

Azerbaijan and Lobbying: Ways to Realize the Potential of the Diaspora

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Abstract: *Although Azerbaijan possesses ancient traditions of statehood, lobbying is considered to be a new sphere for the country. Analyzing Azerbaijan's current activities in this area, we can see that, despite certain achievements, the overall level of lobbying activity still falls short of expectations. Historically, the strong emotional attachment of Azerbaijanis to their homeland has made emigration a psychologically challenging process. Today, although over 10 million of the approximately 50 million Azerbaijanis around the world live abroad, a fully developed and effective lobbying mechanism has yet to be established. The political, economic, and socio-cultural activities of Azerbaijanis across the five continents vary according to the internal conditions and moral values of the countries in which they reside. Azerbaijan's liberation of its occupied territories—particularly its victory in the 44-day Patriotic War—has significantly influenced the country's international standing and has also given new impetus to diaspora and lobbying activities. This success has created favorable conditions for stronger organization among Azerbaijani communities in Europe and the United States, leading to the institutional strengthening of the diaspora and the initiation of substantial lobbying efforts. At the current stage, lobbying has become one of the key priorities in Azerbaijan's foreign policy and in the protection of national interests. The research methodology used in this article is primarily based on historical-analytical and comparative analysis approaches. Key sources include official documents of the Republic of Azerbaijan, reports by diaspora organizations, academic publications, and data from international institutions.*

Keywords: *Azerbaijan, lobbying, diaspora, foreign policy, Patriotic War.*

Introduction

The diaspora is one of the most essential instruments for promoting, safeguarding, and expanding a nation's interests and partnerships abroad. For any country to achieve success in its foreign policy, it is crucial that diaspora activities be organized at a high level. In this context, the development of the diaspora should be a priority for every state.

Today, for Azerbaijan, diaspora activity stands among the most critical spheres of national engagement. In particular, following the Second Karabakh War, the new geopolitical realities created by Azerbaijan in the region necessitated fundamental changes in the activities of diaspora organizations. Currently, certain international forces opposing Azerbaijan are openly engaging in biased and hostile campaigns. Several Western countries have launched anti-Azer-

baijan propaganda in an attempt to overshadow the country's historic victory. These efforts are reflected in biased statements, adopted resolutions, and public speeches made against Azerbaijan.

Countering such actions is the primary responsibility of Azerbaijani diaspora organizations and the State Committee on Work with Diaspora, which oversees this area. The pro-Armenian positions of countries such as France, and Germany, and institutions like the Council of Europe demonstrate the need for Azerbaijan to pay greater attention to this issue.

Overall, diaspora activity is considered essential for enhancing a country's visibility abroad, strengthening its international position, increasing partnerships, and conveying national interests and perspectives to the global community. Today, in Europe and other developed regions of the world, there are many well-established and experienced lobbying organizations that play a direct role in influencing the resolution of various important issues. Theoreticians widely agree that lobbying is a public expression of democratic political systems. For this reason, lobbying exists in some form in virtually every society and state—even in totalitarian regimes. However, the extent to which lobbying is developed depends on the nature of the country's political system, its modernity, political culture, and historical traditions.

Historical Stages of the Formation of the Azerbaijani Diaspora

Today, the term “Azerbaijani diaspora” refers to Azerbaijanis settled in foreign countries. The concept of “Azerbaijanis living abroad” is defined in the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On State Policy Regarding Azerbaijanis Living Abroad”¹ “The migration of Azerbaijanis abroad began to gain significant momentum in the early 20th century. In the Caucasus, the anti-Muslim and anti-Turkic policies of Tsarist Russia were deliberately aimed at weakening the dominant position of the Azerbaijani population in the region. The genocides and ethnic cleansing committed by Armenians in 1905-1906 and 1918 were a direct result of this insidious strategy.

Although the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918 temporarily reduced the volume of emigration, the fall of the republic gave rise to a completely new situation. The founders and supporters of the Democratic Republic faced severe persecution by the Bolsheviks, forcing many to leave the country. It is no coincidence that this period marked one of the most significant waves of Azerbaijani emigration. The establishment of the “Azerbaijani Cultural Association” in Ankara, Turkey, on February 1, 1949, marked the first organized step in the formation of the Azerbaijani diaspora worldwide. In 1956, Saleh bey Sheykhzamanli, son of Naghi bey Sheykhzamanli—who had served as the Minister of National

Security during the Democratic Republic—founded the “Azerbaijan Society of America” in the United States. Today, this society is headed by his granddaughter, Tomris Azari². These developments indicate that the organizational phase of the Azerbaijani diaspora began in the mid-20th century. Before this period, there were no significant instances of community or organizational structures uniting Azerbaijanis abroad.

The post–World War II era marked a new stage in the history of the Azerbaijani diaspora. During and after the war, the number of Azerbaijanis living abroad significantly increased. These included prisoners of war and individuals who settled in European countries after the war for various reasons. The harsh punitive mechanisms and bloody repressions of the Soviet regime discouraged many from returning, contributing to the growth of the Azerbaijani population abroad. It should also be noted that in recent decades, emigration from the territory of Iran—historically home to about 30 million Azerbaijanis—has far exceeded emigration from the Republic of Azerbaijan itself. A few years after World War II, the strict border control regime enforced by the Soviet government effectively halted emigration from the USSR, negatively impacting the further development of Azerbaijani migration abroad.

Today, out of an estimated global Azerbaijani population of 50 million, more than 10 million live in the diaspora. Azerbaijanis residing across five continents engage in political, eco-

nomic, and socio-cultural activities that vary according to the conditions and cultural values of their host countries. Europe is the second largest region in terms of both geographical dispersion and population size of the Azerbaijani diaspora. According to recent statistics, there are 3.5 million Azerbaijanis in Turkey and Russia; hundreds of thousands in Germany and the United Kingdom; and tens of thousands in countries such as Norway, Denmark, Sweden, France, Hungary, and Italy. In other Western countries, the Azerbaijani population typically ranges from 2 000 to 10 000 per country³. Another significant portion of the diaspora is located in Asia, particularly in the countries of Central Asia, where hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis reside.

National leader Heydar Aliyev always placed great importance on strengthening the scientific and intellectual potential of the Azerbaijani people. Thanks to this focus, during his leadership, hundreds of Azerbaijani citizens had the opportunity to study at the most prestigious higher education institutions across the Soviet Union. As a result, more than 15 000 Azerbaijani youth received higher education in over 170 universities across more than 50 major Soviet cities, in more than 250 critical disciplines—including science, economics, culture, industry, and other vital sectors⁴. A number of these graduates remained in the cities where they had studied and contributed to the formation of Azerbaijani diaspora communities in those areas.

Heydar Aliyev's Role in the Organization of the World Azerbaijani Diaspora

Today, the concept of "Azerbaijanism" has become a core ideological foundation not only for Azerbaijanis living within the country but also for those scattered across the world. The national leader, Heydar Aliyev, consistently called upon Azerbaijanis living abroad to unite around this idea. Azerbaijanism encompasses the preservation of one's national identity and cultural-spiritual values while also benefiting from their integration and synthesis with universal human values⁵. The great leader always paid special attention to the unity and organization of Azerbaijanis living abroad. He demonstrated a deep sensitivity to the concerns and challenges faced by diaspora communities and provided consistent guidance to diaspora organizations. Heydar Aliyev encouraged fellow Azerbaijanis to be active participants in Azerbaijan's socio-political, economic, and cultural life. He also emphasized the importance of forming a robust Azerbaijani diaspora in foreign countries and highlighted the strategic importance and prospects of lobbying activities. With his wisdom and foresight, Heydar Aliyev recognized that, in the modern era, the strength of a nation is not measured solely by its economic resources, but also by the power of its diaspora and lobbying network abroad. He understood that no significant success in foreign pol-

icy, nor international advancement of national causes, could be achieved without paying serious attention to this domain.

Heydar Aliyev included December 31 – the Day of Solidarity of World Azerbaijanis – among the national holidays of Azerbaijan⁶. This day, which holds special significance for Azerbaijani statehood, was initiated by the national leader himself. It dates back to December 16, 1991, and is considered the first step toward the global organization of Azerbaijanis. In his historic speech during that event, Heydar Aliyev stressed the importance of ensuring national unity and solidarity among world Azerbaijanis, strengthening ties between the Azerbaijani state and the diaspora, uniting efforts to overcome challenges, and preserving and developing the Azerbaijani language and national-spiritual values. Key issues discussed included enhancing Azerbaijan's international standing, promoting its language, history, and culture abroad, exposing Armenia's aggressive policies, and organizing a consistent and systematic counter-campaign against the infamous Armenian lobby⁷. Following this congress, the Azerbaijani diaspora movement entered a completely new phase. To implement a systematic state policy in this area, Heydar Aliyev signed a decree in 2002 on the establishment of the State Committee for Work with Azerbaijanis Living Abroad. The creation of this committee made it possible to coordinate the activities of Azerbaijani communities, organizations, and

associations abroad from a single center and ensured they received support and care from the state. The establishment of the committee marked the beginning of a new phase in the consolidation of the global Azerbaijani community and in the transformation from diaspora to lobbying. From that point forward, Azerbaijanis around the world gained the opportunity to come to their homeland at any time and raise their concerns directly. Within a short period, the committee successfully carried out significant work toward uniting Azerbaijani compatriots living abroad around the idea of Azerbaijanism and the Azerbaijani state. In 2002, the Law on State Support for Azerbaijanis Living Abroad was adopted by the National Assembly (Milli Majlis), laying out the legal foundations for supporting Azerbaijanis abroad. According to this law, the rights of Azerbaijanis living and operating abroad are protected at the state level. Additionally, the law provides tax and customs exemptions to encourage wealthy Azerbaijanis to invest in the national economy. This law is considered a key legal document that defines the principles and foundation of Azerbaijan's diaspora and lobbying policy. Today, the Azerbaijani diaspora is represented by over 300 organizations, associations, and communities in various countries around the world. Recognizing the growing need for further coordination, President Ilham Aliyev signed a decree on November 19, 2008, establishing the State Committee on Work with Diaspora based

on the earlier committee⁸. This restructuring was driven by the necessity to better manage the expanding scope and scale of Azerbaijan's diaspora initiatives.

Achievements of the Azerbaijani Diaspora

Following the establishment of the State Committee on Work with Azerbaijanis Living Abroad, the organization of Azerbaijani communities worldwide has expanded significantly. While the number of Azerbaijani diaspora organizations abroad stood at 218 prior to 2002, this number has now exceeded 420. Let us highlight some of the significant accomplishments achieved through the joint efforts of our diaspora and diplomatic corps⁹:

- On March 31, 2009, the Governor of the U.S. State of Nevada proclaimed March 31 as the "Day of Commemoration of the Azerbaijani Genocide",
- On February 25, 2010, the Massachusetts House of Representatives adopted a resolution recognizing the Khojaly massacre, on the occasion of its 18th anniversary.
- On February 26, 2011, the Texas House of Representatives also acknowledged the mass atrocities committed by Armenia in Khojaly.
- Similar resolutions recognizing the Khojaly Genocide have also been adopted in the U.S. states of New Jersey, Texas, and Georgia.

- The Russian-Azerbaijani Youth Organization (RAMT), established in 2009 under the leadership of Leyla Aliyeva, Vice President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, has conducted important awareness campaigns as part of the “Justice for Khojaly” initiative.
- A resolution regarding the Khojaly genocide was adopted by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).
- On March 1, 2011, Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley declared March 2011 as “Azerbaijani Heritage Month”.

As a result of targeted efforts, more than 460 Azerbaijani communities and organizations have been established in Europe, North and South America, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and countries such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Norway, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Estonia, Poland, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Turkey, and the United States. The creation of these new communities and associations is a clear indication of the progress made in modern Azerbaijani diaspora building. Organizations such as the European Azerbaijani Society, the Azerbaijan-American Alliance, the U.S.-based Azerbaijan American Network, the Council of Azerbaijani-Americans, and the World Azerbaijani Congress play an active role in spreading the truth about Azerbaijan to the international community. Today, the global Azerbaijani population is estimated at

nearly 50 million, with some sources suggesting the number may reach 60 million. Azerbaijani diaspora representation includes¹⁰:

- 65 organizations in the Russian Federation
- 20 in Turkey
- 37 in Germany
- 20 in the United States
- 17 in Ukraine
- 11 in Sweden
- 7 in the United Kingdom
- 7 in France
- 6 in Canada

Additionally, Azerbaijani national cultural centers and communities are active in Australia, Austria, Argentina, Belarus, Belgium, Denmark, Dagestan, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, the Netherlands, Spain, and many other countries. Our diaspora also supports the publication of around 30 newspapers and nearly 35 magazines in various foreign countries.

The Activities of Azerbaijani Lobbying

Compared to the Azerbaijani diaspora, Azerbaijani lobbying is almost non-existent. The concept of lobbying is new for the independent Republic of Azerbaijan. By “new,” we mean lobbying carried out on the international stage. Lobbying within the country, on the other hand, has developed spontaneously within traditional customs and continues to this day. The absence of legislation in this area leads lobbying to often turn into simple corruption. Consequently, this creates grounds for mass media (both

within Azerbaijan and abroad), as well as various research centers, to “overshadow” the political, economic, and social programs that the young Azerbaijani Republic has successfully implemented. Indeed, similar activities that show signs of corruption in many countries are labeled “lobbying,” but in Azerbaijan, these are often perceived merely as “corruption.” In the United States, lobbying activities are officially linked only to the protection of certain foreign political interests. This was formalized in 1938 through the **Foreign Agents Registration Act**. According to this law, any person engaged in lobbying activities on behalf of foreign political interests must register and submit reports on their activities. The provisions of the law apply to anyone conducting lobbying for the benefit of a foreign government, political party, or independent individual^{11,12}.

In 1946, a specific law regulating lobbying was enacted, introducing the concept of a **professional lobbyist** and requiring all professional lobbyists to register¹³. Looking at Azerbaijan’s lobbying activities, one can mostly observe direct lobbying efforts aimed at influencing decision-making processes. In direct lobbying, the lobbyist personally engages in the process to exert influence. In contrast, indirect lobbying involves influencing the media and press, establishing public relations, and shaping public opinion to create a new image to achieve the desired goal. Creating an independent and strong image of Azerbaijan requires attention to sev-

eral effective social-psychological theories:

- **Empathy Theory by Neuropsychologist Chris Frith:** According to Chris Frith’s Empathy Theory, humans can be more effectively influenced through mirror neurons. This theory states that when people see someone happy or suffering, they can empathize—putting themselves in the other’s place and better understanding their feelings. This ability is part of the mirror neuron system. The emotions most easily and quickly transmitted via mirror neurons are pain and suffering. Therefore, an artist who skillfully conveys emotions through a painting, a composer through music, or a director through a film can deliver a message that emotionally impacts the audience via mirror neurons. However, studies show that wealthy people, psychopaths, autistic individuals, narcissists, and cold-blooded or cruel people have very weak or almost non-existent empathy. Although it is challenging to influence a political world full of cruel, cold, and narcissistic people through empathy, films depicting the Khojaly massacre, the March 31 Genocide, and Armenian terrorism in Ganja and Barda can effectively communicate the truths of our suffering to large audiences. Well-funded productions with foreign directors, cinematographers, and actors, featuring

multiple storylines indirectly portraying Armenian brutality, can reach a wide audience with the tragedies Azerbaijan has faced.

- **Group Effects Theory by Social Psychologist Solomon Asch:** Solomon Asch's theory discusses the influence of groups or crowds on individuals' opinions. This theory was proven through several experiments. In one such experiment involving six people, five were pre-instructed actors, while only one was a real participant. They were shown three strips of different lengths and asked which was the longest. The five actors deliberately chose the wrong strip first, and despite seeing the correct answer, the real participant either doubted their own correct choice or outright conformed to the group's wrong answer. Applying this theory, Azerbaijani voices abroad can be amplified by inviting foreign representatives to events organized mostly by Azerbaijani intellectual diaspora members and influencing them through group effects techniques.
- **Authority Influence Theory by Stanley Milgram:** In Milgram's famous experiment, participants assigned the role of "teacher" were instructed to deliver electric shocks to a "learner" whenever a wrong answer was given. As the wrong answers increased, the shock intensity had to be raised. Due to the high authority of the

experiment leader, participants obeyed and administered even potentially fatal shocks without protest. This experiment demonstrated that when an authoritative figure dictates conditions, people can abandon humanitarian and liberal values completely. Throughout history, decisions and resolutions against Azerbaijan influenced by the Armenian lobby confirm this theory. Azerbaijan can similarly utilize this theory by funding its lobbying activities and leveraging the influence of a friendly and powerful Jewish lobby to convert it into an authoritative force. For example, efforts could begin by gaining the support of influential and powerful U.S. Congress members.

Widespread international promotion of Azerbaijan's achievements is also one of the main responsibilities of diaspora and lobby organizations, as well as embassies. Such promotion can take on political content and play a significant role in increasing the interest of international financial institutions and reputable companies in Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

Today, the Azerbaijani diaspora comprises over 300 active organizations spread across various countries, coordinated through 15 major Coordination Councils that bring together Azerbaijanis worldwide. This extensive network marks a significant milestone, reflecting the diaspora's suc-

cessful transition from mere organizational development to engaging in impactful lobbying activities on the global stage. The political foundation laid by the Great Leader Heydar Aliyev continues to be upheld and advanced by his worthy successor, the President of Azerbaijan, Mr. Ilham Aliyev. Under their visionary leadership, the Azerbaijani people have demonstrated remarkable unity and strength, most notably during the 44-day Patriotic War, which resulted in the restoration of our historical lands. Throughout this conflict, the nation rallied around the concept of the “iron fist,” symbolizing unwavering solidarity and resilience, which was recognized and respected internationally.

Despite facing complex historical challenges and numerous legal, political, social, and economic difficulties in their countries of residence, the Azerbaijani diaspora remains a powerful force with immense internal cohesion and potential for growth. This strength enables the diaspora not only

to preserve its national identity and cultural values but also to play an increasingly influential role in international affairs. Given these factors, the Azerbaijani diaspora is poised to secure a prominent and respected position within the global system of international relations and economic cooperation. Its ongoing development is crucial not only for promoting Azerbaijan’s interests abroad but also for fostering a deeper understanding of the country’s historical legacy and contemporary achievements among the international community.

In summary, the progress made by the Azerbaijani diaspora and its strategic shift towards lobbying activities represent a vital component of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy and national strategy. With sustained support from the state and active engagement of diaspora members worldwide, this vibrant community will continue to contribute significantly to the country’s international influence and success.

Notes

- ¹ Z.B. Əliyev, *Beynəlxalq münasibətlərdə dünya diasporların rolu*, Nurlan, Bakı, 2001, p.150.
- ² A. S. Tahir, “SECTION 907 AMENDMENT TO THE FREEDOM SUPPORT ACT” AS AN UNJUSTIFIED RESULT OF LOBBYING, *The VII International Science Conference «Science, actual trends and perspectives of development»*, November 01–03, Budapest, Hungary, p. 168.
- ³ T.M. Tağıyeva, H.K. Hüseynova, *Beynəlxalq münasibətlərdə lobbizm*.

Dərslik, Bakı Dövlət Univeriteti, Bakı, 2022, p.326.

- ⁴ Azərbaycan lobbisinin inkişafı dahi Heydər Əliyevin vəsiyyətidir, <https://meqam-m.webnode.page/meqaleler/az/%c9%99baycan%20lobbisini n%20inki%c5%9fat%c4%b1%20dahi %20heyd%c9%99r%20%c9%99liye vi n%20v%c9%99siyy%c9%99tidir-%20%20%20%20/>, (accessed 25 june 2025).
- ⁵ H.Ə Əliyev, *Müstəqilliyimiz əbədidir: çıxışlar, nitqlər, bəyanatlar, məktublar, müsahibələr. Birinci Kitab: iyun, 1993-may, 1994*, Bakı, Azər nəşr, 1997, p. 612.

- ⁶ Heydər Əliyev diaspor quruculuğu. <https://az.trend.az/azerbaijan/society/1753599.html>, (accessed 25.06.2025).
- ⁷ S.T. Aleskerova, *Armenian lobby in America against the interests of Azerbaijan*, Thomson Reuters, New York, USA, 2020, pp. 207-211.
- ⁸ Hədəflərə çatmaq üçün lobbicilik ən yaxşı vasitədir: [Elektron resurs] 20.02.20 URL: <http://azadaz.com/xeber/3330/hedeflere-catmaq-uecuen-lobbicilik-en-yaxsi-vasitedir>, (accessed 12.05.2025).
- ⁹ Azərbaycan Respublikasının Diasporla İş üzrə Dövlət Komitəsi, <https://diaspor.gov.az>, (accessed 12.05.2025).
- ¹⁰ T.M Tağıyeva, H.K. Hüseynova, *op. cit.*
- ¹¹ Primary Documents in American History. The Articles of Confederation. The Articles of Confederation: <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=001/llsl0-01.db&recNum=127>, (accessed may 12, 2025).
- ¹² T. Arı, *Amerika'da siyasal yapı lobiler ve dış politika Türk, Yunan, Ermeni, İsrail ve lobilerinin ABD'nin dış politikasına etkileri*, Dora Yayınları, İstanbul, 2015, p. 179.
- ¹³ Political parties of the USA, <https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/politics/story/2011-12-22/voters-political-parties/52171688/1> (accessed 12.05.2025).

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