

Transformation of US-Azerbaijani relations in the post-conflict period (2020–2026)

*The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the transformation of US-Azerbaijani relations in the post-conflict period (2020–2026) through the prism of the interaction of energy, security, and geopolitical factors. The evolution of bilateral interaction is examined, from situational energy partnership based on the supply of Azerbaijani hydrocarbons to European markets bypassing Russia and Iran, to an institutionalized strategic alliance cemented by the signing of the Charter on Strategic Partnership on February 10, 2026. The role of the hydrocarbon factor as a system-forming element of Baku's foreign policy is considered; in particular, the dynamics of increasing Azerbaijani gas exports to Europe following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine are analyzed, as well as the strategic significance of agreements to increase production at the Shah Deniz and Absheron fields. It is demonstrated that Azerbaijan's energy diplomacy serves as an effective instrument for advancing US geopolitical interests in diversifying European energy supplies and minimizing Russia's influence on the EU energy market, while China remains virtually excluded from access to Azerbaijani hydrocarbon resources. Particular attention is devoted to the analysis of the latest American initiatives – the TRIPP (Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity) connectivity project and the 2026 Charter on Strategic Partnership, which attest to an unprecedented level of US strategic engagement in the South Caucasus. The security dimension of cooperation is explored, including the evolution of Washington's position on the Karabakh conflict and military-technical assistance programs for Azerbaijan. The fundamental contradiction between the declared US commitment to promoting democratic values and the actual practice of engagement with the authoritarian regime in Azerbaijan is revealed, confirming the relevance of the *realpolitik* paradigm for analyzing bilateral relations.*

Keywords: Azerbaijan; United States; strategic partnership; energy diplomacy; Southern Gas Corridor; TRIPP; Charter on Strategic Partnership; geopolitics; regional security; South Caucasus; Nagorno-Karabakh; *realpolitik*; history and theory of international relations.

Problem Statement. The Second Karabakh War of 2020 and the subsequent restoration of Azerbaijan's sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh fundamentally altered the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus, bringing to the forefront the issue of reconfiguring Baku's relations with key global actors, primarily the United States of America. While during the 1990–2010s US-Azerbaijani relations developed predominantly within the paradigm of energy pragmatism, where Baku acted as a supplier of hydrocarbons to European markets bypassing Russia and Iran, the post-conflict period (2020–2026) is characterized by qualitatively new trends. On the one hand, Azerbaijan's role as a guarantor of the EU's energy security is growing amid the Russian-Ukrainian war; on the other hand, the Trump administration is initiating unprecedented regional connectivity projects (TRIPP) and institutionalizing the strategic partnership through the signing of the 2026 Charter.

At the same time, this transformation is taking place against the backdrop of the preservation of an authoritarian governance model in Azerbaijan, creating a contradiction between the declared US commitment to promoting democratic values and Washington's actual geopolitical interests in the region. Thus, a scholarly problem arises, which consists in the need for a comprehensive analysis of the factors determining the transformation of US-Azerbaijani relations in the post-conflict period, clarifying the correlation between energy, security, and value-based components in the US foreign policy strategy toward Baku, as well as assessing the impact of new initiatives (TRIPP, Charter on Strategic Partnership) on the regional balance of power and the prospects for long-term peace in the South Caucasus.

Analysis of Recent Research and Publications. An analysis of the scholarly literature on US-Azerbaijani relations reveals the existence of an extensive historiographical base covering a wide range of political, economic, and security aspects of bilateral interaction from the moment Azerbaijan gained independence in 1991. At the same time, the dynamic changes in the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus following the Second Karabakh War of 2020 necessitate a critical reassessment of accumulated knowledge through the prism of the *realpolitik* paradigm. As H. Kissinger rightly observed, after the end of the Cold War the United States found itself in the unique position of the sole global superpower; however, the absence of a comprehensive ideological threat prompted states to increasingly be guided by narrow national interests. In this context, the scholar problematized the ability of «Wilsonian idealism» and the concept of «democracy enlargement» to serve as an effective alternative to the containment strategy under the conditions of the new international system [11, pp. 784, 787]. In turn, F. Fukuyama, analyzing the phenomenon of authoritarian resilience, drew attention to the asymmetry of accountability in non-democratic systems, where the vector of responsibility is directed exclusively «upward».

Extrapolating this thesis to the South Caucasian realities allows us to explain Baku's gravitation toward an authoritarian governance model primarily by the complex geopolitical environment and the permanent threat associated with the Karabakh conflict [15, pp. 503–504, 507].

The scholarly literature presents several conceptual approaches to interpreting Azerbaijan's foreign policy. Strakes J.E. cautioned against a simplistic binary perception of Baku's course as a product of confrontation between East and West, instead proposing to analyze it through the prism of power preponderance theory, where Azerbaijan sought to maintain a roughly parity level of relations with the global dominant power (the United States) and its regional rival (Iran) [33]. Zarifian J. focused on the complex triangle of relations between Baku, Yerevan, and Iran, which caused concern in Washington, especially during the George W. Bush administration [37]. In turn, Z.Yildirim concentrated on the energy dimension, emphasizing that despite Western efforts to limit Russian and Iranian influence in the energy sphere in order to guarantee Europe's security, insufficient support for Azerbaijan on the Karabakh issue had a negative impact on the quality of bilateral relations with the United States [36]. Strimbovski S., for his part, highlighted the balanced nature of Baku's foreign policy course, which, however, remained hostage to the Karabakh conflict and the contradictory influence of the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative [34]. In line with the concept of the economization of foreign policy, R.Yadav viewed Azerbaijan as a «small state» whose rich energy resources turned the Caucasus into an arena of the «*Great Power Game*» involving leading global actors [35].

A separate body of research consists of works directly devoted to US-Azerbaijani relations. Ibrahimov R., analyzing the situation from Baku's perspective as of 2014, concluded that the United States had an inadequate understanding of regional realities and emphasized Azerbaijan's expectations for a revision of American policy in a more constructive manner [30]. Mustafazade P.T., examining the interaction between the two countries in the Caspian region, argued that as of 2019, the key factors making it possible to speak of a «strategic partnership» were cooperation in the extraction and transportation of hydrocarbons, as well as Azerbaijan's participation in NATO counterterrorism operations [12].

Despite the significant volume of existing research, most of it does not take into account the tectonic shifts of 2025–2026. In particular, the TRIPP (*Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity*) initiative – a connectivity project developed by the Trump administration that envisages the restoration of a 43-kilometer railway section through Armenian territory along the border with Iran – requires scholarly examination. As noted in the publication devoted to the outcomes of the White House meeting on August 8, 2025, the implementation of TRIPP for Baku signifies overcoming the transportation isolation of Nakhchivan and strengthening the country's status as a transit hub between Central Asia and Europe, which correlates with US strategic interests in creating alternative routes independent of Russian and Chinese infrastructure. At the same time, the authors point to key challenges: the need for multi-billion-dollar financing, the sensitive issue of preserving Armenian sovereignty over the infrastructure while ensuring unimpeded Azerbaijani traffic, as well as potential opposition from Russia and Iran, which perceive the project as a Western intrusion into their own sphere of influence [22].

Thus, the historiographical review demonstrates the evolution of scholarly discourse from attempts to conceptualize the «multi-vector» and «balanced» nature of Baku's policy, to the recognition of the decisive role of the energy factor, and ultimately to the analysis of the unprecedented US engagement in post-conflict settlement processes and regional connectivity. It is precisely this latter aspect, associated with TRIPP and the 2026 Charter on Strategic Partnership, that shapes the newest research agenda, which requires further in-depth study.

The aim of the article is to provide a comprehensive study of the transformation of US-Azerbaijani relations in the post-conflict period (2020–2026), which entails an analysis of the evolution of bilateral interaction from situational energy partnership to an institutionalized strategic alliance. Particular attention is paid to elucidating the role of the hydrocarbon factor as a key element of Baku's foreign policy and an instrument for advancing Washington's geopolitical interests in the South Caucasus, examining the dynamics of security cooperation in the context of the Karabakh conflict settlement, as well as assessing the impact of the latest American initiatives – the TRIPP connectivity project and the 2026 Charter on Strategic Partnership – on the regional balance of power, the prospects for long-term stability, and the formation of a new architecture of international relations in the South Caucasus.

Presentation of the Main Material. At the present stage, Azerbaijan, with a population of 10,496 million [32] and a GDP of \$74,32 billion (2024) [27] (GDP per capita of \$7,283.8 as of 2024 [28])¹, possesses a developed oil-industrial complex, emerged victorious in the Second Karabakh War, and has fully restored its sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh.

In 2024, the country ranked 85th among 193 world economies by absolute GDP volume (\$74,3 billion), 71st by total exports, and 105th by GDP per capita. At the same time, according to the Economic Complexity Index, Azerbaijan demonstrated rather modest results: 86th out of 130 countries in the trade dimension, 78th out

¹ It should be noted that compared to 2022, the population increased by 94 thousand people, while GDP decreased by \$4.4 billion and GDP per capita declined by \$437,3 [16, p. 105]

of 97 in the technological dimension, and 136th out of 138 in the research dimension, indicating the persistence of a high level of dependence of the national economy on the primary sector, primarily oil and gas [18].

A key factor in the country's geopolitical weight is its hydrocarbon reserves. According to U.S. government data, Azerbaijan's proven oil reserves are estimated at approximately 7 billion barrels, placing the country 18th in the world ranking – ahead of such states as Mexico, India, Norway, Sudan, as well as the European Union as a whole. Oil resources play a crucial role in ensuring Azerbaijan's economic stability and national security, since the oil and gas industry generates more than half of the country's total budget revenues [26].

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) plays a significant role in regulating global oil trade. In 2016, the expanded OPEC+ format was created, incorporating an additional 10 states, including the Russian Federation, Mexico, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. Currently, this alliance controls 55 % of global oil supplies and 90 % of its proven reserves, representing an unprecedented level of influence over the global economy [21]. In April 2020, within the framework of OPEC+ agreements and in order to stabilize prices, Azerbaijan agreed to reduce its daily production by 164,000 barrels, setting a ceiling of 554,000 barrels for the following two months [26].

Alongside the oil sector, Azerbaijan's role in the European gas market increased substantially following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In 2023, 11,8 billion cubic meters of natural gas were exported to Europe via the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), which stretches 773 km overland and 105 km offshore. This large-scale infrastructure project consists of three segments, spans seven countries with six regulatory systems, brings together 11 investors, and supplies natural gas to 12 buyers, most of whom are located in Europe. It was expected that export volumes would reach 12 billion cubic meters in 2024, as 6,4 billion cubic meters were delivered to Europe, 5 billion to Türkiye, and 1,3 billion to Georgia in the first half of that year alone. The main resource source for the SGC is the offshore Shah Deniz field, whose proven reserves amount to approximately 1,2 trillion cubic meters. Currently, the European market accounts for the largest share of Azerbaijan's daily gas exports [29].

In March 2026, President Ilham Aliyev officially reaffirmed the European Union's status as Azerbaijan's leading trade partner and announced plans to increase gas production by an additional 10 billion cubic meters over the next 2–3 years, which will further strengthen Baku's position as a key pipeline gas supplier to Europe. These plans are fully aligned with the strategic priorities of the United States aimed at further diversifying the energy supply sources of European countries and reducing Russia's influence on the EU energy market [1].

The United States actively leverages Azerbaijan's energy potential to advance its own regional interests, primarily in the context of diversifying oil and gas supplies to Europe in order to reduce the share of Russia and Iran in the European energy market. As of 2022, the main items of Azerbaijani exports were crude oil (\$19,4 billion), natural gas (\$15,5 billion), and refined petroleum products (\$561 million) [18]. In 2024, the export structure remained unchanged: crude oil (\$14,6 billion), natural gas (\$8,33 billion), and petroleum products (\$432 million), confirming the dominant role of the hydrocarbon sector in shaping the country's foreign trade balance [18].

An analysis of the geographical structure of exports demonstrates that Azerbaijan effectively serves as a key energy supplier for the southern flank of the EU. Thus, in 2022, Italy received \$11,4 billion worth of gas and \$6,72 billion worth of oil, Spain – \$1,03 billion worth of oil, Portugal – \$756 million worth of oil, Greece – \$1,24 billion worth of gas and \$267 million worth of oil [18]. As of 2024, Italy maintained its position as the main trading partner with a trade turnover of \$10,7 billion [18].

Of particular note is the fact that the geopolitical rival of the United States – China – is virtually excluded from access to Azerbaijani hydrocarbon resources [16, p. 111]. In 2022, oil exports to the PRC amounted to only \$114 million, i.e., 0,58 % of total exports [19]. According to official data from the State Statistics Committee of Azerbaijan, for January–September 2025, China's share in the country's total exports of crude oil and gas did not exceed 0,4 % [25].

In 2014, Azerbaijani researcher R. Ibrahimov, substantiating the allied nature of relations between Baku and Washington, specifically highlighted cooperation with Georgia, to which Azerbaijan provided an alternative and uninterrupted energy supply, as well as with Israel [30, p. 16]. Regarding the latter, it is worth noting that in 2022, Azerbaijan exported \$1,67 billion worth of oil to Israel [31], covering approximately 45 % of Israel's imports of this resource. In 2024, the volume of oil exports to Israel amounted to \$713 million [31]. Given the complex security situation in the Middle East, this level of trade interaction plays an important role in supporting the energy stability of a key US ally in the region.

Azerbaijan is consistently increasing the volume of energy supplies to the European market. On October 24, 2022, during a joint press conference with Georgian Prime Minister I. Garibashvili in Tbilisi, President I. Aliyev announced intentions to increase the annual transit of gas to Europe through the territory of Georgia and Türkiye to 20 billion cubic meters starting from 2027. In addition, the Azerbaijani leader reported plans for the annual supply of 5 million tons of oil to European consumers via the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline [2].

In January 2026, Türkiye and Azerbaijan concluded a long-term agreement on the supply of 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas from the Absheron field for a period of 15 years, envisaging an average annual volume of

2.25 billion cubic meters with the start of commercial deliveries in 2029. This arrangement not only deepens the energy partnership between Baku and Ankara but also provides for a further increase in production at the Absheron field to 4.5 billion cubic meters per year, half of which may potentially be directed to European markets, which is fully in line with US strategic interests in diversifying gas supply sources for EU countries [14].

Thus, hydrocarbon potential remains the cornerstone of Azerbaijan's foreign policy course, transforming energy diplomacy into an effective instrument of Baku's influence on the geopolitical situation in the region and forming a solid foundation for strategic partnership with the United States and the European Union.

A significant component of US-Azerbaijani relations is the security dimension of cooperation. For a long period, Azerbaijan provided support to the United States in the field of regional security, particularly in counterterrorism operations and military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. The country played the role of an important transit hub for supplying American military contingents in Afghanistan. At the same time, Washington did not fully meet Baku's expectations regarding the deepening of partnership relations. Despite this, Azerbaijan managed to compel the United States to take its interests into account in regional politics. Overall, Baku pursues a balanced foreign policy course, maneuvering between the interests of Russia and Iran. The American side sometimes demonstrates insufficient consideration of regional specifics, expecting unconditional loyalty from Azerbaijan, which could pose risks to the country's national security. As R.Ibrahimov rightly noted, given the events in Georgia and Ukraine, Azerbaijan chose a predictable and measured course, avoiding risky steps. The country shows no aspiration for deep regional integration, instead demonstrating readiness for equal cooperation with all interested partners [30, p. 16].

Bilateral military cooperation between Azerbaijan and the United States received a significant boost thanks to the signing of two key documents: the «Joint Statement on Future Relations in the Defense and Military Sphere between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the United States of America» of July 31, 1997, and a similar statement of June 30, 2000. Since 2002, the United States has been providing substantial security assistance to Azerbaijan, implemented through a range of specialized programs. These include the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program, the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, as well as the Building Partner Capacity for Foreign Security Forces program under «Section 333», launched by the US Department of Defense in 2018. These initiatives are aimed at strengthening Azerbaijan's defense capabilities and further deepening military interaction between the two countries [23].

Historically, Azerbaijan positioned itself as one of the West's key allies in implementing the policy of containing Russian and Iranian influence, as well as in guaranteeing the energy security of the European continent. However, despite its strategic importance, Baku did not receive the expected support from Western partners on the Karabakh issue. This situation pushed the Azerbaijani leadership to use energy resources as an effective instrument to strengthen its own geopolitical positions and restore control over Nagorno-Karabakh [36].

The Second Karabakh War significantly exacerbated the security situation in the Caucasus, prompting the United States to undertake more active diplomatic efforts to keep the situation under control. On November 7, 2022, shortly after another escalation of hostilities around Nagorno-Karabakh, US Secretary of State A.Blinken held a meeting in Washington with Armenian Foreign Minister A.Mirzoyan and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister J.Bayramov. «The United States, as a friend of both Armenia and Azerbaijan, is prepared to do everything possible to support you in these efforts», stressed the American Secretary of State [5].

In September 2023, during another round of negotiations with the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, A.Blinken expressed deep concern over Azerbaijan's military actions and the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Notably, in parallel, the high-ranking official reaffirmed the principled position of the United States regarding the recognition of Azerbaijan's right to restore its territorial integrity, stating: «When it comes to sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence, we uphold those principles in the case of all parties concerned» [13]. This statement came against the backdrop of A.Blinken's call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the prevention of further escalation in the region, since, in his conviction, there is no military solution to the Karabakh problem. The Secretary of State emphasized the need to resume dialogue between Baku and the ethnic Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh in order to resolve existing differences [4].

For a comprehensive understanding of the specifics of US-Azerbaijani relations, it is necessary to take into account the state of democratic institutions in Azerbaijan itself. According to the Democracy Index, as of 2023, the country ranked 130th with a score of 2.8, and in 2025, despite a slight rise to the 127th position, the index remained at the same level, classifying the political regime as authoritarian (states with an index below 4 are considered transitional regimes). For comparison: in 2007, Azerbaijan was ranked 135th, in 2011 – 140th, in 2014 – 148th, and in 2020 – 146th [10].

The «2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices», prepared by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor of the US Department of State, documents numerous human rights violations in Azerbaijan. The report particularly emphasizes that the government failed to take credible measures to hold accountable most officials allegedly implicated in such violations. Moreover, no progress was reported in government investigations of alleged abuses committed by Azerbaijani armed forces or individuals during the military actions in 2020 and 2022 [17].

The United States, which traditionally positions itself as a global defender of democratic values, devotes significant attention to the functioning of democratic institutions in various countries. At the same time, in the case of Azerbaijan, the level of democratic development does not play a decisive role in shaping bilateral relations, yielding to geopolitical interests, energy policy, and regional security concerns. Official Baku, for its part, is not inclined to assess the situation with democratic institutions in a negative light. Revealing in this context was President I.Aliyev's statement at a joint briefing with German Chancellor O.Scholz on April 26, 2024, where he categorically denied the existence of censorship and persecution of journalists in the country. The Azerbaijani leader substantiated his position by citing free access to the internet and the functioning of numerous media outlets, and regarding the arrested journalist, he stated that the individual had received «illegal foreign funds». This statement came in response to a European Parliament resolution criticizing the Azerbaijani authorities for intensifying pressure on civil society, activists, and independent media [6]. The actual situation, however, suggests the opposite: on March 6, 2024, nine journalists associated with the independent channel Toplum TV and at least three activists were detained after searches at the editorial office and their homes. In total, since the end of 2023, about 10 journalists have been arrested in the country, mostly from the «Abzas Media» outlet, with the wave of detentions beginning on November 20, 2023 [7].

On August 1, 2024, during a daily press briefing of the US Department of State, Principal Deputy Spokesperson V.Patel was asked a question regarding the detention of Armenian prisoners of war and political figures from Karabakh in Azerbaijani prisons, and whether the State Department was monitoring this situation. The question included a reference to Freedom House data, according to which, following the transfer of Karabakh territory to Azerbaijani control, it is recognized as the least free territory in the world. In response, V.Patel noted that there are no positive decisions in this matter yet, but the relevant work is ongoing [24]. In June 2024, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg ruled that the Azerbaijani government's decision to block access to the website of the Azerbaijani Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty following the publication of a journalistic investigation into financial transactions linked to the family of President I.Aliyev and his inner circle constitutes a violation of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms [9].

Despite the aforementioned problems, electoral procedures are regularly held in Azerbaijan. President I.Aliyev has continuously headed the state since 2003. In the snap presidential elections of February 7, 2024, organized after Baku regained control over Nagorno-Karabakh, the incumbent head of state received 92,12 % of the votes. International observers subjected these elections to criticism, characterizing them as neither free nor fair, taking place against the backdrop of systematic suppression of independent media and the absence of genuine political competition [3]. For comparison, in the previous presidential elections in April 2018, I.Aliyev also achieved a convincing victory with 86,03 % of the votes; however, the OSCE already then recorded numerous violations during voting and noted the lack of genuine competition [8].

A key breakthrough in US-Azerbaijani relations during Donald Trump's second term was the White House meeting on August 8, 2025. As a result, the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia initialed a peace agreement and committed themselves to the implementation of the connectivity project developed by the United States – TRIPP (*Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity*). The agreement envisages the restoration of a 43-kilometer railway section through the territory of Armenia along the border with Iran, which is intended to provide the shortest overland route between the main part of Azerbaijan and its exclave of Nakhchivan, as well as the laying of fiber-optic lines, electricity networks, and a gas pipeline. For Baku, the implementation of TRIPP signifies not only overcoming the longstanding transportation isolation of Nakhchivan but also strengthening the country's status as a strategic transit hub between Central Asia and Europe, which fully aligns with American interests in creating alternative logistical routes independent of Russian and Chinese infrastructure. At the same time, the successful implementation of the project is associated with a number of serious challenges, including the need to attract multi-billion-dollar financing, the delicate issue of ensuring unimpeded Azerbaijani traffic while preserving Armenian sovereignty over the infrastructure facilities, as well as likely opposition from Russia and Iran, which perceive this initiative as an attempt at Western penetration into their traditional sphere of geopolitical interests. Despite these difficulties, the Trump administration demonstrates an unprecedented level of engagement in regional processes, viewing TRIPP as an effective instrument not only for consolidating peace between Baku and Yerevan but also for the long-term reduction of the South Caucasus's dependence on Russian and Iranian logistics. In this way, Azerbaijan is becoming a central partner of the United States in implementing the new geopolitics of connectivity in the region [22].



Fig. 1. Rail and Road Connections in the South Caucasus [22]

On February 10, 2026, the governments of Azerbaijan and the United States of America officially signed the Charter on Strategic Partnership, which institutionalized a qualitatively new level of bilateral relations. The document enshrined TRIPP as a central element of regional connectivity and provided for the establishment of permanent working groups in four priority areas: economy and trade, energy, digital development and artificial intelligence, as well as security and defense.

The Charter officially recognizes Azerbaijan's strategic role as a reliable partner in energy security and provides for the expansion of cooperation in the oil, gas, and electricity sectors, the deepening of interaction in the field of civil nuclear energy, as well as a large-scale technological partnership. The latter includes, in particular, the creation of data processing centers with artificial intelligence on the territory of Azerbaijan with the participation of American private capital. In the security dimension, the Charter expands defense cooperation through mechanisms of defense sales, counterterrorism activities, cybersecurity, and humanitarian demining [20].

Taken together, these provisions attest to an unprecedented level of US strategic engagement in the South Caucasus and definitively establish Azerbaijan in the status of a key regional ally of Washington in the implementation of the new geopolitics of connectivity.

Conclusions. The conducted research demonstrates that US-Azerbaijani relations in the post-conflict period (2020–2026) have undergone a fundamental transformation, evolving from situational energy partnership to an institutionalized strategic alliance. The energy factor has retained its role as the system-forming element of bilateral relations: Azerbaijan, possessing 7 billion barrels of proven oil reserves and having significantly increased gas exports to Europe after 2022, has become a leading pipeline supplier of energy resources for the EU. Baku's plans to increase gas production by 10 billion cubic meters and the agreement with Türkiye for 33 billion cubic meters (Absheron field) fully correlate with US strategic interests in diversifying European energy supplies and minimizing Russia's influence. Tellingly, China remains virtually excluded from access to Azerbaijani hydrocarbons (0,4 % of crude oil and gas exports as of 2025), which confirms Baku's strategic orientation toward Western markets.

A key breakthrough was the signing of the Charter on Strategic Partnership on February 10, 2026, which institutionalized a new level of bilateral relations, enshrining TRIPP as a central element of regional connectivity. The document officially recognized Azerbaijan's strategic importance as a reliable energy partner and laid the foundations for large-scale technological and defense cooperation, attesting to an unprecedented level of US strategic engagement in the South Caucasus.

At the same time, the study revealed a fundamental contradiction between the declared US commitment to promoting democratic values and the actual practice of engagement with the authoritarian regime in Azerbaijan (127th place in the Democracy Index for 2025). Washington's geopolitical and energy interests consistently prevail over concerns about the human rights situation, confirming the relevance of the *realpolitik* paradigm for analyzing bilateral relations. The prospects for further interaction will largely depend on the success of TRIPP's implementation, which faces challenges of a financial, sovereignty-related, and geopolitical nature; however, if successfully realized, it is capable of ultimately transforming Azerbaijan into a central partner of the United States in the new architecture of regional connectivity.

References:

1. *Алієв І.* Азербайджан готовий збільшити поставки газу до ЄС / *І.Алієв* // Укрінформ. – 2026 [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу : <https://cutt.ly/9tJVnOlz>.
2. *Алієв І.* Азербайджан планує збільшити постачання газу до Європи майже вдвічі / *І.Алієв* // Радіо Свобода. – 2022 [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу : <https://cutt.ly/pens6Y0g>.
3. Алієв переміг на позачергових виборах президента – ЦВК Азербайджану / Радіо Свобода. – 2024 [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу : <https://cutt.ly/rendrdMd>.
4. Блінкен провів переговори з Алієвим і Пашиняном та закликав до миру в Карабаху / Радіо Свобода. – 2023 [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу : <https://cutt.ly/Qen4zCe2>.
5. Блінкен привітав «сміливі кроки» Вірменії та Азербайджану щодо мирних переговорів / Радіо Свобода. – 2022 [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу : <https://cutt.ly/RendqKBB>.
6. «В Азербайджані немає цензури»: Алієв заперечив переслідування журналістів у країні / Радіо Свобода. – 2024 [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу : <https://cutt.ly/FendtDff>.
7. В Азербайджані затримані журналісти та опозиціонери / Радіо Свобода. – 2024 [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу : <https://cutt.ly/CendyyZC>.
8. *Губар О.* В ОБСЄ розкритикували вибори президента в Азербайджані / *О.Губар* // DW. – 2018 [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу : <https://cutt.ly/nendeLhM>.
9. ЄСПЛ ухвалив рішення на користь Азербайджанської служби Радіо Свобода / Радіо Свобода. – 2024 [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу : <https://cutt.ly/Pendrlc1>.
10. Індекс демократії / The Economist Intelligence Unit [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу : <https://cutt.ly/EendwDw3>.
11. *Кіссінджер Г.* Дипломатія / *Г.Кіссінджер*. – Київ : КМ-БУКС, 2023. – 864 с.
12. *Мустафазаде П.Т.* Зовнішньополітичні відносини Азербайджану та США в Каспійському регіоні / *П.Т. Мустафазаде* // Вісник Львівського університету. Серія : міжнародні відносини. – 2019. – Вип. 46. – С. 182–188.
13. Блінкен Е. США стурбовані гуманітарним становищем населення Карабаху / *Е.Блінкен* // Радіо Свобода. – 2023 [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу : <https://cutt.ly/6endwsB1>.
14. Туреччина уклала 15-річну угоду з Азербайджаном на постачання газу / Економічна правда. – 2026 [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу : <https://cutt.ly/StJvMta5>.
15. *Фукуяма Ф.* Витоки політичного порядку. Від прадавніх часів до Французької революції / *Ф.Фукуяма*. – Київ : Наш формат, 2018. – 576 с.
16. *Шевчук А.В.* Китайсько-азербайджанські відносини у XXI ст.: політичний, економічний та культурно-освітній виміри / *А.В. Шевчук, Л.М. Шевчук, О.С. Войтюк* // Sciences of Europe. – 2024. – № 139. – С. 104–112.
17. 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Azerbaijan / U.S. Department of State [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://cutt.ly/kendeuGo>.
18. Azerbaijan / OEC (Observatory of Economic Complexity) [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/aze>.
19. Crude Petroleum in Azerbaijan / OEC (Observatory of Economic Complexity) [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://cutt.ly/QensPKKz>.
20. Charter on Strategic Partnership between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the United States of America / Official web-site of President of Azerbaijan Republic. – 2026 [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://president.az/en/articles/view/71553/print>.
21. *Cohen A.* OPEC Is Dead, Long Live OPEC+ / *A.Cohen* // Forbes. – 2018 [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://cutt.ly/hensRYXJ>.
22. *De Waal T.* Rewiring the South Caucasus: TRIPP and the New Geopolitics of Connectivity / *T.De Waal, A.Kochinyan, Z.Shiriyev* // Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. – 2026 [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://cutt.ly/9tJVQEf9>.
23. Defense and Security Cooperation / Embasse of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United States of America [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://cutt.ly/Bendqtkz>.
24. Department Press Briefing / U.S. Department of State. – 2024 [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://cutt.ly/wendtpgF>.
25. Foreign trade relations / Azərbaycan Respublikasının Dövlət Statistika Komitəsi [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : https://www.stat.gov.az/special_version/news/index.php?id=6506.
26. *Gadimova N.* Azerbaijan Backs OPEC+ Deal To Cut Oil Production / *N.Gadimova* // Caspian News. – 2020 [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://cutt.ly/bensRoso>.
27. GDP (current US\$) – Azerbaijan / The World Bank [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://cutt.ly/aensWHwq>.
28. GDP per capita (current US\$). Azerbaijan / The World Bank [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://cutt.ly/gensEOo0>.
29. *Hajiyeva G.* Azerbaijan Begins Gas Supply to Slovenia, Expands Footprint in Europe / *G.Hajiyeva* // Caspian News. – 2024 [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://cutt.ly/VensR8u1>.
30. *Ibrahimov R.* US-Azerbaijan Relations: A View from Baku / *R.Ibrahimov*. – Washington, DC : Rethink Paper, 2014. – № 17. – 20 p.
31. Israel/Azerbaijan / OEC (Observatory of Economic Complexity) [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://cutt.ly/Aens5MoW>.
32. Republic of Azerbaijan / International monetary fund [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/AZE>.

33. *Strakes J.E.* Situating the «Balanced Foreign Policy»: The Role of System Structure in Azerbaijan's Multi-Vector Diplomacy / *J.E. Strakes* // *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*. – 2013. – № 15 (1). – P. 37–67 [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://cutt.ly/Ben0eMA8>.
34. *Strimbovski S.* Azerbaijan's balanced foreign policy trapped in a volatile geopolitical context / *S.Strimbovski* // *Europolicy: Continuity and Change in European Governance*. – 2016. – № 10. – P. 121–134.
35. *Yadav R.* Energy Diplomacy In Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy / *R.Yadav* // *Think India*. – 2019. – Vol. 22 (3). – P. 570–580 [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://cutt.ly/Hen0uW71>.
36. *Yildirim Z.* U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Azerbaijan: From «Alliance» to «Strategic Partnership» / *Z.Yildirim* // *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*. – 2012. – № 11. – P. 1–15 [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/19299>.
37. *Zarifian J.* Iran and Its Two Neighbours Armenia and Azerbaijan: Resuming Relationships under America's Suspicious Eyes / *J.Zarifian* // *Iran and the Caucasus*. – 2009. – № 13. – P. 383–399 [Electronic resource]. – Access mode : <https://cutt.ly/Ren0mXL4>.

References:

1. Aliiev, I. (2026), «Azerbaidzhan hotovyi zbilshyty postavky hazu do YeS», *Ukrinform*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/9tJVnOlz>
2. Aliiev, I. (2022), «Azerbaidzhan planuie zbilshyty postachannia hazu do Yevropy maizhe vdvichi», *Radio Svoboda*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/pens6Y0g>
3. «Aliiev peremih na pozacherhovyykh vyborakh prezydenta – TsVK Azerbaidzhanu» (2024), *Radio Svoboda*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/rendrdMd>
4. «Blinken proviv perehovory z Aliievym i Pashynianom ta zaklykav do myru v Karabakhu» (2023), *Radio Svoboda*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/Qen4zCe2>
5. «Blinken pryvitav “smilyvi kroky” Virmenii ta Azerbaidzhanu shchodo myrnykh perehovoriv» (2022), *Radio Svoboda*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/RendqKBB>
6. «“V Azerbaidzhani nemaie tsenzury”: Aliiev zaperechyv peresliduvannia zhurnalistiv u kraini» (2024), *Radio Svoboda*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/FendtDff>
7. «V Azerbaidzhani zatrymani zhurnalisty ta opozytsionery» (2024), *Radio Svoboda*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/CendyyZC>
8. Hubar, O.V (2018), «OBSIe rozkrytkuvaly vybory prezydenta v Azerbaidzhani», *DW*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/nendeLhM>
9. «YeSPL ukhvalyv rishennia na koryst Azerbaidzhanskoj sluzhby Radio Svoboda» (2024), *Radio Svoboda*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/Pendrlc1>
10. «The Economist Intelligence Unit», *Indeks demokratii*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/EendwDw3>
11. Kissyndzher, H. (2023), *Dyplomatiia*, KM-BUKS, Kyiv, 864 p.
12. Mustafazade, P.T. (2019), «Zovnishnopolitychni vidnosyny Azerbaidzhanu ta SShA v Kaspiiskomu rehioni», *Visnyk Lvivskoho universytetu. Serii. Mizhnarodni vidnosyny*, Issue 46, pp. 182–188.
13. Blinken, E. (2023), «SShA sturbovani humanitarnym stanovyschem naselennia Karabakhu», *Radio Svoboda*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/6endwsB1>
14. «Turechchyna uklala 15-richnu uhodu z Azerbaidzhanom na postachannia hazu» (2026), *Ekonomichna pravda*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/StJVMa5>
15. Fukuiama, F. (2018), *Vytoky politychnoho poriadku. Vid pradavnykh chasiv do Frantsuzkoj revoliutsii*, Nash format, Kyiv, 576 p.
16. Shevchuk, A.V., Shevchuk, L.M. and Voitiuk, O.S. (2024), «Kytaisko-azerbaidzhanski vidnosyny u XXI st.: politychnyi, ekonomichni ta kulturno-osvitnii vymiry», *Sciences of Europe*, No. 139, pp. 104–112.
17. U.S. Department of State (2023), *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Azerbaijan*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/kendeuGo>
18. OEC (Observatory of Economic Complexity), *Azerbaijan*, [Online], available at: <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/aze>
19. OEC (Observatory of Economic Complexity), *Crude Petroleum in Azerbaijan*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/QensPKKz>
20. «Charter on Strategic Partnership between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the United States of America» (2026), *Official web-site of President of Azerbaijan Republic*, [Online], available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/71553/print>
21. Cohen, A. (2018), «OPEC Is Dead, Long Live OPEC+», *Forbes*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/hensRYXJ>
22. De Waal, T., Kochinyan, A. and Shiryev, Z. (2026), *Rewiring the South Caucasus: TRIPP and the New Geopolitics of Connectivity*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/9tJVQEf9>
23. Embasse of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United States of America, *Defense and Security Cooperation*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/BendqztzK>
24. U.S. Department of State (2024), *Department Press Briefing*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/wendtpgF>
25. Azərbaycan Respublikasının Dövlət Statistika Komitəsi, *Foreign trade relations*, [Online], available at: https://www.stat.gov.az/special_version/news/index.php?id=6506
26. Gadimova, N. (2020), «Azerbaijan Backs OPEC+ Deal To Cut Oil Production», *Caspian News*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/bensRoso>
27. The World Bank, *GDP (current US\$) – Azerbaijan*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/aensWHwq>
28. The World Bank, *GDP per capita (current US\$). Azerbaijan*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/gensEOo0>

29. Hajiyeva, G. (2024), «Azerbaijan Begins Gas Supply to Slovenia, Expands Footprint in Europe», *Caspian News*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/VensR8u1>
30. Ibrahimov, R. (2014), *US-Azerbaijan Relations: A View from Baku*, Rethink Paper, Washington, DC, No. 17, 20 p.
31. OEC (Observatory of Economic Complexity), *Israel/Azerbaijan*, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/Aens5MoW>
32. International monetary fund, *Republic of Azerbaijan*, [Online], available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/AZE>
33. Strakes, J.E. (2013), «Situating the “Balanced Foreign Policy”: The Role of System Structure in Azerbaijan's Multi-Vector Diplomacy», *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, No. 15 (1), pp. 37–67, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/Ben0eMA8>
34. Strimbovschi, S. (2016), «Azerbaijan's balanced foreign policy trapped in a volatile geopolitical context», *Europolity: Continuity and Change in European Governance*, No. 10, pp. 121–134.
35. Yadav, R. (2019), «Energy Diplomacy In Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy», *Think India*, Vol. 22 (3), pp. 570–580, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/Hen0uW71>
36. Yildirim, Z. (2012), «U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Azerbaijan: From “Alliance” to “Strategic Partnership”», *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, No. 11, pp. 1–15, [Online], available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/19299>
37. Zarifian, J. (2009), «Iran and Its Two Neighbours Armenia and Azerbaijan: Resuming Relationships under America's Suspicious Eyes», *Iran and the Caucasus*, No. 13, pp. 383–399, [Online], available at: <https://cutt.ly/Ren0mXL4>

Shevchuk Andrii – Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor, Professor of the Department of International Relations and Political Management, Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University, Ukraine.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9023-5214>.

Research interests:

- history and theory of international relations;
- regional security architecture in Europe and Asia.

E-mail: shevchuk.istor@gmail.com.

Шевчук А.

Трансформація американо-азербайджанських відносин у постконфліктний період (2020–2026)

У статті здійснено комплексний аналіз трансформації американо-азербайджанських відносин у постконфліктний період (2020–2026 рр.) крізь призму взаємодії енергетичних, безпекових та геополітичних чинників. Досліджено еволюцію двосторонньої взаємодії від ситуативного енергетичного партнерства, що ґрунтувалося на постачанні азербайджанських вуглеводнів на європейські ринки в обхід росії та Ірану, до інституціоналізованого стратегічного альянсу, закріпленого підписанням Хартії про стратегічне партнерство 10 лютого 2026 року. Розглянуто роль вуглеводневого чинника як системоутворюючого елемента зовнішньої політики Баку, зокрема проаналізовано динаміку нарощування експорту азербайджанського газу до Європи після повномасштабного вторгнення росії в Україну, а також стратегічне значення угод щодо збільшення видобутку на родовищах «Шах-Деніз» та «Абшерон». Доведено, що енергетична дипломатія Азербайджану є дієвим інструментом реалізації геополітичних інтересів США щодо диверсифікації європейського енергопостачання та мінімізації впливу росії на енергетичному ринку ЄС, тоді як Китай залишається практично відстороненим від доступу до азербайджанських вуглеводневих ресурсів. Особливу увагу приділено аналізу новітніх американських ініціатив – проєкту транспортної зв'язаності TRIPP (Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity) та Хартії про стратегічне партнерство 2026 року, які засвідчують безпрецедентний рівень стратегічної залученості США до Південного Кавказу. Досліджено безпековий вимір співпраці, враховуючи еволюцію позиції Вашингтона щодо карабаського конфлікту та програми військово-технічної допомоги Азербайджану. Розкрито фундаментальну суперечність між декларативною прихильністю США до просування демократичних цінностей та реальною практикою взаємодії з авторитарним режимом в Азербайджані, що підтверджує релевантність парадигми *geopolitik* для аналізу двосторонніх відносин. На основі проведеного дослідження сформульовано прогностичні оцінки щодо перспектив імплементації TRIPP та подальшої трансформації американо-азербайджанського стратегічного партнерства в контексті формування нової архітектури регіональної безпеки та зв'язаності на Південному Кавказі.

Ключові слова: Азербайджан; США; стратегічне партнерство; енергетична дипломатія; Південний газовий коридор; TRIPP; Хартія про стратегічне партнерство; геополітика; регіональна безпека; Південний Кавказ; Нагірний Карабах; реальна політика; історія та теорія міжнародних відносин.

The article was sent to the editorial board on 06.01.2026.