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RUSSIA-AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS AFTER AUGUST 2008

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Summary

The significance of the Azerbaijan-Russia relations is varied due to the extent of its importance for both Azerbaijan and Russia. For Azerbaijan, relations with Russia was formed in terms of protection of the independence and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, while for Russia these relations based on the goal of achieving either the regional or global targets. Azerbaijan-Russia relations both from the perspective of historical process and as of now concerned not only in these two countries, but also the fate of the Caucasus and Central Asia. The speculations were browsing around that after the August 2008 events Azerbaijan "has started to approach Russia". The main thesis of this material is that Azerbaijan preserved its balanced foreign policy regardless of strengthening of Russia's regional and global position in the region after the August 2008 and 2010 and despite Russia's insistence and pressures towards Baku.

Key Words: Azerbaijan, Russia, balanced foreign policy, August 2008, Gabala RLS, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Introduction

The significance of the Azerbaijan-Russia relations is varied due to the extent of its importance for both Azerbaijan and Russia. Inherently, these relations constitute one of the most important dimensions of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. For Azerbaijan, relations with Russia was formed in terms of protection of the independence and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, while for Russia these relations based on the goal of achieving either the regional or global targets. Azerbaijan-Russia relations both from the perspective of historical process and as of now concerned not only in

these two countries, but also the fate of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Azerbaijan that fell under the Russia's control as of the first quarter of 19th century, became a field of struggle in the early 20th century, the Second World War and the late 20th century among other powers who wanted to get the control of this region together with Russia due to Azerbaijan's vast natural resources (especially oil and gas). The geographical position of Azerbaijan appeared pretty important in the post-Cold War era in terms of struggle of the West, especially the United States and opposite forces (Russia, Iran, to some extent China) for Caucasus and Central Asia region.

This period the ruling powers in Azerbaijan followed a different policies both in general terms and in terms of relations with Russia. After short period of the pro-Russian policy of Ayaz Mutellibov administration, the period of Abulfaz Elchibey has been pursuing significantly an anti-Russian, but pro-Western policies, while Heydar Aliyev prioritised the balanced foreign policy orientation considering the sensitivity of Russia as well. During this period and afterwards, Azerbaijan, along with pursuing the framework of a balanced foreign policy in general, has carried out major projects with the Western countries during Ilham Aliyev's administration. In this period, Russia's weight in the centre of Azerbaijan's foreign policy has not changed much, but positive or negative processes has been experienced in terms of relations with Russia.

Azerbaijan, as a country suffering from the problem of territorial integrity, was concerned with the territorial loses of Georgia and Ukraine after both country openly resisted Russia during August 2008 and afterwards respectively. Russian officials even have made comments threatening the territorial integrity and the independence of Belarus and Kazakhstan. Thereupon, the former Soviet republics followed more careful policies towards Russia, their reluctance on participation in the Russia-led integration process has decreased. Thus, the events in August 2008 has strengthened the position of Russia in the former Soviet Union geography.

The speculations were browsing around that after the August 2008 events Azerbaijan "has started to approach Russia". The main thesis of this material is that Azerbaijan preserved its balanced foreign policy regardless of strengthening of Russia's regional and global position in the region after the August 2008 and 2010 and despite Russia's insistence and pressures towards Baku. Although Russia pleased with the limitations in Azerbaijan's relations with the West in this period, Azerbaijan was able to resist Russia regardless of 'Nagorno-Karabakh' conflict and both parties could not agree on the Gebele RLS, eventually Russia was forced to leave Gabala RLS. Thus, the Russian military presence in Azerbaijan has completely ended.

In this study, we will study the history and current state of the Azerbaijan-Russia relations and make an assessment on the future of the relationship.

History of Azerbaijan-Russian relations and the importance of both countries for each other

Azerbaijan-Russia relations has been previously formed on the basis of relations between *beyliks/khanates* and dukes (*knyaz*) until the period of when modern Azerbaijani and Russian governments has been established. Historically, interest of Russia in Azerbaijan was stemming from former's desire to access the warm seas. For that purposes, Russian armed units managed to enter to the surroundings of Baku in 914, but were forces to leave the region losing the shootout with a 15 thousand Turkish-Muslim unity in the northern part of the Caspian in the same year.^[1] The attacks on the Russians to Azerbaijan, even in a small scale, had continued during ten centuries and stopped later. In 1465, Shirvanshakh Ferruh Yaser has sent his relative Hasan Bey to Moscow with various gifts in order to "streamline the trade and diplomatic relations". Next year, Great Duke of Moscow

Ivan III has sent an embassy delegation headed by Vasili Papin to Shamakhy, thus the relations has gained a diplomatic nature.^[2] Once Russia became stronger, it made continuous moves southward and took the control of the northern part of Azerbaijan (current Azerbaijan Republic in its entirety) following the signature of Gulistan Treaty (1813) and Turkmenchay Treaty (1828) with Gadjars/*Qacarlar* (Iran) after many years of wars.^[3]

Azerbaijan declared its independence on May 28, 1918, but since the Bolshevik government in Russia did not recognize them and wanted to plant a Bolshevik regime in Azerbaijan, no serious relationship have been formed between them. Despite many attempts of Azerbaijan to prevent the threats stemming from the north, the country could withstand these threats 23 months only and was occupied by the Bolsheviks Russian troops on April 27, 1920 and a day later the Soviet government was established in Azerbaijan.^[4] From these date until Azerbaijan re-declared its independence in August 30, 1991, there has been no an inter-state relations between Azerbaijan and Russia.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia and Azerbaijan re-emerged as two independent states on the world stage. But the features of two states for each others were different. In terms of Azerbaijan, the meaning of Russia can be expressed as followings:

1. Russia, as a heir of the empire, was considered a main threat to independence of Azerbaijan both during the period of the struggle for independence and the first years of independence;

2. Russia was supporting Armenia occupying the territories of Azerbaijan, subsequent threat to Azerbaijan's territorial integrity;

3. Russia was seeking to prevent the Azerbaijan's independent energy policies;

4. Meanwhile, Russia is a key country in terms of solution of the problem on Azerbaijan's territorial integrity (Nagorno-Karabakh conflict);

5. Russia was an important route for Azerbaijan, who doesn't have an access to open seas, in order to reach the open seas and Europe.

6. Russia was a part of Azerbaijan's "diversification of pipelines" strategy in terms of energy policies;

7. A huge number of Azerbaijani citizens working in Russia (subsequently Russia is a source of revenues for Azerbaijanis);

8. Russia is a market for Azerbaijan's agriculture products.

Russia also considered Azerbaijan a strategically important part of the Caucasus.^[5] In general, the importance of the Caucasus for Russia can be expressed as followings:

1. In order to achieve a shorter path southwards (in terms of expansionist strategy to the Indian Ocean) and to strengthen its claims for being a global power by keeping the region under control;

2. To keep Turkey and Iran (due to their ambitions to expand towards north-east/east) and other states (that seek to reach Russia's borders through Iran and Turkey) away from its borders; to limit/terminate the separatist attempts of different ethnic groups in its southern regions (the North Caucasus), thus reduce the concerns on territorial integrity;

3. To prevent (or at least limit) the imposition alternative natural resources into the market, thus to preserve the dependence of consumer states of those resources, on Russia.

4. To limit the possibility of reaching 'Turkestan' by the West, the United States, through this region;

5. The importance of its military presence in the Caucasus in terms of regional and global objectives;

6. The psychological factors in terms of the imperial history and goal of becoming a global

power;

7. The Caucasus is of importance for Russia in terms of protecting its Caspian and Black Sea coast;

8. In particular, Azerbaijan's policy was important in terms of accepting the demands of Russia in the former Soviet Union geography or the resistance to these demands.

If we look at the course of the relationship, when Azerbaijan regained its independence in 1991, Russia has been reluctant to develop diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan, although Ayaz Mutellibov known as a pro-Russian was in power.^[6] Regardless the opinion of Azerbaijani Parliament, however, Ayaz Mutellibov had made a gesture to Russia by signing the Alma-Ata Declaration on December 21, 1991 that envisaged joining the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).^[7] Following the resignation of Mutellibov on March 6, 1992, when Azerbaijan gradually begin to move away from Russia, Russian Foreign Minister Kozirev visited Baku on April 3, 1992 and Russia has recognized the independence of Azerbaijan on April 4, 1992 and the diplomatic relations were established between two countries.^[8] During this period, Head of Parliament Yagub Mammadov who was carrying out the mandate of the President of Azerbaijan demonstrated careful stance in dealing with Russia, since Azerbaijani Parliament has not ratified the Alma-Ata Declaration and Azerbaijani authorities did not participate in CIS meeting.

The ruling Azerbaijan People's Front under the leadership of Abulfaz Elchibey began in Azerbaijan since May 15, 1992 de-facto and since June 7, 1992 de-jure. Since Elchibey prioritized the independence and the relations with other states based on equal status and resisted the hegemonic approaches of Russia, his ruling period was considered as the most problematic period in terms of Azerbaijan-Russia relations. In fact, early years of this period also experienced relatively a period of efficiency, thus Elchibey had paid an official visit to Russia and signed a number of agreements between the two countries.

However, absence of Russia in Azerbaijan's planned oil contracts as a shareholder, consequently arrival of the Western companies to the region, the policy of non-alignment with CIS, the withdrawal of the Russian troops from the country, etc. was disturbing steps for Russia. On the other hand, Russia has started to implement the "Doctrine of New Abroad" since the 1993 and in the face of this policy, some circles in the USA supported the thesis of not giving the necessary support to the former Soviet republic, instead has advocated the adoption of the former Soviet Union as a backyard of Russia. Under these circumstances, the policies pursued by Russia through various means against Azerbaijan proved successful, on the one hand Azerbaijan faced the risk of civil war, on the other hand, Russia supported Armenia have increased attacks on Azerbaijan. The coup carried out in June 1993 overthrew Abulfaz Elchibey from the presidential office and the important part of Azerbaijan's territories was occupied by Russian-backed Armenia.

Heydar Aliyev, who has been elected a Chairman of the Parliament on June 15, 1993 after he was invited to Baku to prevent civil war by Elchibey during the coup attempt, along with maintaining this position and after he was elected a President of Azerbaijani, has used a soft rhetoric for Russia and has tried to soothe Russia's "anger".

For this purpose, as a main important indicator of the abandonment of the pro-Western policy of Elchibey period, the activities of the western companies working in Azerbaijan have been suspended on June 22, 1993 and even their bank accounts were frozen.^[9] Particularly, in order to stop the occupation of Azerbaijan's territories by Armenia with the support of Russia and to liberate its occupied territories, Haydar Aliyev aimed at changing the attitude of Russia on this issue, confirmed Azerbaijan's will to develop good relations with Russia and to join the CIS during his visit to Russia and meeting with Yeltsin Russian President and the other officials in the summer of 1993.

On July 20, 1993 Azerbaijan Parliament approved the Membership Agreement for CIS and Heydar Aliyev went to Moscow to sign related agreements on September 24 1993.^[10]

During this period, Heydar Aliyev was criticized with the "He turned his face to Russia", "Azerbaijan is losing its independence," and with similar criticisms. However, in the process of joining the CIS, Heydar Aliyev both in his public statements to Azerbaijanis and in the talks with Russian officials consistently emphasized the independence, stated that the main reason to join the CIS was maintaining the relations with former Soviet republics.^[11]

In the first 6 months of his ruling that ended the Russian opposition in the foreign policy and even clearly acted as a pro-Russian for a while, Heydar Aliyev administration, after not experiencing too much positive developments in Russia's policy towards Azerbaijan, had turned his face slightly to the West since the 1994 and the negotiations with Western oil companies had been re-launched. In the coming periods, a new framework for Azerbaijan-Russia relations (balanced foreign policy strategy of Azerbaijan) took the drive. Since then, the basic dynamics of Azerbaijan-Russia relations until today can be summarized as follows:

- Russia's strategic objectives (foreign policy, national security and military doctrines);
- Azerbaijan's strategic objectives (national security and military doctrine, foreign policy conception);
- Important problems of both countries (Karabakh, Chechnya issue);
- The production of natural resources in the region to international markets and its transportation;
- Legal Status of the Caspian
- Global competition for the region, Azerbaijan's benefits from this global competition and regional and global balance of power; partial challenges of the global competitiveness posed to Russia;
- Historical, religious, ethnic factors;
- In both countries, the impact of other areas of domestic policy and foreign policy (in particular, the status of relations of both countries with Armenia; the relationship with global and regional actors, the US, Turkey, Iran, China etc. can also be added);
- Global developments affecting the regional balance (September 11, August 2008, the Syrian crisis and etc.).

Russia often regarded Azerbaijan in the framework of called "Near Abroad" doctrine. The "Near Abroad" terminology, first time expressed by Russian former Foreign Minister Andrei Kozirev, envisaged the unification of the former Soviet republic under the federation or confederation umbrella with Russia both in military and economic senses.^[12] The special privileges for Russia in its "Near Abroad" and the granting an authority to Russia's armed forces to intervene in the conflict in the former USSR geography as a "peacekeeping force" were among the basic objectives of the new doctrine.^[13]

In February 1993, the foreign policy doctrine based on "Near Abroad" approach has been adopted by the Security Council of Russian Federation and entered into force in April 1993 after the approval of Boris Yeltsin. Russia's military doctrines adopted since 1993, national security documents and foreign policy doctrines emphasized the importance of the former Soviet Union geography and especially the preservation of the Russian language and culture abroad in this region, as well as highlighted the threat posed by the approach of NATO to Russia's borders and the cooperation in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in particular.

These issues are of great importance and taken into account by Azerbaijan in practice for relations between Russia and Azerbaijan. However, Azerbaijan's official documents emphasize the

integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions in particular, rather than that of Russia. For instance, although Azerbaijan prioritized the development of international cooperation on the basis of "integration to European Union and World Community" and equal partnership in its "Law on National Security" (Article 6.2.9) dated June 29, 2004, Russia was not mentioned there. The National Security Concept (NSC) of Republic of Azerbaijan dated May 23, 2007 defined Azerbaijan as a country "sharing the progressive values of Europe and an integral circle of the Euro-Atlantic security system". The Article 4.1.2 of NSC defines the "integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures" as one of the "main directions of Azerbaijan's national security policy". Whereas, relations with Russia have been mentioned under the "cooperation with the countries of the region" (Article 4.1.5.1) after the relations with Turkey, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova within the framework of GUAM. The general expressions are used in the document concerning the relations with Russia.^[14] Military Doctrine of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated June 8, 2010 also mentioned the development of cooperation with Euro-Atlantic security system and NATO on the basis of mutual interests, however, did mention neither Russia nor Russia-led military organizations.^[15]

As the remaining period, although Russia lost its dominant position on issue of the occupation of Azerbaijan's territories by Armenia, but maintained its 'key country' role and continues to do so.^[16] Russia's attitude on this conflict and its relations with Armenia constitutes to be the most important reason for the ups and downs in Azerbaijan-Russia relations.

Although, Russia demonstrated jealous stance towards Azerbaijan's oil and natural gas contracts with the foreign companies, the energy lobbying led by the former prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin in Russia, the intensive works on the establishment of good relations with Azerbaijan, the negotiations held with the Azerbaijani authorities had a positive result and Russian LUKoil company has gained 10% stake in the 'Contract of Century' signed on September 20, 1994 in Baku.^[17] In the later periods, Russia has continued to receive a share from the oil agreements of Azerbaijani. Initially, Russia did not accept the involvement of the foreign companies in development of the Azerbaijan's oil fields, later Moscow softened its stance, notably when Vladimir Putin came to the power since the energy factor became the main weight of Russia's foreign policy.^[18]

During the ruling power of Haydar Aliyev, the Chechnya issues was constituting the main axis of the problems in Azerbaijan-Russia relations. Chechnya problem in the bilateral relations was felt clearly during the period of the first Russian-Chechen war (1994-1996). During the first Chechen-Russian war, Russia had claimed that Chechens were supported by Azerbaijan, but Azerbaijan rejected these claims. While Russia continued these claims, Moscow applied an economic embargo over Azerbaijan's export. Russia continued to this claim and has imposed unilateral and undeclared economic sanctions for 3 years over Azerbaijan, which was carrying out 70 percent of its exports to Russia.^[19] After the signature of the Khasavyurt Agreement between Russia and Chechnya in 1996 and the Chechnya issue removed from the agenda of relations between Russia and Azerbaijan and Russia was gradually removed unilateral economic embargo imposed on Azerbaijan due to 'Chechnya' issues.

The Chechnya issue emerged in Azerbaijan-Russia relations again after the attack of troops from Chechnya to Dagestan in August 1999 and subsequent attack of Russia to Chechnya under the slogan of 'fighting against the international terrorism'. The accusations of Russia against Azerbaijan even has gone beyond the rhetoric and a Russian military aircraft dropped a grenade launcher in Gimir village of Azerbaijan's northern Zagatala district on October 1, 1999.^[20] Despite the denials of the event by Russian Air Force Commander Lieutenant General Anatoly Kornukov, then Russian Ambassador to Azerbaijan Blokhin stated "they lost the bomb".^[21] After Vladimir Putin came to

power as a president, Azerbaijan has considerably changed this policy and restricted the activities of Chechens in Azerbaijan, while some of them have been arrested, were extradited to Russia.

Strengthening Russia and Azerbaijan during the Putin era

Interests of Russia to Azerbaijan was boosted following Vladimir Putin took the power in Russia, while Azerbaijani government faced the pressure of Russia from time to time. After Azerbaijan gained its independence, the first official visit from Russia on the level of head of state was the visit of Vladimir Putin on January 9-11, 2001. The visit scheduled for 2000 had been postponed twice for various reasons, but eventually Putin visited Baku with huge delegation on January 9, 2001.^[22] During the visit the parties tried to exchange careful expressions for each other.

The visit of then President of Azerbaijan Haydar Aliyev 24-26 to Russia on January 24-26, 2002 has constituted the second phase of the Putin-Aliyev mobility. The bilateral discussions took place between the two heads of state on January 25, 2002 in the Kremlin Palace. In his speech during talks Putin mentioned that for the first time the cooperation on the military level will take place between Azerbaijan and Russia, while Haydar Aliyev emphasized that the development of the relations was observed particularly during President Putin's Government.^[23] The following agreements was signed between Azerbaijan and Russian President during this visit:

1. The Agreement on Status of Gabala Radio Location Station ('Gabala RLS', or in the words of Russia 'Deryal RLS') and Principles of Utilization;
2. The long-term Economic Cooperation Agreement between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation for the period up to 2010;
3. The Joint Declaration of President of Russian Federation Vladimir Putin and the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev.

Apart from that, the cooperation agreement has been signed between the relevant authorities on the direction and principles of economic cooperation between the two countries, on the creation of joint companies in cooperation and exchange of information for the prevention of tax evasion and on the cooperation of border forces.^[24]

The most important point should be emphasized that Russia is still the most important power in the region. The Aliyev's visit draws particular attention to three points. The first of these was the signing of an agreement on Gabala RLS, as Putin also noted, the first cooperation on military matters between Azerbaijan and Russia; second, Putin's statements regarding Russian language and Russian cultural values; third, for the first time the authorities of both countries talked about the strategic partnership between the two countries.^[25]

In fact, these two bilateral visits reflect the general trends of Azerbaijan-Russia relations and continues today as well. When Ilham Aliyev became the president of Azerbaijan, while Dmitry Medvedev the president of Russia, the general course of neither Azerbaijan's foreign policy, nor the main line of the Azerbaijan-Russia relations (despite the bumpy period) has not experienced a very serious change. Mutual visits at the highest level have continued its increasing intensity, but sometimes also experienced tensions. For example, after the good track record of relations between the two countries, the first serious tensions were popped out in late 2002 early 2003 on three main issues (petroleum agreements; espionage charges and claims on assistance to Chechnya; attitudes towards the citizens of Azerbaijan in Russia).^[26]

Ilham Aliyev has continued his father's foreign policy line after he has been selected a President of Azerbaijan and the relations with Russia are also developed in this framework. Ilham Aliyev held his first official visit to Russia during February 5-7, 2004. In Moscow Ilham Aliyev has

held meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, Chairman of Federation Council Sergei Mironov, Speaker of State Duma Boris Gryzlov, Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov and Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and has made assessment on all areas of bilateral relations. In this stage, the Russian President Vladimir Putin paid his first visit to Azerbaijan on February 21-22, 2006 on the eve of "Year of Russia events in Azerbaijan".

When Russia transferred the major part of military ammunitions to Armenia during the unloading process of its military bases in Georgia, it led to the short-term tensions in Azerbaijan-Russia relations. Although Russian officials claimed that they moved the ammunitions to the Russian military base (102) in Armenia, however, it was found out that an important part of the ammunition were given to the Armenian army. In general, Azerbaijan was angered because of Russia's significant arm support to the Armenian army.^[27] In this regard, the reduction of Azerbaijani oil transportation through the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline was noteworthy.

Meanwhile, in order to enhance the cooperation between the two governments the Intergovernmental Economic Cooperation Commission was established and the joint commission studies established for the determination of the border between the two countries. Russia intensified its social-cultural works in Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani students have been set a quota for more scholarships (for example, 178 in 2007, 198 in 2008, 284 in 2009) each year. On February 27, 2007, the Baku branch of the Moscow State University was opened. The Moscow Open University also continues its educational activities in Baku.

The events of August 2008 and the bilateral relations afterwards

The developments in Azerbaijan-Russia relations after August 2008 events can be assessed in the framework of Russia's increasing influence in the former Soviet Union geography and the development in the Turkey-Armenia relations during this period.

Along with August 2008 events, the visit of Turkey's then president Abdullah Gul to Armenia, dubbed as a "football diplomacy"^[28], Azerbaijan's foreign policy demonstrated anti-Western stance, the relations in the energy field with Turkey were strained, Azerbaijan signed a gas deal with Russia (the signing of the Moscow Declaration^[29] on "the military way of solution will not applied" to the Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia under the Russia's mediation on November 2, 2008, could be added here), Azerbaijan participated in the Nabucco's ceremony in Ankara at the ministerial level only. All these kindled the discussions around Azerbaijan's foreign policy changes again.^[30]

Because, the visits to France, Russia and Iran shortly after Ilham Aliyev took the office in 2003, browsed speculations that Azerbaijan has gave up its balanced policy, which was criticized that the country would move the relations with Russia and Iran to higher level. However, Novruz Mammadov, then head of foreign policy department in the Presidential Administration rejected in the press conference the criticism regarding "pro-Russian foreign policy of Azerbaijan" and reiterated the "continuation of Baku's balanced foreign policy line founded by Heydar Aliyev".^[31] The one of the most serious responses to the similar criticisms came again from Novruz Mammadov, mentioned in the journal of "Azerbaijan Focus" (dated 2010) published by the Centre for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. According to Mammadov, "the current line of Azerbaijan's foreign policy is 15 years old" emphasizing the continuation of balanced foreign policy line, but also highlighted the importance of relations with Russia and non-alignment with Western blocks.^[32] In the article, Novruz Mammadov also highlighted the claim that "pro-European course was one of the priorities of Azerbaijan from the first days of independence" and stressed the

importance of relations with the EU and NATO. In fact, after the collapse of USSR Azerbaijan indeed participated almost in all of the anti-Russian buildings (except NATO) and still continues to this line. The answer of the questions on the continuation of main line in the Azerbaijan-Russia relations after 2008 is particularly important in the context of two issues:

1. Integration initiatives in Russia's former Soviet Union;
2. Future of Gabala RLS, as the remains of Russia's military presence in Azerbaijan.

Despite all the pressures over Azerbaijan in this period, the country remained outside of the Moscow-led integration initiatives. Azerbaijani authorities has strengthened the emphasis on independence in their statements due to irrationality of siding at the same block with Armenia, which is hitherto occupying the Azerbaijan's territories. In fact, Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev several times stated that Armenia didn't occupy the Azerbaijani territories alone as it didn't have enough capability, but Armenia occupied Azerbaijan's territories with the help of supporters. It was supposed to he was meant more Russia with this statement. In terms of Azerbaijan's resistance against Russia on Gabala RLS, the attitudes of other former Soviet Republics, notably Armenia and Ukraine were important. On 21 April 2010, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich signed an agreement in Kharkov city, which granted Russia the right to keep Russia's Black Sea Fleet in the Sevastopol naval base in Ukraine's Crimea, until 2042.^[33] The agreement signed in 1997 between Russia and Ukraine envisaged the use of the Sevastopol base by the Russian Navy until 2017. In 2004, pro-Western forces after coming to power in Ukraine during "Orange Revolution" endorsed the NATO membership of Ukraine and evacuation of this base in 2017 at the latest. Ukraine was angered with the utilization of Russia's Black Sea fleet in the Sevastopol base against Georgia during August 2008 war.

20 August 2010, Russia and Armenia has signed a protocol to extend the duration of the Russian military base in Armenia until the year 2044 including with enhancing Russia's authority and without demanding any financial compensation.^[34] According to previous protocol, which was signed on the March 16, 1995, the tenure of this base was identified as 25-year (should be terminated in 2020). The extension of the Russian military bases in Ukraine and Armenia long before the tenure, has created additional pressure over Azerbaijan. Despite those pressures, Azerbaijan have held its position tight in the negotiations with Russia regarding the Gabala RLS with Russia and the Gabala RLS was terminated its operations as of December 10, 2012 due to failure to reach an agreement with Russia.^[35] As of 2013 Russian totally left the Gabala RLS. Different statements were made on the issue that the disagreement was stemming from economic reasons and it was alleged that Russia supported the opposition against Ilham Aliyev during the presidential elections held in Azerbaijan in 2013. But all these explanations did not change a significant fact: Russia for the first time, especially after the August 2008 war, was not able to get what it wanted of particular importance in the former Soviet Union.

Another test in the Azerbaijan-Russia relations was experienced during the Turkey-Russia crisis following the shot of Russian military aircraft by Turkey. At this stage, the Azerbaijani authorities have tried to display more balanced attitude and to exert efforts to resolve the crisis between Russia and Turkey. However, Azerbaijan demonstrated a closer stance towards Turkey during the visit of former Prime Minister of Turkey Ahmet Davutoglu to Azerbaijan on December 3-4, 2015. Ilham Aliyev at the beginning, middle and end of his speech of December 3 2015 stressed that "we stand by Turkey on every issues" during his meeting with Ahmet Davutoglu.^[36] Amidst the Turkey-Russia crisis, Ilham Aliyev and Recep Tayyip Erdogan demonstrated more warmer attitude during Aliyev's visit to Turkey on March 15, 2016 and embraced each-others several times.

Conclusion

In general, Azerbaijan considered Russia a threat and a country trying to occupy former in the historical process, while Russia has assessed Azerbaijan in the dilemma of opportunities and threats. In terms of Russia, Azerbaijan is a bridge for access to south and opportunity with other features, but also a threat due to its cooperation with others powers After Azerbaijan gained independence, the policies of Elchibey administration (anti-Russian and pro-Western) without taking into account Russia, have not been successful. However, during the administration of Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijan's relations with Russia continued on the basis of balance of power. Russia's intensive endeavours to maximize its interests in Azerbaijan have not been very successful given Azerbaijan's security and energy policies.

Today, the criticisms on Azerbaijan's shifting close to Russia is unfair. Among the reasons of that, there are Azerbaijan's disappointments for its expectations from the West, the changes in Russia's global and regional powers and activities. While Azerbaijan demonstrated harsh reaction towards the alleged free of charge transfer of weapons from Russia, worth to billions of dollar, to Armenia in 1997 and 2000; the transfer of military commodities/harwares in Georgia (under the Western pressure) to Armenia and to Armenia-occupied regions of Azerbaijan and pursued a pro-Western policies^[37], the disappointments from the West caused the similar opposite reactions.

Due to current conditions, the future of Russia-Azerbaijan relations will be significantly determine according to the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the rate of Azerbaijan's stance towards Russia's request. In this context, lack of provision of military assistance by Russia to Armenia during the "four-day-war" in early April 2016 in the Armenian-Azerbaijani line of contact, was used as a means of improving the public image of Russia in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan, as a newly independent country, contained problems where undoubtedly the outside forces could intervene. Under these conditions, the country is not able to set its foreign policy line alone. While Azerbaijan is trying to maintain a balanced foreign policy line, it is seeking to take advantage of the power balance between countries with interests in the region. In this context, there may be mutual adjustment of external demands for Azerbaijan. Whereas, Russia may extend its pressures over Azerbaijan again to include the country in its own controlled establishments in the upcoming periods. Russia's possible success to gain a dividends in Azerbaijan by using its resources will be of loss of not Azerbaijan only, but as well as of other countries of the region and other states with interests in the region. At this stage, the relations of Azerbaijan with other major powers will be important.

^[1]Süleyman Əliyərli, *Azərbaycan Tarixi*, Bakü, Azərbaycan Yayınevi, 1996, s. 212.

^[2] Əliyərli, *Azərbaycan Tarixi*, s. 331.

^[3]Əliyərli, *Azərbaycan Tarixi*, s. 619.

^[4]Cemil Hasanlı, *Azərbaycan Tarihi 1918-1920*, Ankara, Azərbaycan Kültür Derneği, 1998, s. 410.

[5]Nazim Caferov, Araz Aslanlı, “Kuzey Kafkasya: Azerbaycan İçin Riskler ve Fırsatlar”, Karadeniz Araştırmaları, Yaz 2016, Sayı 50, s. 2-4.

[6]Nazim Cafersoy, Eyalet-Merkez Düzeyinden Eşit Statüye; Azerbaycan-Rusya ilişkileri (1991-2000), ASAM, Ankara 2000, s. 9.

[7]Musa Qasımlı, Azərbaýcan Respublikasının Xarici Siyasəti (1991-2003), II Hissə, Bakı, Mütərcim, 2015, s. 505

[8]Kıyaslamak gerekirse, Azerbaycan'ın bağımsızlığını Türkiye 9 Kasım 1991'de, ABD ve İran ise 25 Aralık 1991'de tanımışlardı.

[9]Cafersoy, Eyalet-Merkez..., s. 23.

[10]“Müstəqil Dövlətlər Birliyi (MDB)”, <http://www.mfa.gov.az/content/947>

[11]Buraxılışa məsul: Ramiz Mehdiyev, Hidayət Orucov, Heydər Əliyev: Müstəqilliyimiz əbədidir (Birinci kitab iyun, 1993 - may, 1994), Bakı, Azərənəşr, 1997, s. 29-30.

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