolution.

As for the action plan on gender equality, the project involves creating a play inspired by the renowned Azerbaijani play "Sevil," written by Jafar Jabbarly in 1928. It is a seminal work in Azerbaijani literature and drama that explores women's emancipation and themes of social change. The play centers on the character Sevil, a woman who breaks free from traditional constraints and fights for her rights in a patriarchal society. Through Sevil's journey, the play addresses gender equality, personal freedom, and the struggle against societal norms.

The students have made some changes to the original play to emphasize the importance of not seeing differences between men and women or among individuals based on

inherent traits. By performing this play in different theaters and schools, they aim to raise awareness about acceptance and collaboration despite our differences.

It's crucial to recognize and embrace our differences. Even within a single country, various dialects indicate inherent diversity. The concept of a nation is relatively new, developed in the 18th and 19th centuries. Before that, there were no borders or the concept of one nation. This historical context underscores the importance of cooperation and understanding in our diverse world.

**Q.: Which other projects is EAS undertaking to promote environmental protection?**

**A.:** We have organized numerous events to celebrate our combined efforts and inspire future actions promoting environmental protection and sustainability.

In June 2024, we hosted the Green Globe Gala. Our guest speakers were Mr. Samir Mammadov, Country Manager for the United Nations Global Compact in Azerbaijan, and Mr. Fuad Hatamov, Head of Partnerships and Communications at World Wildlife Fund Azerbaijan. They discussed the importance of sustainable development projects. We also extended invitations to various embassies, as they play critical roles in fostering international collaboration. It is crucial for all parties to acknowledge the severe challenges our planet faces, and true partnership is essential for our collective progress.

In June, we also hosted the seminar titled "Climate Explorers: A Journey to Climate Action Yesterday." Our 8th grade students actively participated in sessions on the upcoming COP29 led by renowned speakers. The speakers included Samir Mammadov, Country Manager for the UN Global Compact in Azerbaijan; Ayan Shamchiyeva, Carbon Consultant at Bonega Consulting; and Javid Hidayatov, Co-Founder of Bonega Consulting.



# PHILOSOPHY BEHIND CREATING INVITING SPACES

AYTAJ IMANOVA IS A GRADUATE OF THE FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE AT ISTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY. IN 2017, SHE WORKED ON A PROJECT FOR STARBUCKS IN ISTANBUL. IN MILAN IN 2018, SHE JOINED BARECCA & LAVARRA, THE ARCHITECTS BEHIND THE WORLD-FAMOUS BOSCO VERTICALE PROJECT. THE FOLLOWING YEAR, SHE CONTRIBUTED TO A MOSQUE RENOVATION PROJECT IN ISTANBUL. EARLIER THIS YEAR, SHE FOUNDED IMANAKI DESIGN, AN INTERIOR DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE STUDIO IN BAKU. IN THIS INTERVIEW, SHE OPENS UP ABOUT HER EXTENSIVE WORK EXPERIENCE AND HER CURRENT GOALS.



contacts:  
@imanaki\_design

## AZERI OBSERVER EDITORIAL STAFF

**Question:** *Tell us about your studio and its philosophy. Why Imanaki?*

**Answer:** I combined my first and last names, turning them into Imanaki. Our philosophy is to create comfortable living spaces for people while addressing their needs creatively and aesthetically. No matter how beautiful a house is, it's impossible to live in if it's inconveniently arranged and doesn't suit your lifestyle. This principle also applies to public spaces.

**Q.: Do you remember your first project? Was it difficult?**

**A.:** I remember my first project, which I worked on alone, investing a great amount of effort. It was the Villa Cherry project, and it will always have a special place in my heart. For the project, I handled both interior and landscape design. It was very interesting and, yes, somewhat challenging, but I am very grateful to the clients for giving me their complete trust, which is why the project was successful. Success is measured by the happiness of the clients. I still receive videos and photos from their various events at home, and this truly motivates me.

**Q.: There's currently a real boom of designers in Baku, with all kinds of design schools and various courses are popping up. Does this lead to fierce competition for customers, or do you have undeniable advantages over them?**

**A.:** Yes, there are many designers in Baku, which makes me happy. I enjoy following my colleagues' work. From my perspective, I don't fight for customers and even believe that's the wrong approach. I do have advantageous traits, like my responsibility, international experience, education, and continuous development. But most importantly, it's about the human factor. The customer needs to choose a specialist who aligns with their character, values, and lifestyle to avoid misunderstandings. A designer must fully understand the customer, and this is only possible if you're on the same wavelength. When we work with customers, we thoroughly analyze, understand, accept, and love them, sincerely wanting to create their ideal home or workplace.

**Q.: What are the main criteria for selecting furniture when creating interior designs?**

**A.:** The criteria vary for each project, depending on who the space is intended for. For example, in one project, we focused on the choice of upholstered furniture because the customer had certain health issues. In another project, the client didn't want guests to spend too much time in the living room, so we put hard, uncomfortable sofas on the ground floor [laughs]. There was also a project where we created a reversible sofa – not only because it's trendy but also so the customer could alternate between watching TV and enjoying the garden view.

**Q.: Most of your projects are luxury homes, apartments, and country houses for private clients. Do you also work with corporate customers, such as cafes, restaurants, hotels, or offices? Which type of client do you find more interesting in terms of collaboration?**

**A.:** I really enjoy corporate projects and public interiors. In these projects, you need to simultaneously consider the sales strategy along with the design. That does, of course, make it more challenging, but the satisfaction from the results is much greater. We're currently developing a hotel design project, and our team has put their hearts into it. We're eagerly counting the days until we can reveal our work to everyone.



**Q.: Do you have a favorite design style?**

**A.:** Yes, I love minimalism and modernism. However, I don't limit myself to just those styles; I enjoy experimenting and mixing different styles. The most interesting visual solutions often come from blending different design elements.

**Q.: In your extensive travels, what countries have inspired you?**

**A.:** Italy, especially during Design Week, is a major source of inspiration for me. However, inspiration is a strange phenomenon; sometimes it can even come from a history lesson.

A portrait of Mrs. Justyna Poborska, the spouse of the Polish Ambassador to Azerbaijan. She is a woman with shoulder-length brown hair and blue eyes, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a dark blue or black dress with a white and pink floral pattern. A thick, reddish-brown beaded necklace is around her neck. Her right hand is raised to her ear, and she is wearing a gold watch on her left wrist. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting.

Mrs. Justyna Poborska,  
Spouse of the Polish Ambassador to Azerbaijan

*Broadening Horizons  
through Diplomacy*

IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW FOR AZERI OBSERVER, MRS. JUSTYNA POBORSKA, SPOUSE OF THE POLISH AMBASSADOR TO AZERBAIJAN, PROVIDES A GLIMPSE INTO HER REMARKABLE JOURNEY BLENDING ACADEMIA, CULTURAL IMMERSION, AND DIPLOMATIC LIFE. FROM HER EARLY YEARS IN GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES TO HER PIVOTAL ROLE IN BAKU'S DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY, SHE REFLECTS ON HOW HER DIVERSE EXPERIENCES HAVE SHAPED HER CAREER AND PERSONAL GROWTH. DELVING INTO THE DEEP HISTORICAL TIES BETWEEN POLAND AND AZERBAIJAN, MRS. POBORSKA HIGHLIGHTS THE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS OF POLISH ARCHITECTS IN BAKU, UNDERSCORING THEIR LASTING IMPACT ON THE CITY'S ARCHITECTURAL LANDSCAPE. BEYOND HER DIPLOMATIC DUTIES, SHE DISCUSSES NAVIGATING THE VIBRANT DIPLOMATIC SCENE IN BAKU, HER CONTRIBUTIONS TO BILATERAL RELATIONS, AND HER PASSION FOR EXPLORING AZERBAIJAN'S CULTURAL AND NATURAL TREASURES.

◀ **BY ELENA KOSOLAPOVA**  
AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

**Question:** *Can you tell us about your journey from studying in Germany and the US to becoming a part of the diplomatic community in Azerbaijan?*

**Answer:** Although my parents weren't involved in diplomacy, I was exposed to such a lifestyle from an early age. During primary school, we moved to Germany for three years when my mother was teaching Polish at the University of Tübingen. After a brief return to Poland, I participated in an exchange program in the US, spending a year in Illinois, where I earned my high school diploma. While studying at the Institute of Applied Linguistics at Warsaw University, I received a DAAD scholarship to continue my studies in Halle, Germany. There, I completed the Specialized Polish-German Translations faculty. After returning to Poland and earning my MA in literature translations, I pursued a career in my favorite industry: contemporary music. I spent several years working for major music companies, handling marketing and promotion for both international and Polish artists. When my partner, who later became my husband, was appointed the Ambassador to Azerbaijan, I eagerly joined him on this exciting journey. Fortunately, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports diplomats in maintaining family ties, allowing me to work at the Embassy in Baku.

**Q:** *How did your early experiences studying abroad shape your career and personal life?*

**A.:** You could say that deciding to study abroad was out of character for me. I've always been a family-oriented person, valuing long-term friendships and taking my time adapting to new environments. Constant changes were challenging for me. However, they have also helped me realize from a young age that I can handle things on my own, no matter the situation. It has been an invaluable life lesson.

Another aspect of living abroad is getting to know the people – their language, culture, and customs – which is an adventure in itself. My linguistic studies involve a great deal of analyzing how language impacts thinking, culture, and life, providing a solid theoretical foundation for these interests, which I continue to pursue to this day. Traveling is a great passion of mine, and I'm sure my past experiences sparked this love. In terms of my professional career, growing up abroad has given me openness and ease in communicating with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Understanding the perspectives and thought processes of those with whom I work allows me to grasp their actions and expectations easily. This skill is incredibly valuable when working in an international environment.

**Q:** *How do you balance your career with your role as the spouse of an ambassador?*

**A.:** Well, I work at the Embassy during the day and attend various events in the evenings [laughs]. It's not easy to schedule, as Baku has a very vibrant diplomatic scene; many of my friends who are more experienced ambassador spouses admit that it's more intense here than in other places they've been posted. In addition to official receptions, dinners, exhibitions, and concerts, ambassador spouses organize and participate in many other events. The group that brings us all together is called HOMS and mainly focuses on charity work, with several events organized every month in this field. My dear friend Mira Michalková, the wife of the EU Ambassador to Azerbaijan, initiated the EU Family group, which brings together the spouses of EU ambassadors. Among other things, they have organized events to support war-affected Ukraine. Although my work commitments prevent me from participating in these events as often as I'd like, I deeply respect the dedication and efforts of the other spouses and support their endeavors.

**Q:** *What are some of the biggest challenges you have faced in adapting to the diplomatic lifestyle?*

**A.:** Honestly? Changing the way I dress. Before coming to Baku, my wardrobe mainly consisted of sports clothes, as my favorite way to spend free time in Warsaw was playing sports, especially badminton. Here, I have to dress according to diplomatic protocol, which meant updating my wardrobe. The hardest part of adapting to life in Baku has been not having the opportunity to play with friends and participate in amateur tournaments. However, I'm pleased to see the development of badminton in Azerbaijan and predict that the Azerbaijani team will soon achieve success on the international stage.

**Q:** *Can you describe some of the rewarding aspects of being part of the diplomatic community?*

**A.:** This is a tricky question since many of my friends and colleagues will read this interview. So, I'll be very diplomatic in my answer [laughs]. The most obvious benefit is making new friends from diverse national, cultural, social, and educational

◀ **'I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A FAMILY-ORIENTED PERSON, VALUING LONG-TERM FRIENDSHIPS AND TAKING MY TIME ADAPTING TO NEW ENVIRONMENTS. CONSTANT CHANGES WERE CHALLENGING FOR ME. HOWEVER, THEY HAVE ALSO HELPED ME REALIZE FROM A YOUNG AGE THAT I CAN HANDLE THINGS ON MY OWN, NO MATTER THE SITUATION. IT HAS BEEN AN INVALUABLE LIFE LESSON.'** ▶







backgrounds. It's enriching to discuss both serious and trivial matters with them, as we all bring different perspectives to the table. These conversations and meetings are incredibly interesting and educational, even as it concerns my own country. When I first started attending events in Baku and meeting other ambassadors, my husband's friends, and their spouses, I was surprised at how much they knew about Poland and how many of them could speak Polish. Another unique aspect of Baku's diplomatic community is the close relationships and frequent encounters, which I've learned are not so common everywhere in the world. These frequent interactions help maintain friendships and effectively plan and execute common projects like Charity Bazaars or HOMS trips to the regions. These personal ties are the most precious part of being in the diplomatic community.

**Q.: What advice would you give to someone considering a career in diplomacy or marrying a diplomat?**

**A.:** Being a diplomat is more than just a profession; it's a way of life. While it is certainly beneficial to have a formal education in international relations, law, history, or social sciences, there are also personal aspects to consider when pursuing a career in diplomacy or marrying a diplomat. A successful diplomat and their spouse must be ready for frequent –sometimes unexpected and not always desirable – changes in their lives. Diplomacy is a form of civil service, and a public servant must understand the responsibilities that come with this role. A career diplomat should be open-minded, interested in the world and the people around them, flexible, easygoing, and yet firmly committed to representing and defending their country's interests.

On a personal level, one must be prepared to lessen contact with family members and friends left behind in their home country. Diplomat spouses should also be ready to partially sacrifice their own professional plans and careers for the sake of being together. A career in diplomacy is very interesting and rewarding, but it also has its downsides. Nevertheless, for someone looking to broaden their horizons, both figuratively and literally, a career in diplomacy or marrying a diplomat are both very intriguing options.

**Q.: Azerbaijan and Poland have a long history of cooperation, and Baku has a rich Polish heritage. Has this connection helped you adapt to living here?**

**A.:** As you mentioned, cooperation between Poland and Azerbaijan has a long tradition, with contacts between Poles and Azerbaijanis deeply rooted in our histories. Both of our nations share a similar understanding of the importance of national language, traditions, customs, and family relations in resisting strong and sometimes aggressive neighbors. We are very proud of the rich Polish heritage in Baku, including famous buildings designed by Polish architects like Józef Płoszko, Kazimierz Skórewicz, and Józef Gosławski, the city master plan and management by Polish Mayor Stanisław Despot-Zenowicz from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, and groundbreaking inventions for the oil and gas sector by engineers Witold Zglenicki and Paweł Potocki. These contributions are well known in Azerbaijan and are increasingly recognized in Poland. In short, the solid foundation for understanding between Poles and Azerbaijanis has certainly helped me find common ground with my Azerbaijani colleagues and interlocutors.

**Q.: What cultural differences have you observed between Poland and Azerbaijan?**

**A.:** While visiting different regions of Azerbaijan, I have noticed that social and family roles tend to be more traditional than in Poland. In tea houses, men often socialize exclusively with other men. Azerbaijani women also place a higher emphasis on their appearance than Polish women, dressing more femininely on a daily basis and clearly aiming to be attractive to men. Another cultural difference in Azerbaijan is the strong family connections that intertwine with business, culture, society, and other aspects of life. These strong bonds can be very supportive, but they can also create burdens at times. Nevertheless, I was amazed at how well my Azerbaijani friends knew their extended families, including cousins, uncles, aunts, and other relatives; in contrast, I don't think my Polish friends have such detailed knowledge about their own genealogy and family.

**Q.: How do you incorporate your love for travel into your life in Azerbaijan? Are there any local destinations you recommend visiting?**

**A.:** I've already mentioned that we have visited many regions of Azerbaijan, which is important both professionally and personally. To be a successful diplomat, it's crucial to have a deep interest in and knowledge of our host country. Visiting various regions, cities, towns, and villages is an essential part

**‘WHILE VISITING DIFFERENT REGIONS OF AZERBAIJAN, I HAVE NOTICED THAT SOCIAL AND FAMILY ROLES TEND TO BE MORE TRADITIONAL THAN IN POLAND.’**





of life for an ambassador and their spouse. It helps us better understand the country, get to know its inhabitants, and discuss possibilities for developing bilateral ties.

From a personal perspective, exploring these areas is incredibly interesting and rewarding. We love traveling, discovering new places, and experiencing local monuments and nature. That's why we try to travel to the regions as often as possible. So far, we have visited major tourist attractions such as Quba, Shahdag, Qebele, Qobustan, Sheki, Lenkoran, Naftalan, Tufandag, Zaqatala, Lerik, and many more. It's hard to recommend just one or two places, but I suggest starting with the pictographs in Qobustan and the Old Town of Baku to learn about the history, and Absheron National Park and Besh Barmag Mountain – just under an hour's drive from Baku – to see the stunning nature.

**Q.: You have visited many places in Azerbaijan, but Poland is also an interesting country to see. What places and attractions would you recommend to visitors of your country?**

**A.:** Certainly! Poland and Azerbaijan not only share traditions and history but also offer similar attractions from a tourist perspective. I highly recommend visiting Poland, especially with the convenience of direct flights between our capitals operating four times a week by LOT Polish Airlines.

Why visit Poland? It's centrally located in Europe, bordering seven countries. Poland is known for its multicultural and multi-religious society, and it's considered safe and friendly. In 2023 alone, Poland welcomed over 3.2 million foreign tourists, making it one of the main tourist destinations in the EU. Cities like Kraków, Warsaw, Gdańsk, and Wrocław attract thousands of visitors eager to explore Poland's rich history and vibrant modern culture.

Some must-see places include the Wieliczka Salt Mine, Zakopane (the winter capital), Toruń (birthplace of Nicolaus Copernicus), and Zamość (an ideal Renaissance city). Nature enthusiasts can explore Białowieża National Park (famous for

Żubrówka production), the Masurian Lakes, and the Tatra Mountains. Poland also offers excellent spa and health tourism opportunities. I'm confident that Azerbaijanis will find Poland a captivating, enriching, and affordable tourist destination with high-quality infrastructure and services.

**Q.: Looking back at your time in Azerbaijan, of what experiences or accomplishments are you most proud?**

**A.:** I've indeed spent a lot of time in Azerbaijan, and I do have things I could call my achievements. I've successfully established my role as the Ambassador's Spouse within both diplomatic and local circles. I've made genuine friendships, enjoyed memorable moments with them, exchanged information and ideas, and participated in various HOMS projects. As an employee of the Polish Embassy in Baku, I've contributed to numerous projects and events crucial for enhancing Polish-Azerbaijani relations. My husband and I have hosted high-ranking officials from Poland, including ministers, deputy ministers, and members of Parliament, as well as scientists and specialist advisors. Drawing on my knowledge of Azerbaijan, I've been able to provide insights and explanations to our guests, particularly on aspects of life in the country that resonate more deeply with women.

**Q.: To finalize the interview, we have the same question for all ambassadors' spouses. There is a saying that behind every successful man, there is a woman. How does that manifest in your life?**

**A.:** This question is probably better suited for my husband. How does he feel having a wife like me beside him? But seriously, we're both human, and we each have moments when we need support from one another. Our relationship works both ways. There are times when my husband needs my support, and there are times when I lean on him for support. The key is that we believe in each other and stand by each other regardless of the circumstances.

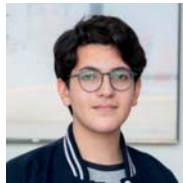


## CONGRATULATIONS TO SABIS® SUN'S CLASS OF 2024!

This summer, the senior class of 2024 will be graduating from SABIS® SUN International School before they begin the next milestone in their educational career in the fall, university! Seniors have already received word of their acceptance at universities in the U.S., Europe, Azerbaijan, and around the world, including Ivy League universities.



Rovshan Salahov



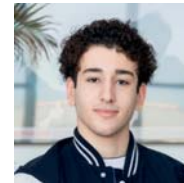
Bekir Kaan Genc



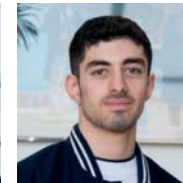
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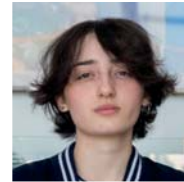
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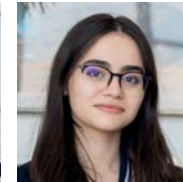
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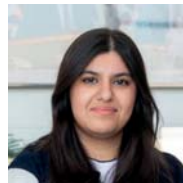
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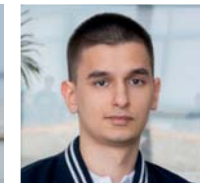
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Panoramic view of the Spa Hotel Imperial soaring above Karlovy Vary

# ROYALS' RETREAT:



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# DISCOVER THE CZECH SPA RESORTS



BY ELENA KOSOLAPOVA  
AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

As a teenager, I had a fondness for reading novels from the 18th and 19th centuries. Despite being penned by various authors in different languages and featuring diverse plots and central themes, many of these novels shared a common thread: characters from royal and noble families often retreated to spa resorts. These havens of tranquility offered a respite from the bustling pace of everyday life, providing a sanctuary to heal both body and mind. While the novels' characters might have been fictional, spa resorts themselves are very real, serving as renowned holiday destinations for prominent figures in European artistic, cultural, and political life over the centuries.

Karlovy Vary and Mariánské Lázně in the Czech Republic are some of the oldest and most celebrated spa resorts in Europe, hosting esteemed visitors like British King Edward VII, Russian Czar Peter the Great, Empress Elizabeth of Austria, German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, composers Ludwig van Beethoven and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Italian violin virtuoso Niccolò Paganini, American inventor Thomas Edison, and writer Mark Twain, all of whom frequented these thermal spring towns.

The enduring popularity is hardly surprising, given the renowned healing properties of the local springs. The unique composition of the mineral waters is reputed to cure almost all ailments save death itself. The waters are used for drinking cures, mineral baths, and inhalations, addressing a wide array of health issues, including diseases of the digestive system, metabolic disorders, and musculoskeletal and circulatory ailments, as well as gynecological, endocrinological, oncological, nervous, respiratory conditions, and issues related to weight and obesity.

The good news is that the beneficial properties of Czech mineral springs have remained unchanged over the centuries. Today, these resorts are accessible not just to the rich and famous but to anyone who values health and well-being. Moreover, present day Czech spa resorts offer more than just therapeutic treatments. By blending modern techniques with traditional wisdom, they provide various wellness programs designed to offer exclusive relaxation, alleviate the stresses of city life, and transport visitors into the enchanting world of a classic novel.

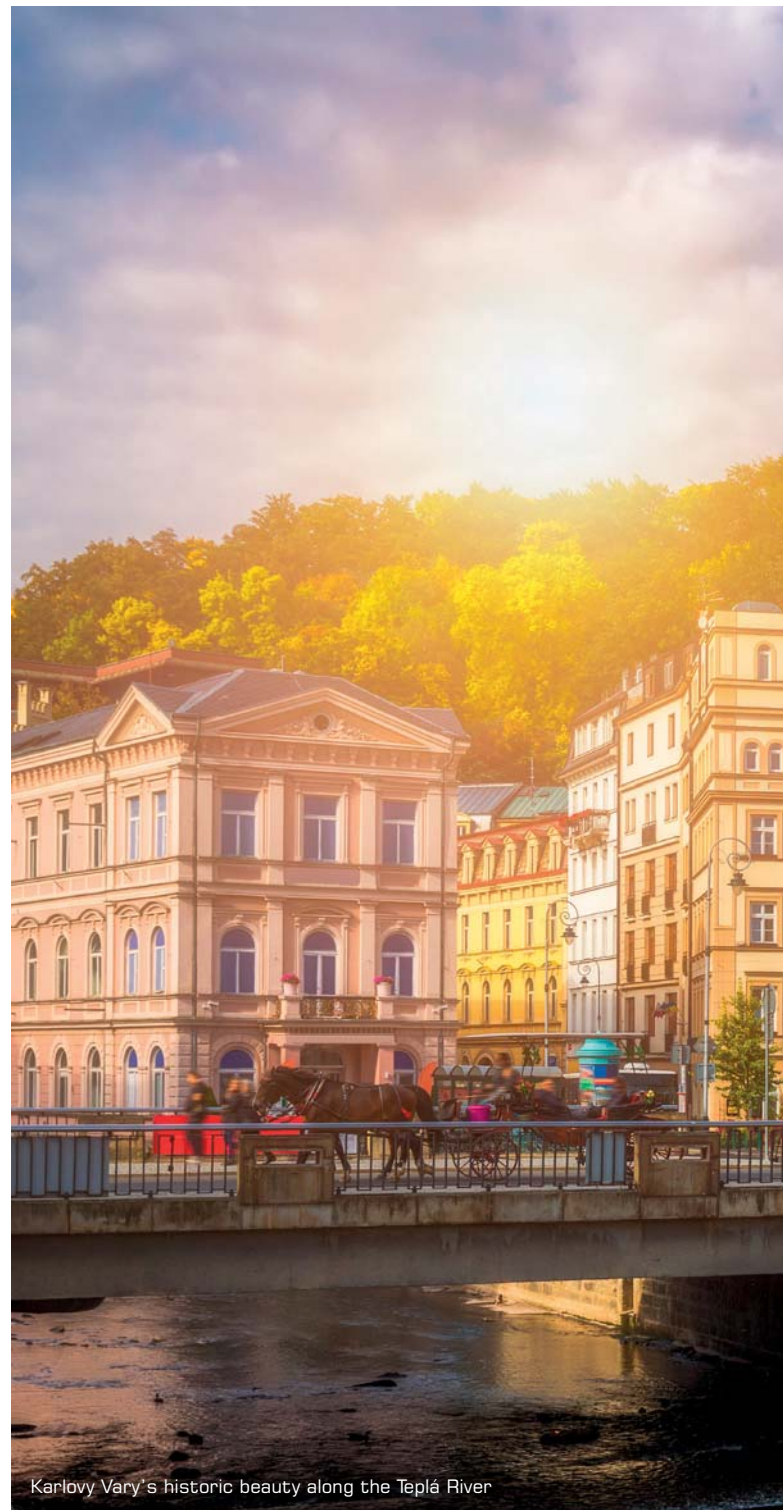
### KARLOVY VARY

Karlovy Vary is the crown jewel of Czech spa towns, though it is the country's second-most visited destination. Renowned for its breathtaking neoclassical, neo-Baroque, and Art Nouveau architecture, it is one of Europe's most picturesque spas. The town's stunning streets have been immortalized in films like *Casino Royale*, *Last Holiday*, and *Shanghai Knights*. With its grand colonnades, historic buildings, and idyllic setting in a forested valley, Karlovy Vary exudes spa elegance and is a must-see location, even if wellness treatments aren't on your agenda.

The city also hosts the prestigious Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, one of Europe's premier film events, drawing luminaries such as Miloš Forman, Robert De Niro, John Travolta, Oliver Stone, Michael Douglas, Steve Buscemi, and Salma Hayek. During the festival, however, hotel prices can skyrocket two-to-three times higher, and restaurant reservations become scarce. If celebrity-spotting isn't your goal, however, consider visiting after the festival for a more tranquil experience.

Karlovy Vary boasts a range of accommodations to suit any budget. From the opulent five-star Grandhotel Pupp, renowned for hosting festival guests, to charming boutique hotels ideal for

budget-conscious travelers, there is something for everyone. During my stay, I chose the five-star Imperial Hotel perched above the historic city center like a majestic castle. Surrounded by a serene park, we woke each morning to melodious birdsong and enjoyed stunning views of the city and forest from our window. Despite its hilltop location, the hotel is easily accessible via the Imperial cable car, which whisks guests back and forth from the main tourist square and the city's primary spring in minutes. The hotel offers an extensive range of treatments and wellness procedures, supported by a skilled and experienced team of doctors and medical staff. However, what distinguishes the Imperial Hotel – and indeed any hotel in Karlovy Vary and Mariánské Lázně – is that you never feel like a patient in a hospital.



Karlovy Vary's historic beauty along the Teplá River



Each hotel and restaurant here captures the enchanting essence of an old mansion, imbued with the tranquility and serenity of 19th-century life, making you feel like a treasured guest. The cities also boast a vibrant cultural life, with concerts ranging from classical music to rock clubs and 80s-style discos, which are particularly popular with older tourists (while attracting many younger visitors). This delightful, relaxing atmosphere significantly enhances any treatment, as physical well-being is intrinsically linked to psychological health.

Karlovy Vary is also the birthplace of the famous Czech bitter herbal liqueur Becherovka, which has over 200 years of history. This legendary drink made from a secret recipe of more than 20 herbs and spices is often referred to as the 13th spring of the city (a reference to the town's 12 mineral water springs).



Filling a Karlovy Vary sipping cup with thermal spring water



An interactive tour of the Jan Becher Museum located in the former Becherovka factory in the city center – and the tasting ceremony at the museum bar afterward – was an unforgettable experience for me. It revealed why Becherovka is so cherished. When visiting Karlovy Vary, don't miss the opportunity to discover this iconic Czech beverage.

### MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ

Mariánské Lázně, along with ten other European spa towns, was added to UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage list as part of the multi-country nomination known as "The Great Spa Towns of Europe." When I first visited this charming town, it felt like a paradise for pensioners. The main clientele here are people aged 60 and older, and everything is tailored to their leisurely lifestyle. I've never seen so many happy retirees in one place. Of course, you'll find some younger visitors and even families with children, but they too are seeking retreat, silence, and peace.

Mariánské Lázně is a cozy town surrounded by forests and filled with wonderful parks and beautiful gardens. It's small enough that you can walk everywhere, which means there's almost no traffic, adding to the tranquility. You can stroll uninterrupted, watch water trickle from numerous fountains and springs, breathe in the scent of blooming flowers and trees, or simply unwind with a coffee and some excellent spa wafers. The mineral water from dozens of springs, along with carbon dioxide gas and peat mud from ancient forests, makes Mariánské Lázně the perfect place to treat a broad spectrum of ailments.

Like Karlovy Vary, the hotels in this spa town combine historic splendor with the modern comforts and service quality of high-end accommodations. I stayed at the four-star Hvězda Hotel from the Ensana Group, which is located next to the town's main colonnade. A distinctive feature of this group's hotels is that they are all connected by long corridors, allowing guests to move around without going outside and facing the summer sun or winter snow. These corridors not only provide easy access to treatment procedures, spas, restaurants, and cultural events in other hotels, they also enhance the guest experience, as they are styled like real museums. You can view historical pictures of the town, admire beautiful items made from authentic Czech glass and porcelain, listen to the natural sounds of local forests and springs, or simply enjoy the view of the



The enchanting Singing Fountain of Mariánské Lázně



The main colonnade of Mariánské Lázně amidst a sea of flowers



Mariánské Lázně's Ferdinand's Spring under the evening sky



The vivid hues of Mariánské Lázně's charming architecture

neighboring colonnade and park through panoramic windows while listening to soothing music. Additionally, the corridors feature taps with mineral water from the town's main springs. However, it's highly recommended to drink these waters only after consulting a spa physician, as they all have different effects and could cause negative side effects if consumed improperly.

There's a popular joke in town that one of the most famous springs, the Cross Spring, is said to cure coughs. In reality, it doesn't help with respiratory issues, but it does have a strong laxative effect, so if you drink enough, you need to be very careful when coughing!

In Mariánské Lázně, I experienced the unique Maria Spa, where you sit in a room filled with medicinal CO2 gas, watch a film about the town's history, listen to relaxing music, and inhale air enriched with oxygen – all at once. This spa is part of an anti-aging program, and the gas is absorbed by your body, improving blood circulation, while the oxygen helps with cell regeneration. This treatment not only rejuvenates your body but also creates

an atmosphere that soothes your soul, providing unusual clarity of mind and a surge of energy.

Mariánské Lázně, with its blend of natural beauty, historic charm, and rejuvenating treatments, offers a unique sanctuary for those seeking peace and wellness. Whether you come for the healing springs, the serene parks, or the elegant atmosphere, this enchanting town promises a restorative and unforgettable experience.

#### EXCURSIONS

While vacationing in Karlovy Vary and Mariánské Lázně, be sure to book some excursions outside these charming spa cities. I visited Locket, a picturesque town just 15 kilometers from Karlovy Vary. This enchanting place might look familiar to many, as it was featured in the James Bond movie *Casino Royale*, where it stood in for a Montenegrin town where James Bond and Vesper Lynd meet their MI6 contact. Perched on a hill and embraced by a river on three sides, Locket transports you



The serene beauty of Locket Castle amidst rolling hills



The colorful old town and iconic Prague Castle overlooking the Vltava River



The timeless allure of Charles Bridge in the heart of Prague



Classic Czech beer paired with the beauty of Charles Bridge

back in time, enveloping you in the medieval spirit of Czechia. Dominating the town's skyline is Locket Castle, a 12th-century fortress that is now a museum.

One of the most fascinating, albeit brutal, exhibits is the medieval chamber of torture, a stark reminder of the harsher aspects of the past. This made me appreciate how much more humane society has become over the centuries. The castle also houses an impressive collection of arms, diverse military equipment, and an extensive array of 19th and 20th century porcelain. Among the most intriguing items is a fragment of the Locket meteorite, which fell around 1400 and originally weighed about 107 kg. The meteorite was split apart for scientific research, and its pieces are now held in several museums across Europe and North America. Beyond the castle, the town itself is a romantic haven, with Gothic and Baroque architecture, as well as numerous restaurants and cafés offering traditional Czech cuisine.

Finally, no trip to the Czech Republic would be complete without a visit to the enchanting city of Prague. Known by many names – the Golden City, the Mystical City, the City of a Hundred Spires – Prague reveals new facets with every visit. Did you know that Prague, not Amsterdam, was the first European city to cultivate tulips? The story goes that

the first tulip bulbs arrived in Europe in 1554 as a gift from the Turkish Sultan to Emperor Ferdinand I of Habsburg. King Ferdinand I had a Summer Palace in Prague, where he established the Royal Garden filled with exotic plants and trees, including tulips. This garden adorned with Italian-inspired architecture, romantic fountains, and ornamental flower beds still exists today, a hidden green oasis in the heart of the bustling city.

Prague holds many secrets, even from its residents. Our guide recounted a fascinating story of how, during a major flood several years ago, water levels were observed lowering in one spot. Excavation revealed a medieval alchemist's lab hidden underground. It's amusing to think that a lively place could conceal such a mysterious collection of old chemical bulbs and recipes just beneath the surface. Who knows what other mysteries Prague holds in store? The city offers a bit of everything: historical monuments, stunning Gothic architecture, vast gardens and parks, and delectable cuisine. I find a unique joy in sipping wine or beer at the Old Town Square or along the banks of the Vltava River; it is such a pleasure when you take your time and just breathe in the aromas of pink cherry trees in the air. This romantic city invites you to savor every moment!



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# ZULAL WELLNESS RESORT BY CHIVA-SOM

A UNIQUE DESTINATION OF WELLBEING TOURISM



 BY EMIL AKHUNDOV

AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

When I received an invitation to visit Zual Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som, located in the northernmost part of Qatar with a holistic approach to health and relaxation, I didn't think twice. I didn't know what kind of wellness program there would be, but the opportunity to turn off my mobile phone for a week – I was warned in advance that the resort has a “no phones” policy – was already delightful.

After less than three hours onboard a comfortable Qatar Airways plane, and another hour-and-a-half in a car moving smoothly along the glass-smooth asphalt of a highway, I'm here. A smiling hostess escorts me to the tea ceremony master, as this is how they greet guests here. Depending on the time of arrival, guests are offered invigorating

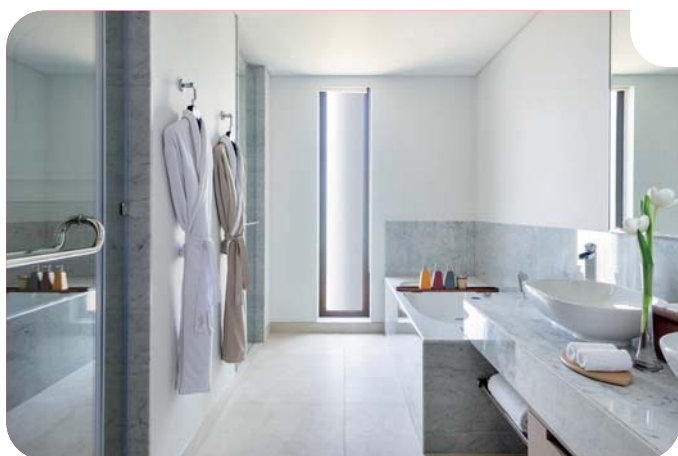
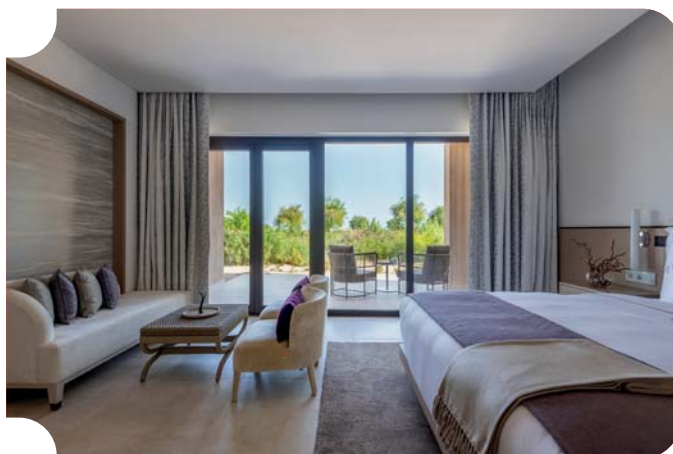




black, healthy red, or relaxing green tea; my arrival in the evening called the serving of the last option. My extremely interesting conversation with the tea ceremony master about the benefits of this drink – do not add sugar or honey to tea, as this will deprive it of all its beneficial qualities – was interrupted by the host suddenly returning and shifting from foot to foot. Politely, but with a hint of strictness, he tells me that food products were found when scanning my luggage (revealing to me that, during the stay at Zual Wellness Resort, local specialists will monitor all health aspects of their guests, including, of course, food as well). My answer is that these are sweets for the hotel’s marketing team, which seems to satisfy him, but he still asks me to sign an acknowledgment that the hotel refuses to be responsible for the quality of products brought into its territory. It seems that it will not be easy for me here, I thought, putting my signature on the document. Fortunately, I was wrong.

Zual Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som is the first resort based on the principles and teachings of Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine (TAIM), which was opened recently on March 29th, 2022. The wellness approach here is based on six components of well-being: nutrition, sports, spa, physiotherapy, physical and mental health, and aesthetics. The word “Zual” itself means “clean water,” which, when looking at the history of the Arab Peninsula, reveals the special meaning of the name: the source of clean water here has always been comparable to the source of life. The resort is divided into two parts: Zual Serenity with 60 rooms and suites only for guests 16 years and older and Zual Discovery, a family resort with 120 suites and guestrooms. In the family part, there are no restrictions on the age of children arriving with guests because this is a wellness resort for children from the first days of their lives.





I check into a beachfront villa on the “adult” side of the resort and immediately explore my own private stretch of beach, which will become one of my favorite parts of the resort over the next few days. In the morning, I go for a consultation with a Health & Wellness Advisor, who will create an individual plan for my recovery. Sports, aesthetic medicine, weight loss, relaxation, or cleansing – the programs at Zula Wellness Resort are adapted to any guest’s request. Dr. Ashley fills out a short questionnaire about my past illnesses, lifestyle, and habits, and asks me about my wants and needs. My request sounds like this: I want to get maximum relaxation and raise my level of vital energy, the decline of which I have been feeling lately. Based on all the information received, he creates an individual schedule for me for the coming days, which consists of classes in physical exercise, stretching, and yoga, all meant to correct my posture spoiled by a sedentary lifestyle, as well as spa treatments that relax

the body and mind, including various types of massages. However, he notes that the resort’s wellness programs are created without serious restrictions and cover areas from physical to psychological health, thanks to which guests can easily integrate new healthy habits and attitudes into everyday life after leaving the resort.

Zula Wellness Resort was my third health resort, and, based on my previous experience, I honestly admit that I was mostly wary of the fact that I would surely have to go through a grueling fast, as had happened before. A pleasant surprise was the fact that I was wrong about this too. They don’t follow exhaustive diets here; you can eat a little of everything. The menu includes gluten-free bread, coffee, meat, and even desserts made with nuts, fruits, honey, and coconut sugar, which is very important for a sweettooth like mine. Two permanent restaurants, Aizoon and Al Sidr, serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner with a rich selection of Middle Eastern and

Pan-Asian cuisines. Two more restaurants, Mediterranean Malbu and Acacia, with dishes of international and Arabic cuisines, are open alternately every other day, but only in the evenings. Gourmet dinners are served here for resort guests. Separately, it should be noted that all the ingredients in Zual Wellness Resort's kitchen are grown using environmentally friendly methods and obtained from local sources. Emphasis is placed on the use of fermented and nutrient-dense foods to improve digestive function. The menu includes a variety of teas, herbal infusions, and smoothies, the taste of which can be enjoyed at any time of the day. Wellness cuisine, in addition to nutritional value, also provides healing elements of Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine. Zual was the first resort to use the achievements of this branch of medicine in the kitchen; when creating dishes, the ingredients and medicinal herbs described in the Koran were taken into account.

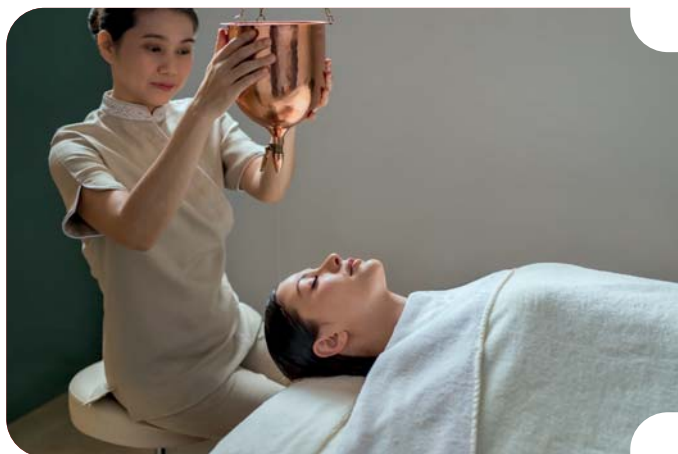
I was to find out about Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine the next day during a private consultation with a specialist in this field, Dr. Mohammed. I was surprised to learn that the healing methods at Zual Wellness Resort are based on the texts of one of the most famous books in the history of medicine, The Canon of Medicine by the Persian scientist and physician Ibn Sina. From the 12th to the 17th centuries, doctors in many countries of the East and West studied the basics of medical science precisely according to The Canon of Medicine. Ibn Sina, known in the West as Avicenna, was born in Bukhara in 980. During his life, the medieval Persian scientist and physician served as a court physician for the Samanid emirs and wrote more than 450 works; however, it is The Canon of Medicine that is considered one of the most ambitious – five volumes – and most valuable for humanity.



According to Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine, all people are divided into a certain number of types, each of which corresponds to one of the natural elements. And this is where another surprise awaited me. I am a person who was born under the sign of Leo, one of the brightest representatives of the fire element, but I learned that, according to the philosophy of TAIM, I am an air “with a hot-humid temperament.” Grinning at my strong reaction, Dr. Mohammed explained that this classification had nothing to do with the so-common zodiac concept. He even gave examples of several traits of my character and my body that correspond to the truth, which made me think that this philosophy might be onto something. Surprisingly, TAIM is a set of rules that applies to all areas of human life. Based on my type, Dr. Muhammad wrote me a whole set of rules that will help me achieve good health, extending to such aspects of life as sleep duration, the acceptability of certain foods, the intensity of physical activity, and much more.

This is probably the main difference and value of Zula Wellness Resort; the guests here pay not just for accommodation and comfort, not only for spa treatments (though they were impeccable) and not for exquisite dishes that can surprise the most sophisticated gourmets. But, most of all, guests receive a unique experience of transitioning to a healthy lifestyle, which they can continue to lead even outside of this resort.

Unfortunately, I spent only a few days here, although many guests stay here for months. But I really hope that I managed to bring with me from Qatar to Baku all the rules and habits that I managed to instill as a part of my visit to this undoubtedly special place. Eat right, spend more time in the fresh air, engage in physical activity, respect and pamper your body, and take care of the peace of your mind. This is what truly improves the quality of our life.



# INVESTING IN AZERBAIJANI ARTISTS: OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

BY ORNELA RAMASAUKAITE  
ART MARKET EXPERT

The world of art investment is a unique realm where passion meets profit and where the intangible value of cultural significance intertwines with the tangible potential for financial gain. Collecting art from emerging markets like Azerbaijan offers a dual promise; it provides the emotional satisfaction of discovering and nurturing new talent as well as the possibility of significant returns on investment for those with a discerning eye and patient approach.

Art collecting is, at its core, an emotional endeavor. The thrill of discovering an artist whose work resonates deeply, the pride in supporting cultural development, and the joy of living with thought-provoking pieces are all rewards that transcend monetary value. Azerbaijani art is underlain by its rich cultural heritage and contemporary fragility, offering collectors a chance to engage with a narrative that is both ancient and unfolding in real-time.

However, the potential for financial returns cannot be ignored. As the global art market continues to expand and diversify, emerging scenes (like Azerbaijan's) present opportunities for substantial ROI. Early supporters of artists who go on to achieve international recognition can see their initial purchases multiply in value many times over. The key lies in identifying talent with the potential for global appeal while it is still accessible.

Let us explore the specific opportunities and risks associated with investing in Azerbaijani art.

## OPPORTUNITIES IN AZERBAIJANI ART MARKET

### 1. Emerging Market Appeal

The growing interest in artists from remote or underrepresented markets presents a significant opportunity



Painted by Mouk (Mahammedali Israfilov)



Ms. Ornela Ramasauskaite

for Azerbaijani artists. Following Australia's recent success at the Venice Biennale, there's an increasing trend of exploring art scenes beyond traditional centers. With its relatively closed art market and limited number of internationally active artists, Azerbaijan offers a unique appeal to collectors seeking undiscovered talent.

### 2. Rarity and Potential Returns

The scarcity of Azerbaijani artists with international careers can make those who achieve success highly valuable. Early investors in these artists may see substantial returns as the country's art scene develops.

### 3. Internal Market Growth:

Azerbaijan itself is beginning to invest more in its art market. This internal growth, in conjunction with an educated and affluent population that is increasingly adopting Western lifestyles, could lead to a more robust local art scene and higher art circulation.

### 4. International Expert Interest

A small but growing number of international experts are showing interest in contemporary Azerbaijani art. This attention could act as a catalyst, increasing global interest in Azerbaijani artists and driving up the value of their work.

### 5. Low Entry Prices

Currently, art prices in Azerbaijan are relatively low compared to more established markets. This presents an opportunity for investors to acquire works at accessible price points with the potential for significant appreciation.

## RISKS IN AZERBAIJANI ART MARKET

### 1. Lack of Market Infrastructure

The absence of a local art auction house in Azerbaijan is a significant drawback for art investors and collectors. Auction houses play a crucial role in establishing market values and providing liquidity for art investments.

### 2. Limited International Exposure

Azerbaijan does not host an international art fair and has limited participation in major global art events. This lack of exposure can hinder the visibility and marketability of Azerbaijani artists on the international stage.

### 3. Underdeveloped Gallery System

With only few galleries operating at a professional level, the support system for artists in Azerbaijan is limited. This can make it challenging for artists to gain representation and build their careers.

### 4. Educational Gaps

Art education in Azerbaijan often needs more comprehensive training in marketing, management, and international art practices. Many artists also face language barriers, which can impede their abilities to navigate the global art market.

### 5. Logistical Challenges

Complicated procedures for art management and insurance in Azerbaijan can make it difficult for artists to participate in international events or for collectors to acquire and transport works.

### 6. Limited Government Support

A sustainable, long-term government funding system for artists, such as grants or support from arts councils, is necessary for the development of artistic careers, especially in their early stages.

## EXAMPLES OF A POSSIBLE INVESTMENT: FARID RASULOV – A MULTIDISCIPLINARY SUCCESS STORY

One of the most prominent figures in contemporary Azerbaijani art is Farid Rasulov. Born in 1985 in Shusha, Rasulov's journey into the art world is as intriguing as his work. Initially trained as a doctor at the Azerbaijan State Medical University, Rasulov made a surprising career shift to visual arts after graduation. This unconventional path has undoubtedly influenced his artistic practice, bringing a unique perspective to his creations informed by his foundation in medicine.

Rasulov's rapid ascent in the art world is noteworthy. Within a short period, he achieved the honor of



Painted by Mouk

representing Azerbaijan at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009. This early success was followed by further participation in the Venice Biennale, including the 55th edition in 2013, in which he contributed to "Ornamentation" and "Love Me Love Me Not," a collateral event showcasing contemporary art from Azerbaijan and its neighbors.

Rasulov's artistic practice spans various media, including large-scale paintings, installations, 3D graphics, animation, and sculpture. What sets the artist apart is not just his technical proficiency or conceptual depth, but his ability to create works that resonate on both local and global levels. His art serves as a bridge, connecting the rich cultural heritage of Azerbaijan with the discourse of international contemporary art. This is perhaps most evident in his installations, in which traditional carpet patterns become vehicles for exploring issues of globalization, cultural identity, and the homogenization of space.

From a critical perspective, Rasulov's work can be seen as a commentary on the complexities of cultural identity in an increasingly globalized world. His pieces recontextualizing traditional Azerbaijani motifs in contemporary settings touch on the challenges of maintaining cultural distinctiveness in the face of modernization. At the same time, by applying these motifs to universal objects and spaces, he suggests a kind of cultural hybridity that is both unsettling and oddly familiar.

For collectors and institutions, Rasulov’s work represents an opportunity to engage with art that is both culturally specific and universally relevant. His established international reputation, combined with the established status of the Azerbaijani art market, positions his oeuvre at a fascinating juncture. As the art world continues to seek diversity and new perspectives, artists like Rasulov who can deftly navigate between local traditions and global concerns are likely to see their significance – and value – increase.

**MOUK: THE RISING STAR OF AZERBAIJANI ART**

In contrast to the length of Rasulov’s established career, we have Mouk (Mahammedali Israfilov), born in 2004 in Baku. Representing the youngest generation of Azerbaijani artists, Mouk embodies the fusion of classical training with contemporary sensibilities.

What truly distinguishes Mouk’s oeuvre, however, is the emotional depth and intellectual rigor that underpin his visual language. His artistic philosophy, which views the early 20th century as a golden age of painting, is particularly intriguing. This reverence for a period of radical artistic innovation suggests a deep understanding of art history and a desire to engage with the legacy of the great modernist masters. Despite this inspiration, Mouk does not simply replicate the styles of the past. Instead, he reinterprets them through a contemporary lens, infusing them with the urgency and complexity of the present moment.

Mouk’s work can be seen as a commentary on the challenges faced by young artists in the current century. In an art world often dominated by cynicism and irony, the artist’s willingness to engage with genuine emotion and vulnerability is refreshing. His paintings often convey a sense of introspection and existential inquiry, inviting viewers



Painted by Farid Rasulov



Painted by Farid Rasulov



Painted by Farid Rasulov

to contemplate their own place in a rapidly changing world.

Mouk’s engagement with color is particularly noteworthy. His use of vibrant, often unexpected combinations creates a visual language that is both deeply personal and universally resonant. These chromatic explorations can be interpreted as metaphors for the complex emotional landscapes of youth or as reflections on the cultural vibrancy of contemporary Azerbaijan.

For collectors and institutions, Mouk’s work represents an exciting opportunity to engage with the cutting edge of emerging talent from a region still underrepresented in the global art market. Despite his impressive technical and conceptual sophistication, he resonates a youth that suggests significant potential for growth and development. As Azerbaijan continues to gain recognition in the international art scene, artists like Mouk are likely to see increasing attention and appreciation.

Moreover, Mouk’s art offers a unique window into the experiences and perspectives of Azerbaijan’s post-independence generation. His work captures the energy, aspirations, and anxieties of a youth culture navigating the complexities of national identity, global influences, and personal expression. This cultural significance adds an additional layer of value to his work beyond its already considerable aesthetic merits.

**INVESTING STRATEGIES AND CONSIDERATIONS**

For investors interested in the Azerbaijani art market, a nuanced approach is necessary to navigate the opportunities and risks.

**1. Balance Between Established and Emerging Talents**

Investors may find more stability in focusing on established

artists who have already gained international recognition, but for those willing to take on more risk for potentially higher returns, emerging artists represent an opportunity to invest early in promising careers. Look for artists who demonstrate a unique voice and the ability to bridge local traditions with global art trends.

## 2. Due Diligence

Given the limited market infrastructure, thorough research is crucial. Engage with international experts who have knowledge of both global and the Azerbaijani art scenes.

## 3. Long-Term Perspective

Investing in Azerbaijani art may require a long-term outlook. The market is still developing, and it may take time for investments to appreciate significantly.

## 4. Support for Market Development

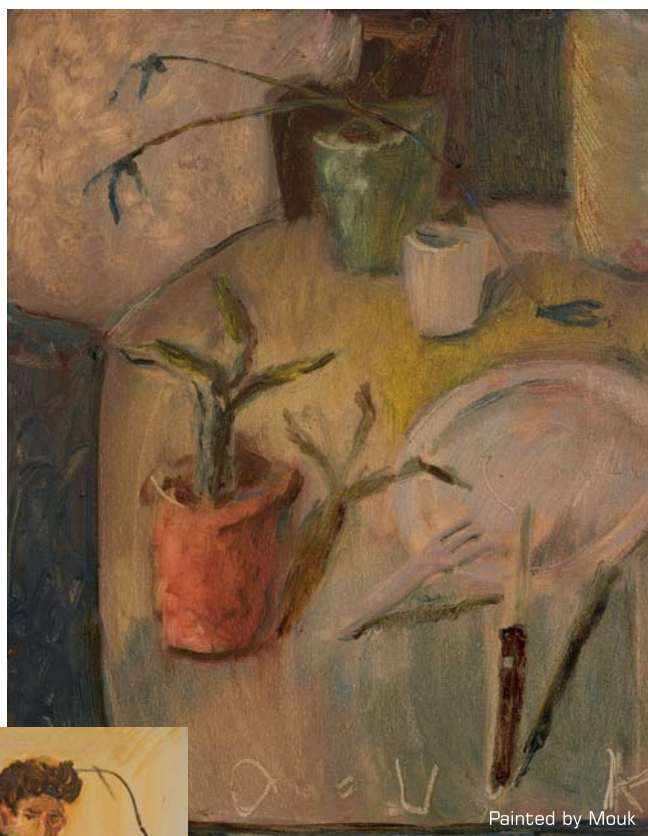
Investors might consider supporting initiatives that strengthen the Azerbaijani art market, such as sponsoring artists' participation in international events or supporting career development.

## 5. Diversification

As with any investment strategy, diversification is critical. Consider balancing investments in Azerbaijani art with more established markets to mitigate risks.

As we draw this exploration of the Azerbaijani art scene to a close, it becomes evident that we are witnessing the emergence of a vibrant and complex artistic ecosystem – one that offers both significant opportunities and unique challenges for collectors, investors, and art enthusiasts. The Azerbaijani art market stands at a crucial juncture, poised between its rich cultural heritage and the global currents of contemporary art, which offers a rare opportunity for early engagement with a developing art scene that has the potential for significant international recognition in the coming years. The country's efforts to establish itself as a cultural hub, exemplified by institutions like YARAT Contemporary Art Space and the iconic Heydar Aliyev Center, signal a commitment to nurturing artistic talent and fostering cultural exchange that bodes well for the future of Azerbaijani art.

Looking to the future, the trajectory of the Azerbaijani art scene will likely be shaped by several key factors. The continued development of cultural institutions and educational programs will be crucial in nurturing emerging talent and providing platforms for artistic exchange. The country's ability to navigate the delicate



Painted by Mouk



Painted by Mouk

balance between state support and artistic innovation will also play a significant role in determining the vitality and authenticity of its artistic output. Moreover, increased exposure to international art markets and events will be essential in building the global reputation of Azerbaijani artists and attracting a broader base of collectors. For collectors, investors, and art lovers alike, Azerbaijan presents not just

an opportunity for acquisition but an invitation to be part of a living, evolving artistic tradition – a chance to witness and support the birth of what may become the next significant chapter in the history of global contemporary art.

*Ornela Ramauskaite, PhD Candidate, is an international art market expert and CEO of artXchange Global. Awarded as "Leading Female Figure in Art Wealth Management 2023" by the "Wealth and Finance International Fund Awards 2023".*

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THE JAZZ CLUB REOPENING AT FAIRMONT BAKU FLAME TOWERS

On one of the highest points of Baku, within the walls of the extraordinary and original Flame Towers complex, the JAZZ CLUB has reopened its doors, continuing the tradition of exquisite recreation at the Fairmont Baku hotel. The glamorous event, held in partnership with The M.O.S.T. magazine, attracted foreign diplomats, esteemed figures from local and international companies, as well as renowned public persons.

PHOTOS BY JEYKHUN HASANOV

From L to R: 1. George Ganchev (General Manager of Fairmont Baku Flame Towers); 2. Gary Jones (BP Azerbaijan President), Guests of the event; 3. Anastasiya Goryacheva (Founder of Yes, God!); 4. Hamayil Alasgarova (Blogger); 5. Guest of the event; 6. Rain Sultanov (Azerbaijani saxophonist and composer), Konul İsmayilova (Socar Upstream); 7. Arslan Abbasov (Publisher of Azeri Observer & The M.O.S.T.); 8. Dogu Yaman (Fairmont Baku Flame Towers); 9. Nazrin Sadikhova (Founder of Biomed Spektr), Milan Sedlacek (Ambassador of the Czech Republic); 10. Eldar Alimuradov (Chairman of the Board of the Azerbaijan Hotels Association); 11. Tomris Mutallibzada, Indira Mutallibzada (Founder of Beauty of Science); 12. Parvana Adigozalova (World Class by Hyatt Regency), Zarifa Shabanova (Prive restaurant); 13. Ekaterina Evdokimova (Helentours);



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14. Sema Abiyeva (Blogger), Gunay Heydarova (Improtex Motors); 15. Aytac Mammadli (Founder of Aychaychi), Orkhan Hajiyev (Founder of Baku Translation), Aysel Mirzayeva (Director of Peak Network); 16. DJ Zedmoon;



17. Azer Gulaliyev (National Parliament), Farida Osmanova (Fairmont Baku Flame Towers), Asmar Mammadova (Savalan Wines); 18. Emil Akhundov (The M.O.S.T. Magazine); 19. Nigar Poladova (Luxury Wines), Khalida Babayeva (Savalan Wines), Afet Khudaverdiyeva (Luxury Wines), Dilara Ibragimova (Luxury Wines), Ruslan Gojayev (Luxury Wines); 20. Murad Dadashov (General Director of Khazar TV Channel); 21. Nikolaos Piperigkos (Former Ambassador of Greece to Azerbaijan) with spouse Saida Mehdiyeva; 22. Vera Petrenko (Azeri Observer and The M.O.S.T.); 23. Kenan Demirel (Fairmont Baku Flame Towers), Nurkhan Mammadaliyev (Fairmont Baku Flame Towers); 24. Shamil Aliyev and Fidan Aliyeva (Sacria Atelier); 25. Nara Hasanly (Embassy of Egypt); 26. Tatyana Ivanaeva (Journalist).



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## THE EUROPEAN AZERBAIJAN SCHOOL HOSTS GREEN GLOBE GALA

The European Azerbaijan School recently hosted the highly anticipated Green Globe Gala, a grand affair aimed at fostering a global impact through collaborative efforts and environmental awareness. This prestigious event, held in partnership with Azeri Observer magazine, attracted an illustrious crowd of 150 guests. Among them were ambassadors, esteemed figures from prominent local and international companies, public persons, and media representatives.

PHOTOS BY NAHID HASANZADA

**From L to R:** 1. Francesco Banchini (CEO of European Azerbaijan School), Arslan Abbasov (Publisher of Azeri Observer & The M.O.S.T.); 2. Yana Slivka (Executive Director @ British Chamber of Commerce Azerbaijan); 3. Razi Nurullayev (Member of Parliament); 4. Shakhin Eldarov (Azerbaijan Industrial Corporation), Fuad Hatamov (WWF Azerbaijan), Ayaz Mirzayev (Head of the Azerbaijan Journalists Network PU), Emin Musavi (Director of ASAN Radio); 5. Farrukh Bakhshiyev (CEO of Azerbaijan Logistics Services); 6. Hokuma Karimova (YARAT Contemporary Art Centre), Gunay Massimova (Director of Baku Education Information Center); 7. Natella Karimova (Blogger), Nara Hasanova (CineMastercard); 8. Mahmud Aliyev (Director of Mugham Perfume House) with spouse Farida Gurbanova; 9. Ilhom Abdurahmon (Ambassador of Tajikistan), Andrei Ravkov (Ambassador of Belarus); 10. Arzu Mustafayeva (Cafe City), Dilara Guliyeva (Cafe City); 11. Tatyana Shnipenko (Director of Pizza Holiday Baku), Anna Vlasova; 12. Victoria Romero Caballero (Ambassador of Mexico) with spouse Hendrik Bekker; 13. Lala Hasanova, Francesco Banchini, Arslan Abbasov, Emil Hasanov (bp Azerbaijan).





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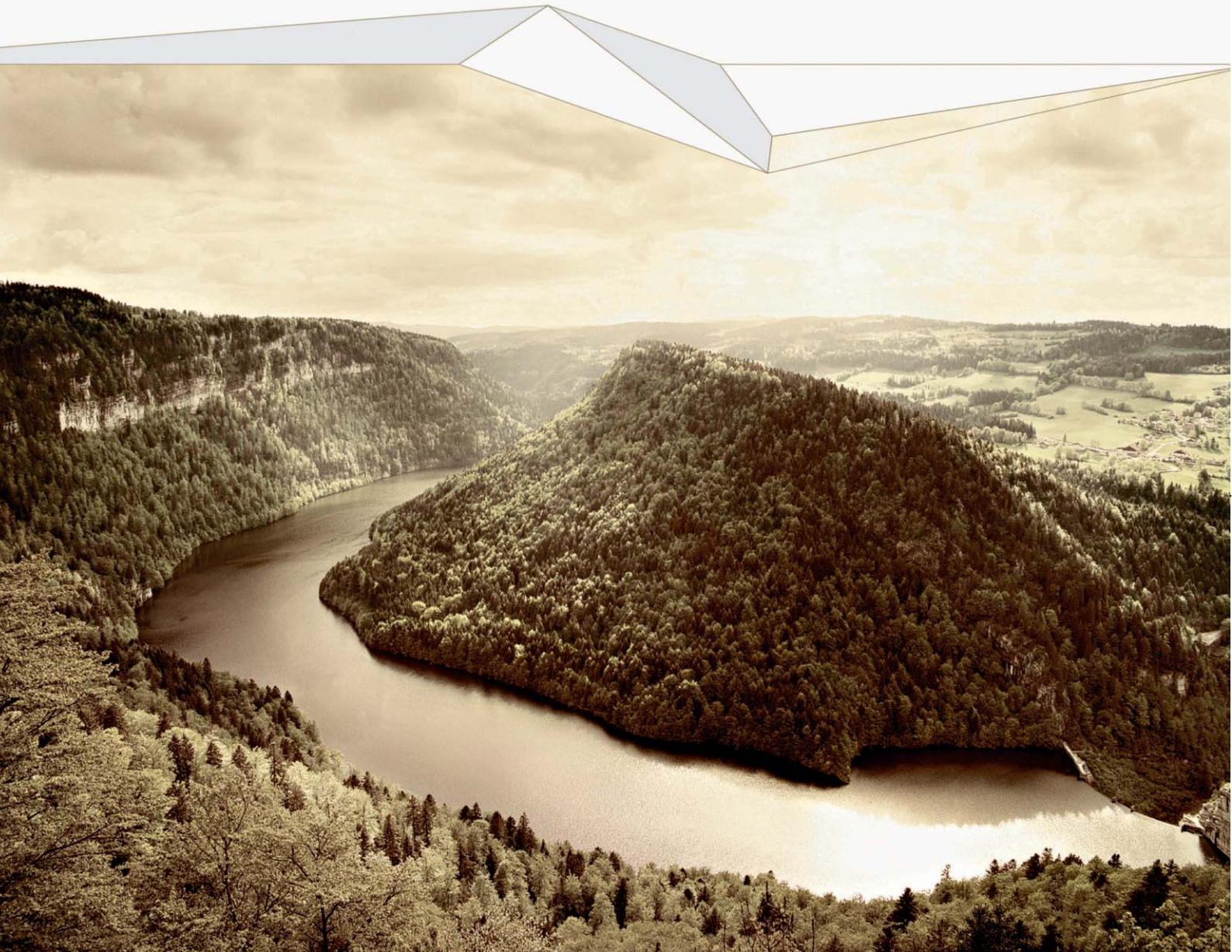
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