

Role of Leadership in Shaping the Geopolitics of the Region Session

International Conference “Shaping the Geopolitics of the Greater Eurasia: from Past to Present to Future”, dedicated to the legacy of great statesman and former President Heydar Aliyev’s 100 Years anniversary

May 2-4, 2023, Baku and Shusha, Azerbaijan

Good morning, dear Ladies and Gentlemen! Gun aidyn, hurmatli hanimlar va janablar!

I gladly join in congratulations on the birthday of our gracious host, outstanding diplomat, scholar and educator Dr Hafiz Mir Jalal oglu Pashayev. I had the pleasure of serving along with Ambassadors Sadiq Safayev and Tedo Japaridze with Dr Hafiz Pashayev in Washington, DC partially in the period described in his “Racing Up Hill” memoirs. Indeed, these were very challenging times, when foundation for constructive partnership of our countries with the United States was being built.

I would like to extend profound gratitude to Rector Hafiz Pashayev and his colleagues at the famous ADA for bestowing honor to be among the participants of the conference dedicated to the unique legacy of great statesman and former President of independent Azerbaijan Heydar Alirzaoglu Aliyev.

Quite recently, on April 10, 2023 President Ilham Heydaroglu Aliyev paid an official visit to Astana and during a ceremony of opening a street named after Heydar Aliyev in the central part of the Kazakh capital President Kassym Jomart Kemeluly Tokayev stressed our duty to pay tribute to personalities of global standing such as Heydar Aliyev.

The speakers of this session, besides our American friends, represent Uzbekistan, Georgia and Kazakhstan, the republics that once upon a time were part of the Soviet Union, and each of us, I am sure, could speak for hours detailing their respective countries’ experience in living through early years of independence.

More than 30 years elapsed and we are witnessing contrasting picture, where stories of success and progress of some of former Soviet republics are intermingled with stories of failures and regress in case of some other republics. It

would be an oversimplification to claim that starting conditions for all of us were the same. Definitely similar, but not the same. A set of internal and external challenges was different, though, there was one common denominator: many in the outside world were quite skeptical about our ability to survive as independent states. And, admittedly, grounds for such skepticism seemed convincing.

Some republics were faced with severe challenges to their territorial integrity. Some republics had to deal with delicate task of maintaining stability in interethnic relations in the context of quite understandable national awakening among representatives of titular nation. Practically all newly independent republics had to start economic reforms from zero in terms of financial resources, aggravated by disruption of traditional supply chains and difficulties in arranging stable, long term sources of income.

Land-locked countries of Central Asia had to resolve problems stemming from their unfavorable geographic location. Dependence on good will of neighbors in such matters always is a tricky issue: on their part temptation to attach politically sensitive strings could be too strong to resist. In a world guided by pragmatic calculations one could not count on altruism in interstate relations. Hence it was urgently necessary to motivate influential foreign partners to develop a vested interest in the future of new states. Each had to devise her own solutions. Some succeeded, some failed. Analyzing reasons for ups and downs brings us to the role of personality in shaping destiny of a nation.

Azerbaijan was fortunate to have Heydar Aliyev at the realm of power at the most crucial period of its transition to true independence. His parents when choosing a name for their son must have been prescient about his future role in life because the meaning of the name Heydar is “one who is in the avant-garde, one who leads”. The outside world views contemporary Azerbaijan as a successful, economically vibrant, socially oriented, modern, democratic, pluralistic, secular and multicultural country, capable of effectively protecting its national interests while maintaining constructive, mutually beneficial relations with foreign partners in all azimuths: West and East, North and South. Undoubtedly all these milestones are grounded in the great legacy of Heydar Aliyev’s leadership from 1993 to 2003. Up to present day the most impressive achievements are elevation of Azerbaijan’s status in the world, victorious restoration of territorial integrity, resolution of pressing socio-economic issues and ensuring the ability of every citizen to benefit from the nationally generated wealth. It is impossible to overestimate the exceptional role of Heydar Aliyev’s leadership in resolutely navigating Azerbaijan

from chaotic early years of independence when a plethora of outside players tried to interfere into internal affairs of the young country, seeding unrest and instigating coup d'état attempts, all way to a politically and economically stable presidential republic enjoying international legitimacy and attracting large-scale investments from leading multinationals.

Heydar Aliyev proved himself a pragmatic politician and astute diplomat, whose outstanding qualification as a statesman made him recognizable and popular throughout the entire Soviet Union when it was next to impossible for a non-Russian (or a non-Ukrainian for that matter) to make it up all way to Moscow and become a full member of the Politbureau and First Deputy Prime Minister. In contrast to overwhelmingly lacklustre and unassuming members of the Soviet leadership Heydar Aliyev definitely stood out by his intellectual prowess, reputation of integrity, charisma and energetic physics. He simply was the most handsome gentleman among them!

I remember well how proud we in Central Asian republics were that such an impressive representative of the Turkic-speaking brotherly Azerbaijan made it to the top echelon in Moscow. Heydar Aliyev from the years when he occupied prominent positions in the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic emphasized special bonds of friendship with Kazakhstan and the Kazakh people. He made that point by personally heading Azerbaijani delegations for celebrations of the 50-th and the 60-th anniversaries of the Kazakh SSR. His contribution to promoting multifaceted relations between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan since they have gained independence is remarkable: during regular exchange of official visits the heads of two states reached many important agreements, building up solid foundation for today's strategic partnership and encompassing alliance.

The Kazakh and Azerbaijani diplomats were closely coordinating their approaches to determining a highly contentious issue of legal status of the Caspian Sea when five littoral states were negotiating a corresponding document.

Acting in collaboration with Nursultan Nazarbayev Heydar Aliyev succeeded in arranging international, especially Western, appreciation of geostrategic importance of the Caspian region not only as a reliable supplier of energy

resources, but also as a linchpin of the Greater Eurasia, a crucial bridge connecting Europe with the Caucasus, Central Asia and South West Asia, a key space where West-to- East corridor for running goods between leading economic powers might be maintained as a viable alternative to traditional routes. Previously voiced sceptic dismissals as “back-water potentates’ pipedreams” of strategic vision of the then leaders of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan were proven wrong in light of recent radical changes of geopolitical realities. Nowadays there is a general recognition of global significance of the Middle corridor for multimodal delivery of cargo between Europe and China across Kazakhstan-Caspian Sea-Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkiye-Black Sea-and Mediterranean.

Besides obvious commercial implications the Middle corridor highlights the necessity of effective interconnectivity between Central Asian and South Caucasus republics with relevant consequences for their joint diplomatic posturing and speedy resolution of existing disagreements among some of them. Our joint contribution to shaping the future of Eurasia would be turning the Caspian region and adjacent neighborhood into a space of peaceful coexistence of equal partners maintaining constructive relations in strict accordance with basic tenets of the UN Charter.

On the topic of shaping the future of Eurasia, I would like to emphasize the potential of Kazakhstan joining efforts with Azerbaijan especially in light of the fact that leaders of the two countries – Kassym Jomart Tokayev and Ilham Aliyev belong to the same generation of modern politicians, have practically similar backgrounds and are guided by their unwavering commitment to work together in order to promote and deepen strategic cooperation between the two republics in protecting independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of each other. That is the gist of the Joint Declaration on the outcome of the Kazakh-Azerbaijan summit in April, 2023. The Presidents specifically pledged mutual support within the framework of the UN, the Islamic Cooperation Organization, the Organization of Turkic States, the OSCE and the CIS as well as other international and regional structures the two countries belong to. I would point out to the growing significance of Islamic and Turkic dimensions of the Kazakh-Azerbaijani cooperation bilaterally and in their interaction with other brotherly countries. In fact, it is a testament of Heydar Aliyev, who since mid-nineties was underlining that Turkic and Islamic people based on communality of historic and cultural roots and traditions, linguistic and religious proximity would be able by expanding their

spiritual ties find effective solutions to most difficult problems. He foresaw that geopolitical location of our countries, wealth of their natural resources, intellectual potential and hardworking populace along with commitment to independence and sovereignty, democratic and market reforms are bound to transfer our region into one of the most developed and prosperous in the entire world.

At the 7-th summit of the Turkic states in Istanbul on April 26, 2001 Heydar Aliyev pointed out that in early 20-th century outstanding personalities of the Turkic peoples calling for their political, economic and cultural consolidation proposed a slogan “Unity of words, ideas and actions” and expressed his belief that under changed historic circumstances this slogan would be guiding contemporary leaders. Current geopolitical turbulence in Eurasia dictates necessity to implement in action the ideas of unity. This would be the best way to honor the legacy of great statesman and visionary Heydar Aliyev.

Thank you for your kind attention.