



AZERBAIJAN'S RISE TO GLOBAL PROMINENCE UNDER ILHAM ALIYEV

23th January, 2025

CRCSF PUBLICATIONS



Azerbaijan, a country in the heart of the South-Caucasus region bordering the Caspian Sea, Russia, Georgia, Armenia, and Iran, is known as the “European Marvel of the East” and as a place where “East meets West.” This unique position has served as a strategic bridge for millennia, creating a rich mosaic of cultural, political, and economic influences. This constant flow has made Azerbaijan a fascinating destination. Beyond arid plains, the country boasts lush mountains and a dramatic coastline, while Baku presents a spectacle of futuristic architecture alongside ancient fortifications. Azerbaijan offers a journey that is both educational and deeply rewarding, rising like a phoenix to transform its post-Soviet legacy into a vibrant economy & a key player on the global stage under the visionary leadership of President Ilham Aliyev since 2003.

Building on this historical & geographical advantage, under President Aliyev's leadership, Azerbaijan has entered a remarkable period of progress & prosperity. Between 2003 & 2024, the country's GDP increased from approximately \$5 billion to nearly \$80 billion in 2022, reflecting a clear & strategic vision for the country's future.



Aliyev's policies have focused on diversifying the economy, reducing dependency on oil and gas, and investing in modern infrastructure, technology, and human capital. Social development has also been impressive, with poverty rates falling from 49% to less than 5%, demonstrating a strong commitment to improving citizens' lives. As Aliyev emphasizes, Azerbaijan is now connecting its rich historical heritage with a modern period of innovation, sustainability, and smart city development, offering valuable lessons for international cooperation. This period marks a national rise, positioning Azerbaijan as a confident and influential global actor.

Furthermore, Azerbaijan's strategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia has enabled it to pursue a multifaceted foreign policy, balancing relations with numerous nations and strengthening its global standing. Under President Aliyev, Azerbaijan has actively participated in key international organizations, including the UN, SCO, OSCE, Non-Aligned Movement, and OIC, thereby expanding its diplomatic influence. A major component of this foreign policy has been energy diplomacy. Through the Southern Gas Corridor, which includes the TANAP and TAP pipelines, Azerbaijan has emerged as a pillar of European energy security. This initiative allows Europe to diversify its energy sources and reduce reliance on traditional suppliers. Strong export deals and partnerships with major oil and gas players underscore Azerbaijan's strategic confidence in its energy sector.

In addition to its diplomatic efforts, in recent years, Azerbaijan has also taken significant steps to promote peace and stability in the South Caucasus. For instance, the lifting of cargo restrictions to Armenia reflects a growing commitment to regional cooperation. The country has focused on measures to prevent repeated conflicts and envisions peace as a pathway to regional integration. President Aliyev's leadership has been crucial in advancing these efforts, demonstrating Azerbaijan's dedication to regional stability and collaboration.

Moreover, complementing its foreign & diplomatic achievements, Azerbaijan's commitment to innovation & technology has made it a rising hub for startups and entrepreneurs. The "Digital Azerbaijan" initiative, launched in 2020, has fostered a strong tech ecosystem, attracting investment & talent worldwide. With over 200 companies, 20 IT parks & innovation institutes, including Baku Techno-Park & the Azerbaijan National Incubation Center, the country is emerging as a center for digital creativity.



According to the World Bank, Azerbaijan's ICT sector has grown at a 15% annual rate over the last five years, surpassing regional averages. As President Aliyev stated, "Azerbaijan is open for business and innovation, and we are committed to creating a favorable environment for tech companies to thrive."

At the same time, Azerbaijan's unique blend of Eastern and Western influences has created a melting pot of cultures, ideas, and innovations. The country's rich historical heritage, combined with a modern outlook, makes it appealing to tourists, investors, and entrepreneurs alike. Baku, the capital city, has become a symbol of this transformation, showcasing stunning architecture, a vibrant cultural scene, and world-class infrastructure. Its iconic skyline reflects Azerbaijan's rise to global prominence. Moreover, the nation's secular nature is notable: mosques stand near Russian Orthodox churches, and people of different faiths have coexisted peacefully for centuries.

Similarly, the country's architectural and urban heritage reinforces its unique identity. Azerbaijan's rich heritage is evident in landmarks like the Walled City of Baku (Icherisheher), a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the Flame Towers, which symbolize modernization. The Heydar Aliyev Center, awarded Design of the Year by the London Design Museum in 2014, exemplifies Azerbaijan's commitment to innovation and design. Medieval cities such as Baku, Shamakhi, and Ganja showcase exceptional urban planning, with thoughtfully organized caravanserais, mosques, marketplaces, and advanced water systems, highlighting a human-centered approach ahead of its time. The mountain village of Lahij demonstrates enduring engineering ingenuity with its ancient water and sewerage systems over a thousand years old.

In line with these achievements, Azerbaijan has prioritized human development by investing heavily in education, healthcare, and social welfare. The country boasts a 99.8% literacy rate, modernized schools and universities, and improved access to healthcare, with spending increasing by 30% between 2010 and 2020. As President Aliyev stated, "Our goal is to create a society where every citizen has access to quality education, healthcare, and social services" [3]. The country's rising Human Development Index (HDI) score, from 0.673 in 2000 to 0.745 in 2021, reflects this commitment.



Ultimately, the story of the Land of Fire is one of transformation and perseverance. Under President Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan has emerged as a respected geopolitical actor with a solid reputation in energy and trade diplomacy. Its strategic infrastructure and foreign connections have strengthened economic resilience. Looking ahead, Azerbaijan is poised to play an even larger role in Eurasian cooperation and global discourse, leveraging its strategic location, rich cultural legacy, and innovative spirit. As noted by foreign analysts, Azerbaijan’s progress demonstrates its dedication to sustainable development, regional collaboration, and global prominence.