

# BAKU DIALOGUES

POLICY PERSPECTIVES ON THE SILK ROAD REGION

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# Training Diplomats in Azerbaijan

## Past Successes and Future Plans

*Fariz Ismailzade*

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of Azerbaijan as one of 15 newly independent republics in 1991, the development of a sovereign and professional diplomatic service became of utmost importance and urgency. Doing so, it was understood, was a necessary attribute and instrument for pursuing a country's foreign policy agenda, which at minimum should aim to strengthen sovereignty, minimize external risks, develop bilateral and multilateral relations, and properly position a given country on the global map of nations.

Yet apart from Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine, Azerbaijan and the remaining 11 former Soviet republics

had limited experience with a truly professional and competent diplomatic service. The Soviet Union granted little authority to the 'ethnic republics' and provided them with no autonomy in foreign relations. Consequently, the offices of the republic-level Ministries of Foreign Affairs remained quite small and primarily handled protocol responsibilities for foreign dignitaries and guests traveling from Moscow to those parts of the country. The one in Baku, for instance, was established in 1944 as the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan.

Unsurprisingly, these ethnic republics lacked professional diplomatic academies to train young cadres. A handful

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of professional diplomats from those parts of the Soviet Union were either trained in Moscow (carefully selected, and with very limited quotas) or had a chance to work in Soviet embassies abroad as technical support staff, such as (civilian and military) translators and service personnel. Rarely, senior members in the ethnic foreign ministries were permitted to travel abroad as members of Soviet delegations to the UN General Assembly, where they sat in on sessions and committees and here and there even participated in meetings with foreign officials. Occasionally, they and mid-level diplomats in these foreign ministries went to various types of exhibitions and participated in cultural activities in socialist bloc countries. But this was almost completely devoid of substantive, policymaking content: the centralized Soviet government did not want any provincial capital to engage actively—much less substantively—in foreign affairs, which remained in Moscow's steely grip.

Still, sometimes (and in some periods), the assignments were a little more substantive. Commenting on Soviet foreign ministry practice in the 1960s, the author of a paper published by Bilkent University's Center for Russian Studies states:

In countries where some republics had a particular interest, due to common borders (Romania for Moldova) or ethnic bonds (Ukraine in Canada, due to the diaspora, or Armenia in Iran, in connection to the important Armenian community in the country), diplomats coming from the [ethnic] republics could be especially attached to the embassy as secretaries in the chancery, cultural attachés or consular agents. These diplomats were used for their cultural and linguistic features as part of an 'ethnic' diplomacy, of which R. Mamedov is an example, as head of the consular section of the [Soviet] embassy [in Ankara].

By and large, however, at the moment that these countries (re)gained independence thanks to the implosion of the Soviet Union, their now independent governments had significant difficulties in assembling a professionally-trained diplomatic cohort to work in their respective, newly-established foreign ministries. The available cadres from Moscow-based schools and diplomatic backgrounds lacked local language skills. Most of the personnel that staffed these new ministries came from existing (local) protocol teams; others had experience working with foreign delegations as translators, guides, and so on. Many academics and university professors with foreign language skills

were also invited to serve and fill the staffing needs of the diplomatic services being set up in the ethnic republics now having become independent states.

Moreover, since Azerbaijan was located in the southwest corner of the Soviet Empire, and thus bordered Iran

and NATO member state Türkiye, its capital Baku had not been completely secluded from the conduct of Soviet foreign affairs. For example, the Congress of the Peoples of the East, the first large-scale international anti-colonial conference in history, was in September 1920 in Baku, which played host to 1,900 delegates originating from all corners of the former Russian Empire and various parts of the Arab world (as far away as Algeria), the Balkans, China, India, Indochina, Iran, Japan, Korea, Mexico, South Africa, and Türkiye.

Moreover, France's Charles de Gaulle visited Baku after attending the Tehran Conference in 1943, at the height of World War II. Two separate U.S. Congressional delegations visited Baku within a week

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*The Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy was launched by President Ilham Aliyev in March 2006, under the leadership of now Rector Hafiz Pashayev, who had recently returned to Baku from Washington where he had served as the country's first ambassador to the United States.*

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creasing numbers—in the decades leading to the implosion of the Soviet Union.

As part of the U.S. State Department's Cold War-era "Jazz Ambassadors" program, legends like Earl Hines and B.B. King played before engrossed Azerbaijani audiences in what was commonly known as the capital of Soviet jazz (they came in 1971 and 1979, respectively).

Starting around the mid- to late-1950s, Baku began to play host to an increasing number of Asian and, a few years later, African delegations. One such delegation was led by the future head of Zimbabwe's domestic intelligence service who went on to serve as Home Affairs Minister,

in September 1945, followed by the arrival of a U.S. Senator on the very next day. Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser came to the city in 1958, India's prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru did so in 1961, and Türkiye's president Cevdet Sunay visited in 1969. Others followed—in in-

Dumiso Dabengwa, who in 1964 spent weeks in Azerbaijan learning about collective agricultural cooperatives. Also, various decrees issued by Moscow also spurred a greater number of visits by foreign dignitaries to Baku. For instance, in 1958, the Secretariat of the USSR Central Committee ordered Azerbaijan to establish "Friendship Societies" with Albania, the "Arab East," China, and India. In 1961, Azerbaijan was instructed by the Presidium of the Moscow-based Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee to establish a branch in Baku.

In the 1980s, for example, Iran and Iraq opened consulates in Baku. The oil capital of the world was often visited by foreign tourists and celebrities from socialist countries. Azerbaijani universities also admitted many foreign students from developing countries. For example, the future President of Angola, Eduardo dos Santos, studied petroleum engineering and radar communications for six years at the Azerbaijan Oil and Chemistry Institute (now the Azerbaijan State Oil and Industrial University), graduating in 1969 (during much of this period, he was also the head of the Pan-African Students' Association of the USSR).

Yet, in almost all the instances noted above, foreign guests were served either by communist party officials or various arms of the Soviet secret police or intelligence apparatus, with very little jurisdiction or power granted to the local branch of the Foreign Ministry.

### *Independence Period*

When Azerbaijan restored its independence in 1991, it had already been dragged into a full-scale war with Armenia over its Karabakh region. Thus, Baku was the epicenter of many foreign delegations coming to attempt to negotiate a ceasefire agreement. The number of embassies in Baku was increasing rapidly, seemingly day by day. Neighboring and faraway states were recognizing Azerbaijan's independence and seeking to establish full-scale diplomatic relationships. At the same time, the abundant oil (and later, gas) resources of the Caspian Sea quickly began drawing the interest of global energy giants. All of these activities required a large number of professional diplomatic cadres, a well-organized Foreign Ministry, and an active and able foreign service. Yet, the

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*As we have since our founding in 2006, ADA will remain Azerbaijan's diplomatic training lodestar.*

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country was also in the middle of several existential crises (e.g., expanding foreign occupation, floods of refugees and internally displaced persons), which produced a level of political and socio-economic instability that took on the characteristics of a failing state on the edge of full-on civil war.

Under these adverse conditions, Azerbaijan began to open its first embassies abroad and launch diplomatic activity at both multilateral and bilateral levels with very small financial resources and, as noted above, few seasoned diplomats. For some of the active members of the anti-Communist movement, called the Popular Front, which held power from spring 1992 to June 1993, the legacy of Azerbaijani statehood, including its foreign service, traced its roots to the period of the existence of the short-lived Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (May 1918–April 1920), the first secular republic in the Muslim world.

During this short period, nearly 20 countries operated diplomatic missions or representative offices in the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR), including Armenia, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands,

Sweden, Switzerland, Persia, Poland, Ukraine, the UK, and the United States. The ADR also managed to build an active foreign service, establishing diplomatic and consular representations in Armenia, Crimea, Dagestan, Georgia, Germany, the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Ukraine, and other countries. Decisions were made (but not executed) to open more such missions in countries like Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Sweden, the UK, and the United States.

The ADR also sent a delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, which was led by Alimardan bey Topchubashov, chairman of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic's parliament. Thanks to the ADR's diplomatic outreach, the country was de facto recognized by the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference on 11 January 1920.

Perhaps the best assessment of the ADR's diplomatic achievement can be derived from the words spoken by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, who recalled his meeting with Topchubashov's delegation thusly: "They talked the same language that I did in respect of ideas, in respect of conceptions of liberty, [and] in respect of conceptions of right and justice."

More than 70 years later, the modern independence period had its urgencies and necessities. For Azerbaijani diplomats, the learning process had to be quick and on the job. At the onset, there was no time for systematic training and education. The difficult external environment, which increased risks to the country's sovereignty and statehood, pushed Azerbaijani diplomats to seek alliances and support from foreign stakeholders. On many occasions in those first years, Azerbaijani diplomats relied on Turkish diplomats' help and/or actively used the Russian language and Russian-based texts and documents to promote Azerbaijan's agenda.

The main priorities and message of Azerbaijani foreign policy at that time were to get world powers and global policymakers to condemn the occupation of Karabakh by Armenia, seek humanitarian support for the plight of Azerbaijani refugees and IDPs, and attract investment and military aid. Another priority for the work of diplomats was engaging with the legislative bodies of their host countries to counter the lobbying activities of Armenian diaspora organizations, which included pushing for various anti-Azerbaijani resolutions and laws.

During the First Karabakh War period, which ended in May 1994

thanks to a Russian-brokered ceasefire, Azerbaijani foreign policy prioritized the promotion of the two cornerstone principles of international law: sovereignty and territorial integrity of all UN member states, starting, naturally, with its own. Focusing on this as well as on the IDP issue could gain certain geopolitical dividends and push the resolution of the conflict over Karabakh toward the desired outcome—that is, to ensure Karabakh remained within Azerbaijan.

At the same time, the country's difficult socio-economic situation also encouraged Azerbaijani diplomacy to actively use the energy card in its foreign policy messaging, thus putting the country and the core Silk Road region on the world map and drawing the interest of foreign powers, near and far, to the region. By doing so, Azerbaijan's leadership and its senior diplomatic representatives sought to attract foreign investment, which was much needed for the country's shattered economy to recover, but also to make a stronger case for the geopolitical advantages of supporting Baku's position on the Karabakh issue.

Due to the small size of the national budget in the early years of regained independence—due in part to the increasing costs of the Second Karabakh War—the

Azerbaijan foreign service lacked sufficient resources to pursue effective public diplomacy. At that time, social media was absent from the everyday use of diplomats. Emails and websites were only then in their beginning stages, and the main public diplomacy focus of diplomats was TV, radio, and newspaper reporters. Azerbaijani diplomats only began gradually to learn how to work effectively with civil society actors, universities, and think tanks, where they could make presentations about the Karabakh conflict.

Initially, Azerbaijan could afford to establish embassies only in some of the world's most important capitals (e.g., Ankara, London, Moscow, Paris, Washington) and in the most important centers of multilateral diplomacy (e.g., Geneva, New York, Vienna). Those first diplomatic missions aimed to develop essential linkages with major powers and attract their focus on Azerbaijan's situation. In those early years, Azerbaijani diplomacy neither initiated many regional, sub-regional, and international initiatives and platforms, nor did it participate broadly in the full gamut of issues being discussed multilaterally.

Due to Azerbaijan's internal instability, one can say that the initial cohort of diplomats and ambassadors appointed in the early

1990s was composed mainly of loyalists to the country's top leadership, which had changed three times in three years during the initial period of restored independence. Most of these people did not have a professional diplomatic background. Moreover, the first cohort of diplomats included professional Arabists, researchers from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, and professors from the University of Languages. Others became top diplomats because of the foreign language skills they had gained due to having previously lived and working abroad. For instance, Azerbaijan's first ambassador to the United States, Hafiz Pashayev, tells the story that he was recruited from his post as Director of the Metal Physics Laboratory at the Institute of Physics of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences and sent to Washington in large part because he had received a prestigious post-graduate research fellowship in 1975-1976 at University of California at Irvine and was thus judged to be familiar with the American way of life.

Despite these shortcomings, Azerbaijani diplomacy in the early 1990s scored numerous diplomatic victories. In 1993, for example, the UN Security Council adopted four resolutions

that condemned the Armenian occupation of Karabakh and demanded the immediate withdrawal of Armenian military formations from the occupied lands. Another victory was scored at the OSCE 1996 Lisbon Summit when all participating States acknowledged the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan through a special statement by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.

But perhaps the greatest diplomatic victory of Azerbaijan in those early difficult years of independence was the successful conclusion of talks that resulted in the "Contract of the Century"—a groundbreaking oil and gas agreement between Azerbaijan's state oil company, SOCAR, and major Western oil companies, led by BP. Although this was an energy and economic agreement, the ability of the Azerbaijani leadership and its top diplomats to attract competing nations into such an unprecedented endeavor, balancing their interests and developing a multi-vectoral approach, was a masterpiece of diplomacy. Alongside Western companies, Russian, Iranian, Japanese, Russian, and Turkish companies were also initially involved.

As Svante Cornell and Fred Starr observed in an earlier edition of *Baku Dialogues*, the Contract of the Century "placed Azerbaijan

on the world map, benefiting from the country's critical geographical location and energy resources to make it a serious regional player: a sovereign and engaged subject of international politics and not just an object to be manipulated by outside forces." By ensuring that the foregoing set of players each held an interest in the success of the Contract of the Century not only made them stakeholders in the success of Azerbaijan and, thus, invested in fostering mutually-beneficial relations; but it also ensured that the country could begin to adequately finance its development, pursue administrative reforms, provide for its own security, and, ultimately, ensure the liberation of its Armenian-occupied lands.

Alongside such victories, however, Azerbaijan suffered some diplomatic losses. One prominent example was the adoption of Section 907 (entitled "Restriction on Assistance to Azerbaijan") of the Freedom Support Act (1992), which prohibited any kind of direct U.S. government-to-government aid to Azerbaijan. This effectually put the United States in the business of sanctioning Azerbaijan (and only Azerbaijan of all post-Soviet states). It should be noted that 907 was adopted by the U.S. Congress (its lead champion was then-Senator John Kerry, with then-Senator Joe Biden

also being an active supporter) and signed into law by President George H.W. Bush before Azerbaijan had even had the opportunity to establish an embassy in the United States.

## *Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy*

As the economy of Azerbaijan began to recover from its deep recession in the late 1990s, the resources available for the development of a modern diplomatic service also increased. The Contract of the Century begat the construction and opening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and the establishment of the State Oil Fund, which has boosted the national budget and allowed Azerbaijan to start increasing the number of its embassies and permanent missions abroad. Between 2005 and 2010, for example, the number of its diplomatic representations tripled, increasing from 25 to 75. At the same time, Azerbaijan was now able to host many international forums, play an active role in multilateral diplomacy, initiate new regional projects and platforms,

develop and promote its public diplomacy, and provide other countries with humanitarian and development assistance.

The rising number of Azerbaijani legations abroad, plus an expanding Foreign Ministry at home, resulted in growing demands for new, young, and professionally trained diplomatic cadres.

Initial training sessions at the Ministry took place on an ad hoc basis—i.e., when funds were available from outside donors or the Ministry's own projects. Of special popularity among the Ministry's diplomatic staff were training courses abroad offered by various partner diplomatic academies and foreign universities. These were fully sponsored trainings, offered by the ministries of other countries. Diplomats loved to travel internationally to attend such courses.

In the late 1990s, the United States Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce (USACC) was established in Washington. That institution helped to bring together Azerbaijani and American business

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*The rising number of Azerbaijani legations abroad, plus an expanding Foreign Ministry at home, resulted in growing demands for new, young, and professionally trained diplomatic cadres.*

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interests and has spearheaded countless projects to deepen various aspects of the relations between the two countries. Among its flagship projects was the establishment of the Caspian Studies Program at the Harvard Kennedy School in 1999, which included a provision to send senior Azerbaijani diplomats to Harvard for executive training programs.

In the early 2000s, UNDP had agreed with the Foreign Ministry to sponsor a more permanent training center in the latter's building, which was fully equipped with modern technology and provided space for small trainings. The Ministry and UNDP worked closely together to develop a training curriculum and bring trainers from various countries, including through NATO's Partnership for Peace Consortium of Training Centers as well as the NATO Science for Peace program. Yet, this training center remained small and underfunded.

A new system needed to be put in place for the recruitment, training, rotation, and evaluation of diplomatic personnel. As Rector Pashayev was quoted as saying to the *New York Times* in July 2007, "To spread our image in the world, we need a real presence. But we have a shortage of diplomats."

This encapsulates the logic of the decision to establish the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy (ADA), which had been launched by President Ilham Aliyev in March 2006, under Pashayev's leadership, who had recently returned to Baku from Washington. ADA was set up initially under the Foreign Ministry, and the rector was given a concurrent appointment of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. The latter was designed to indicate the importance of ADA's mission for the Ministry and, indeed, for the whole country.

The establishment of ADA and the appointment of such a prominent public figure to lead its development raised hopes among the Azerbaijani public, the intelligentsia, and top diplomats about the high quality of future professional training and the expected rise of the overall capacity of the Ministry's cadres. All expected that ADA would be able to raise significant funds and resources for a superior level of diplomatic training and education.

The initial scope of work of the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy involved setting up a training program for the staff of the Foreign Ministry. These were mostly second and third secretaries from various departments dealing with

economic, political, and consular issues—both at bilateral and multilateral levels. ADA had decided to contact prominent educational centers around the world specializing in the training of diplomats. These included the Clingendael Institute, the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna (also known as the Vienna School of International Studies), the *École nationale d'administration* (ENA), the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University's Edmund Walsh School of Foreign Service, and Türkiye's Diplomatic Academy.

Professors from these and a few similar institutions conducted week-long training courses for the staff of the Foreign Ministry on topics including bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, current trends in public diplomacy, how to run effective negotiations, communication and public speaking skills, and modern consular affairs. These courses were very informative and, most importantly, very motivating and stimulating for the Azerbaijani diplomats. They felt the Ministry's growing attention to their professional development and built hopes for ADA to play a more active role in furthering their career prospects.

In parallel to such weekly courses, ADA also established the

Global Perspectives Lecture Series, featuring hour-long lectures and discussions with prominent global leaders, public opinion makers, prominent researchers, scholars, and experts, and distinguished (retired) diplomats. At the same time, language courses were launched with the help of foreign embassies based in Baku.

Of special help to the selection of partners was the International Forum on Diplomatic Training (IFDT)—an informal association of all serious diplomatic academies and graduate schools of international affairs from around the world established in 1972 as a yearly meeting of deans, directors, and rectors under the co-chairmanship of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna and Georgetown's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy. Just a few years later (in 2012), ADA hosted the IFDT's 40<sup>th</sup> annual meeting under the title, "Diplomatic Training in the Twenty-First Century: Sharing Experiences, Meeting New Challenges, Opening New Frontiers." Panels featured discussions on how small states' diplomatic activity can help preserve their sovereignty and territorial integrity, energy and environment diplomacy, and the evolving diplomacy of regional organizations. Practical workshops covered topics like e-diplomacy training,

content-based language instruction for diplomats, and the utility of role-playing in training diplomats to be better multilateral negotiators.

At the time of ADA's establishment, the Foreign Ministry, which at the time was led by then newly appointed foreign minister Elmar Mammadyarov, had implemented a reform program of the recruitment system. While in the 1990s, the recruitment of young diplomats was done on an ad hoc basis without any exams or other merit-based criteria, the new minister has set up a new professional system of examination and recruitment, which has led to the selection of talented and smart young diplomats.

The selection process, developed by Deputy Minister Vaqif Sadiqov, consisted of three stages: written tests, written essays, and oral interviews. Candidates with knowledge of rare languages were given special preferences.

The Ministry's emphasis on meritocracy, transparency, and accountability went so far as to remove itself from conducting the written exams. Instead, it was outsourced to the State Committee for the Admission of Students, which was widely regarded for its professionalism. The *New York Times* reported how

Azerbaijan introduced a foreign service entrance exam that is "turning the system into a meritocracy. Of the 700 applicants who took the test, only eight passed; they were the only people to enter the foreign service in 2006."

The next year, the best 35 university graduates were selected out of more than 1,000 applicants—also entirely based on their results, irrespective of their social status and background. This group made significant changes in the culture, work style, and mentality of the Ministry as a whole and laid the foundation for the future strong performance of the Azerbaijani diplomatic service.

### *Advanced Foreign Service Program*

Soon after its founding, the Azerbaijani Diplomatic Academy established a new program for the Ministry's fresh recruits. The program was called the Advanced Foreign Service Program (AFSP) and lasted for six months. All newly-recruited students were assigned by a ministerial decree to attend morning classes at ADA, before receiving hands-on training in the various ministerial departments in the afternoon.

AFSP's original curriculum was developed along six distinct blocks: International Law and Politics, Global Trade and Economics, Public Diplomacy, Consular Affairs, Leadership Skills, and Areas Studies and Internships. Intensive English-language lessons were also part of the curriculum from the onset.

Under the *International Law and Politics* block, the courses focused on major multilateral treaties and conventions, including a module on the legal status of the Caspian Sea. Coursework also covered globalization, regional disputes, the history of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Karabakh, the primary activities of multilateral and regional organizations, and the foreign policy priorities of global and regional powers. UN Security Council resolutions were also taught, and practical sessions were held on how to write diplomatic notes and letters. Other parts of the course were dedicated to global security challenges like terrorism, asymmetric warfare, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

Human rights issues and the country's national security interests were also covered.

In the *Global Trade and Economics* block of the original AFSP curriculum, courses focused on integrating political knowledge into the economic field, with special attention on the WTO, energy policies, foreign economic relations, investment promotion, and trade and transport issues. Tariffs and sanctions were also discussed. And since Azerbaijan is a producer and exporter of hydrocarbon sources of energy, students learned to develop presentations on the history of this industry in Azerbaijan and present-day major regional energy projects. Alternative and renewable sources of energy were also the focus of these discussions. Students were also taught to work on the development of the non-hydrocarbon sector of the economy by promoting connectivity corridors and regional hub projects.

The third block of the original AFSP curriculum was *Public*

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*AFSP's original mission consisted in producing not only talented executors of papers and letters, but also world-class analysts, negotiators, and communicators in possession of a sense of initiative and fully developed dynamic personalities.*

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*Diplomacy*, an entirely novel element for a diplomatic culture rooted in the Soviet model. Courses focused on working with civil society organizations (including those devoted to human rights work), youth and advocacy groups, religious entities, think tanks, and traditional, web-based, and social media outlets. Mock press conferences were organized. Debates with civil society and diaspora activists were also included in the program, as were visits to IDP and refugee camps. Students and lecturers actively discussed the growing role of technology and digital media in diplomatic activities, with sessions also geared to learning how to write effective press releases, organizing media events, and so on.

The fourth block was *Consular Affairs*, which consisted mainly of a classical approach to the current legal frameworks on the protection of citizens, providing various services to them, details and articles of the Vienna Convention, visa and travel procedures, and assisting citizens after incidents of crime. Mock simulations were organized, and special practical sessions were held with experienced consular officers, including from the foreign embassies based in Baku. The approach may have been familiar, but the tone was different: students were taught to approach consular matters with

the aim of "getting to yes" through a "serving-your-fellow-citizens" approach, which was not exactly a hallmark of the Soviet model of diplomacy.

The fifth block, *Leadership Skills*, was in many ways the most rewarding part of the original AFSP curriculum. One segment was devoted to public speaking and communication skills, negotiation abilities, effective presentation skills, teamwork, and so on. Another focused on communication with embassies, government officials, and international organizations, but also on communication across various cultures and religions.

A special leadership training program for more senior diplomats was established in parallel to AFSP, which focused on first secretaries and above. Thanks to the support of the Norwegian embassy, ADA worked with a prominent workforce management company based in Oslo, Right Management, to design and implement a tailor-made leadership development program for Azerbaijani diplomats and civil servants. Particular emphasis was placed on developing managerial skills that were not common in a typical Azerbaijani work environment at the time: effective communication, time management, running effective meetings, providing



feedback, and active listening. Crisis management and change management also became integral parts of the course.

The sixth block of the original AFSP curriculum was devoted to *Area Studies and Internships*. The main focus was on important geopolitical theaters and geographies like Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North America, and the post-Soviet space. ADA came up with the innovative idea to select the top ten performers in this block of the AFSP program to participate in a one-month, fully-funded internship program in key Azerbaijani embassies. The interest expressed by aspiring diplomats was very high and the competition to secure a coveted spot was fierce. The list of participating embassies was carefully selected to provide a personal mentorship opportunity for the ambassador and to make sure that the young attachés would be provided with an interesting and unique portfolio of tasks. ADA took care of visa, travel, and lodging issues. As it turned out, the internship-at-embassies program became one of ADA's best (and most popular) initiatives.

The training provided by each block was important for young Azerbaijani diplomats to master in order to become

successful in their everyday work, but also to learn how to act as proactive leaders in championing the country's foreign policy priorities abroad as well as become producers of serious diplomatic analyses. AFSP's original mission consisted in producing not only talented executors of papers and letters, but also world-class analysts, negotiators, and communicators in possession of a sense of initiative and fully developed dynamic personalities.

The classes were held in an interactive manner, with lectures and discussions enhanced with practical skills development through simulations, case studies, role-playing exercises, peer-to-peer learning sessions, and field visits. Young diplomats were also taken to such important governmental and private institutions as Parliament, SOCAR, religious entities, oil fields, the Central Bank, and so on.

ADA also actively involved foreign teachers and trainers not only from the list of educational centers specializing in the training of diplomats, as provided above, but from other universities and centers, as well. These have included the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, the Joint Vienna Institute, the Moscow State Institute of International

Relations (MGIMO), Oxford University, and the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

At the end of their AFSP course of study, all participants of the course were ranked according to their performance in the class and attendance records. The top performers received honor certificates. Others were given attendance certificates. Several low performers were identified as such and thus failed out of the Foreign Ministry's overall recruitment process.

### *Other Interesting Projects*

The Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy continued to organize young recruits' training programs on an annual basis whilst increasing its focus on mid-career diplomats. The changing context and environment pushed all working professionals to seek new knowledge, information, skills, and competencies. Thus, while ADA organized regular courses for mid-career diplomats, it often invited

representatives from other state agencies, such as the Ministry of Economy, Parliament, the IT Ministry, the Transport Ministry, the Tourism and Culture Ministry, the Presidential Administration, and others to create better communication between various stakeholders and foster interagency dialogue.

Seeing the initial success of the Diplomatic Academy, foreign embassies and donor agencies started to invest in building the capacity of the new diplomatic academy and offered various partnership programs. As noted above, the Norwegian embassy offered to sponsor a year-long project to develop the leadership and management capacity of more senior Azerbaijani diplomats. Modules were taught both in Baku and Oslo. Again, ADA involved officials and civil servants from beyond the Foreign Ministry, to further the atmosphere of interagency dialogue. The trainers from Norway were so much liked by the Azerbaijani participants that they have continued to be employed by ADA for two more years at the expense of the state budget.

In addition to training the country's diplomats, ADA began to offer its first accredited graduate-level university program in September 2009, the Master of Arts in Diplomacy and International Affairs. MADIA, as it is known commonly, was the first university-level degree program in the country taught entirely in English. Moreover, the MADIA curriculum was consciously modeled on similar programs taught at the Fletcher School and the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna and thus became the first in the country to purposefully break from the post-Soviet education model inherited by the Azerbaijani system, which over-emphasized rote learning and memorization. With MADIA, ADA sought to bring the comparative advantages of the best universities from abroad to Azerbaijan: teaching students to develop critical analysis and complex reasoning skills as well as communication, negotiations, public speaking, problem-solving, teamwork, and writing skills.

The inherent pedagogical logic of MADIA was predicated on rejecting

the study of international affairs in an insular environment, with the student body being composed exclusively of Azerbaijani citizens. As such, a special scholarship program—the Topchubashov International Fellowship—was established by the Foreign Ministry to attract and retain high-quality foreign students (a clear sign of booming public diplomacy efforts in Azerbaijan). Out of 32 matriculating students of the first MADIA

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class, 16 were Azerbaijanis and 16 were foreigners from Afghanistan, Argentina, the Czech Republic, Kenya, Mexico, Pakistan, Poland, and Russia.

In September 2011, ADA began to offer an undergraduate version of MADIA: the Bachelor of Arts in International Studies (BAIS) program. More than 120 exchange agreements have been signed with leading universities from all over the world, which ensures that both programs (as well as others) retain their international, outward-looking perspective.

ADA also began running its flagship Baku Summer Energy School (BSES), which will mark its nineteenth year later this

year. This prestigious two-week certificate program continues brings together world-renowned scholars, academics, and policymakers to examine and gain a better understanding of global energy and environmental issues and their practical application.

A special focus of the program remains the Caspian basin, which is the Silk Road region's major source of oil, gas, wind, and solar energy.

Although the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy was conceived from the very beginning to evolve into a fully-fledged university, this only became a reality in early 2014 by presidential decree. Since then, now ADA University has continued to play a constantly-evolving role in strengthening the conduct of Azerbaijani diplomacy, including additional tailor-made training programs to go along with AFSP.

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In March 2022, ADA University established an in-house think tank, the Institute for Development and Diplomacy, to deepen its engage-

ment and outreach with expert, research, diplomatic, and policymaking communities, both in Azerbaijan and abroad. Modeled on the best practices of leading world-class, university-affiliated research institutes and think tanks, IDD serves as ADA University's hub of policy-oriented, interdisciplinary research and analysis.

IDD published this policy journal every quarter, as well as scores of Analytical Policy Papers and Working Papers every year. It oversees the work of ADA University Press, whose history goes back to the very first years of the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy. Some early monograph titles include *Crafting Foreign Policy: Azerbaijan in Global Politics* (2009) and *Azerbaijan as a Regional Hub in Central Asia* (2011), while *Liberated Karabakh: Policy Perspectives by the ADA*

*University Community* (2021) is the title of a more recent book.

In addition, it leverages ADA's unique and unmatched convening power and influence to serve as Azerbaijan's leading focal point for high-level, policy-oriented conferences, lectures, briefings, workshops, and other impactful events. IDD also hosts the Center of Excellence in EU Studies, which provides a further opportunity to train civil servants and diplomats in EU affairs and expand EU-Azerbaijani relations.

### *Future Plans*

The world is becoming a much more complex and uncertain place in which to live, and thus both the topics of diplomatic training courses and the competencies of the modern diplomats are also changing. We have to understand, face, manage, and overcome new risks and threats, which means that the capacity of diplomats to deal with these new emerging problems must also increase. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic created new realities on the ground. As never before, diplomats must now understand the details of public health issues and how to assist citizens during times of pandemics or other emergencies.

At the same time, the development of new technologies has changed the reality of diplomatic correspondence. One no longer needs to wait so much for the official notes and letters to pass through the general departments of the embassies and ministries. Signal and WhatsApp messaging and social media have made diplomatic correspondence easier, faster, and more accessible. On the other hand, these and other technological trends heighten the risks of information security, confidentiality, leakage of sensitive data, and improper usage of social media for daily work.

Cybersecurity courses and data analytics are becoming increasingly integral parts of diplomatic training programs. The spread of "fake news" and disinformation is already a problem we all face. Diplomats need to learn how to detect and counter such threats, as well as to properly use credible sources for data analysis and reporting.

Moreover, the volume of incoming information is increasing day by day, and modern diplomats need to upgrade their time management skills, but also to acquire the ability to process information, analyze it, report it, and filter the most urgent and important information. Faced with a constant flood of large amounts of information, some diplomats might feel either

overburdened or isolated from the main flow of information.

ADA University is leading in the development of unique training courses for diplomats and civil servants on the foregoing topics, as well as others. We will also deepen our focus on interdisciplinary courses, programs, and skills. In an increasingly globalized and complex world, such courses will help young diplomats get a general and broad view of the world's problems and offer creative solutions.

In the wake of Azerbaijan having finally liberated Karabakh in 2020, messaging about the country's development plans, as well as the ongoing peace process, has taken pride of place in the conduct of the country's diplomacy. While for the last 30 years, we focused on the Armenian occupation and the plight of our one million IDPs and refugees, the region's new geopolitical reality dictates that Azerbaijani diplomats must continue to learn how to craft new, different, and even more attractive messages to promote the country's independent foreign policy agenda.

We are therefore encouraged by the leadership of Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov in improving and remodeling the admission testing system. For two years running, prospective new diplomats are again

undergoing a rigorous, transparent, and highly-competitive process (in three stages), which resulted in 40 new hires in the most recent cohort. ADA played a role in this rejuvenation, and we expect to play an even greater one, given our past track record and the country's updated legislative framework. To wit: at the end of 2024, the Milli Mejlis (Azerbaijan's parliament) adopted a new Law on Diplomatic Service. This law set higher standards of conduct, more stringent eligibility requirements, made promotion criteria more transparent and meritocratic, modernized compensation packages as well as social and pension benefits, defined term limits on postings abroad, regularized rotation schedules, toughened accountability and disciplinary provisions, and so on.

These and other measures should be understood as crucial for ensuring Azerbaijan continues being a strong, self-reliant country with much increased economic capacity, a broad regional agenda, heightened international respect and recognition, and an ambitious vision for the future. As we have since 2006, ADA will remain Azerbaijan's diplomatic training lode-star by helping our foreign service effectively and persuasively present all this to counterparts based in Baku and around the world, whilst simultaneously entering into the necessary partnerships to match those ambitions. **BD**