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## MADANIY DIPLOMATIYA: O‘ZBEKISTON VA OZARBAYJON O‘RTASIDAGI QARDOSHLIK RISHTALARI

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## MAQOLA HAQIDA

**Kalit so‘zlar:**

O‘zbekiston, Ozarbayjon, madaniy diplomatiya, turkiy davlatlar.

**Annotatsiya:** Ushbu maqoladan maqsad O‘zbekiston va Ozarbayjon o‘rtasidagi qardoshlik aloqalarini madaniy diplomatiya nuqtai nazaridan ko‘rib chiqishdan iborat. Umumiy turkiy merosga ega bo‘lgan ikki davlat tarixan til, san‘at va adabiyot kabi sohalarida faol hamkorlik qilib kelgan. Zamonaviy davrda bu aloqalar madaniy diplomatiya orqali qayta tiklandi. Ta‘lim, san‘at va madaniy faoliyat sohalarida hamkorlikni rivojlantirib, ikki davlat o‘z xalqlari o‘rtasidagi aloqalarni mustahkamlab, turkiy hamjamiyat ichida hamjihatlikni mustahkamlamoqda. O‘zbekiston va Ozarbayjon o‘z madaniy merosini kelajak avlodlarga yetkazishda muhim rol o‘ynaydi.

## CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: FRATERNAL TIES BETWEEN UZBEKISTAN AND AZERBAIJAN

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## ABOUT ARTICLE

**Key words:** Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Cultural Diplomacy, Turkic States.

– **Abstract:** This article aims to examine the fraternal ties between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan in the context of cultural diplomacy. With their shared Turkic heritage, the two countries have historically demonstrated a robust engagement in domains such as language, art, and literature. In the contemporary era, these ties have been reinvigorated through the conduit of cultural diplomacy. By fostering collaboration in education, the

arts, and cultural activities, the two nations have reinforced the bonds between their respective peoples, while fortifying the solidarity within the Turkic community. Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan serve as pivotal actors in the transmission of their cultural legacy to future generations.

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## КУЛЬТУРНАЯ ДИПЛОМАТИЯ: БРАТСКИЕ СВЯЗИ МЕЖДУ УЗБЕКИСТАНОМ И АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНОМ

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### О СТАТЬЕ

**Ключевые слова:**  
Узбекистан, Азербайджан,  
культурная дипломатия,  
тюркские государства.

**Аннотация:** Цель данной статьи - рассмотреть братские связи между Узбекистаном и Азербайджаном в контексте культурной дипломатии. Имея общее тюркское наследие, эти две страны исторически демонстрировали активное взаимодействие в таких областях, как язык, искусство и литература. В современную эпоху эти связи оживились благодаря культурной дипломатии. Развивая сотрудничество в области образования, искусства и культурной деятельности, две страны укрепляют связи между своими народами, одновременно укрепляя солидарность внутри тюркского сообщества. Узбекистан и Азербайджан играют ключевую роль в передаче своего культурного наследия будущим поколениям.

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### INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan are two Turkic States with a long history of shared cultural and historical traditions. Despite their geographical location to the east and west of the Caspian Sea, cultural and historical interactions between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have remained strong for centuries. Situated in the middle of the Silk Road, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have historically been centres of science, art and trade, and this shared history has laid the foundations for today's cultural diplomacy. The two countries share common Turkic roots, language similarities, literary and artistic heritage, which have linked the two peoples throughout history and have been further strengthened in the modern era.

Since gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have made significant strides in the realm of cultural diplomacy, particularly in the 21st century. Cultural diplomacy has become an integral part of the foreign policies of the two countries, reinforcing not only

political and economic cooperation but also cultural ties. Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, two important actors of the Turkic world, are reviving their historical ties through cultural projects and activities, thereby deepening their cooperation in several fields, including education, art, language and history. This cooperation creates a new synergy not only between the two countries but also throughout the Turkic world.

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This article seeks to examine the fraternal ties between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, with a particular focus on the role of cultural diplomacy in forging and sustaining these ties. It also aims to evaluate the historical, cultural and political dimensions of these ties. Furthermore, the objective is to analyse the evolution of cultural cooperation between the two countries in the modern period and its overall impact on the Turkic world.

This study examines the cultural dimension of diplomatic relations between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, utilising historical and cultural data. In the article, the interactions between the two countries will be discussed, regarding sources including historical texts, cultural events and educational cooperation. Additionally, regional cooperation and cultural diplomacy mechanisms in the Turkic world will be analysed, with a focus on the future direction of these relations.

### **Cultural Diplomacy in the Modern Era**

Cultural diplomacy represents a foreign policy instrument utilized to foster cultural connections between nations. In the modern era, this concept is not limited to the political and economic interests of states; it also encompasses their objective of achieving long-term peace and cooperation through the promotion of cultural interaction between peoples. Cultural diplomacy serves to establish a connection between two countries or societies, utilising elements such as art, literature, education and history. In the contemporary era, within the context of globalisation, cultural diplomacy has assumed a pivotal role in the soft power strategies of states.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C.P. Schneider, Cultural Diplomacy: Hard to Define, but You'd Know It If You Saw It. *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 2006, pp.55-57.

Cultural diplomacy has a conceptual framework that was developed in the 1960s and is regarded as one of the foreign policy instruments defined as 'soft power' (yumshoq kuch). This concept, which was first proposed by Joseph Nye, emphasises that countries can exert influence in the international arena through cultural values and interaction, in addition to military and economic pressure. According to Nye, a country's soft power is created through the spread of its cultural appeal and ideals.<sup>2</sup> In this context, cultural diplomacy is an instrument of foreign policy that aims to establish a wider network of international relations by deepening social, cultural and educational interactions between countries.

The scope of modern cultural diplomacy has been expanded to promote a country's cultural heritage, art, language and values to other countries, to create a positive image in international relations. In particular, the advent of digital technologies and social media has enabled cultural diplomacy to transcend the limitations of inter-state relations, extending its reach to a global arena.<sup>3</sup>

The contribution of Russian scholars to the definition of cultural diplomacy is related to the broader contextualisation of the concept. In Russia, cultural diplomacy is often referred to as 'культурная дипломатия' and occupies an important place as the official cultural policy of the state. The aim of cultural diplomacy is defined as "the strengthening of Russia's international image, the promotion of its national cultural values and heritage".<sup>4</sup> Although this approach originated during the Soviet era and was initially shaped by ideological interactions, it is currently supported primarily by cultural and scientific cooperation in the modern era.

As posited by the Russian scholar Medvedev, cultural diplomacy signifies the expansion of educational, scientific and cultural projects, as well as the fortification of mutual comprehension between peoples. Cultural diplomacy exerts a far-reaching influence, not only at the state level, but also through civil society and academia.<sup>5</sup>

Cultural diplomacy is becoming an increasingly significant aspect of international relations. This is due to several factors, including:<sup>6</sup>

- **Soft Power:** As an alternative to hard power elements such as cultural diplomacy, and military and economic power, cultural diplomacy increases a country's soft power by increasing its attractiveness and enabling other countries to cooperate voluntarily.

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<sup>2</sup> See: J. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. Public Affairs, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> M.C. Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*. Center for Arts and Culture, 2003, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> В. А. Медведев, *Культурная дипломатия как инструмент "мягкой силы" в международных отношениях*. Вестник МГИМО, 4(25), 2012, 35-40.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> A.S. Mattila, *Cultural Diplomacy: A Theoretical Framework*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p.215.

- Image Creation: The cultural products of a country shape the perception in other countries by creating a positive image of that country.
- Cultural Exchange and Understanding: Cultural diplomacy increases understanding between different cultures and paves the way for cultural exchange.
- Economic Benefits: Cultural events and exchanges stimulate economic growth in sectors such as tourism, education and cultural industries.

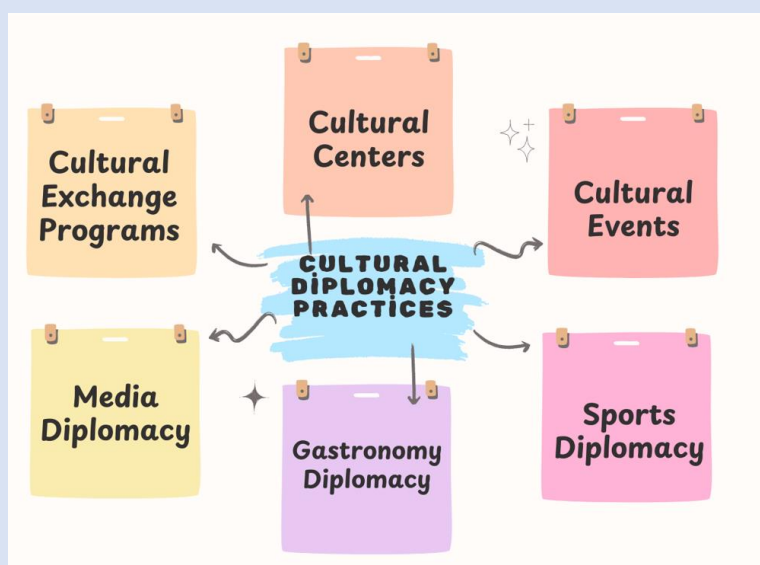


Figure 1: Cultural Diplomacy Practices.

Source: Figure created by the author.

Cultural diplomacy is a strategy employed by numerous countries. France, for instance, utilises the Alliance Française network to disseminate French culture globally, while Italy seeks to enhance its national image through events in the realms of fashion and design. South Korea, similarly, leverages popular culture products such as K-pop and K-drama to cultivate a global fan base.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, in the contemporary era, cultural diplomacy has emerged as a pivotal instrument, facilitating the more efficacious conduct of states within the global milieu. Cultural diplomacy serves to advance a more tranquil and cognizant world by fortifying not only inter-state relations but also the bonds between disparate cultures.

The bilateral cooperation between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan represents a case study in modern cultural diplomacy. It serves to reinforce the bonds between the two countries, which are anchored in a shared historical, linguistic, and cultural heritage. In multilateral forums such as the Organisation of Turkic States, the two countries are actively engaged in promoting their

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, *Cultural Diplomacy: A Handbook for Practitioners*. Paris, UNESCO, 2017.

collective cultural legacy on the global stage. Educational collaboration, cultural events, and art initiatives stand out as the primary instruments that reinforce the fraternal ties between the two peoples.

### **Historical Ties**

Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan are two significant members of the Turkic world, with a long history of shared cultural and historical traditions. Despite the geographical distance between these two countries, they have historically shared numerous common characteristics. The migration of Turkic tribes from Central Asia to the Caucasus, a process that commenced in pre-Islamic times, has resulted in a robust foundation for interaction between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. In particular, the nomadic and settled lifestyles of Turkic tribes in these regions have left a significant imprint on the region's geography.<sup>8</sup> The historical processes uniting Central Asia and the Caucasus have developed through the establishment of common cultural, linguistic and trade ties. The adoption of Islam, the influence of the Seljuk Empire and the commercial links provided by the Silk Road are among the factors that contributed to the deepening of relations between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. During the Soviet era, these two countries were under a unified political system and subsequently transformed their relations following the attainment of their independence. The historical ties between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan are a significant foundation for the bilateral cooperation that exists today.<sup>9</sup>

The historical record indicates that various Turkic tribes have inhabited the territories of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. The rise of the Great Hun Empire in Central Asia, followed by the Gokturk Khaganate, constituted a pivotal moment in the establishment of Turkish culture and identity in these geographies. As a result of the westward expansion of Turkish tribes, Azerbaijan has become one of the most significant centres of Turkish presence in the Caucasus region. Uzbekistan, in contrast, is the centre of Central Asia and has been under the rule of various Turkish states, including the Karakhanids and the Timurid Empire, following the Göktürk Khaganate.<sup>10</sup>

The earliest known historical connections between the peoples of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan can be traced back to the 9th-7th centuries BC. At that time, the Cimmeric-Iskit-Sakka tribes, originating from Altai, established a partial settlement in the territory of present-day Uzbekistan. They subsequently continued their movement from the north, traversing the Crimea and the Great Caucasus Mountains, and proceeded to occupy the territory of present-day

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<sup>8</sup> See: Touraj Atabaki and Sanjyot Mehendal, *Central Asia and the Caucasus: Transnationalism and Diaspora*. London: Routledge, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Denis Sinor, "The Historical Role of the Turk Empire." In *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, edited by Denis Sinor, 285–316. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 102 – 105.

<sup>10</sup> Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. pp. 52-54.



Azerbaijan. During this period, the Massaget tribes, representing a formidable military-political unity, inhabited the territory of present-day Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan.<sup>11</sup>

The establishment of the Seljuk Empire saw a greater cultural integration of Turkish traditions in the Caucasus and Central Asia. The Seljuk Empire exerted control over a vast expanse of territory, spanning from Central Asia to Azerbaijan. This resulted in the establishment of cultural, political, and military connections between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. This process contributed to the formation of a shared historical consciousness between the two regions. Furthermore, following the Mongol invasions, Turkish-origin dynasties such as the Timurids and the Karakoyunlus played a pivotal role in maintaining these relations.<sup>12</sup>

The two countries have been in constant interaction with each other throughout history, thereby ensuring the preservation of their respective identities and cultures. The shared history of the two countries provides the foundation for their contemporary political and cultural relations.

One of the most significant historical connections between the two states is the Silk Road. The Silk Road has served not only as a conduit for trade but also as a conduit for cultural and political exchange between Central Asia and the Caucasus throughout history. The cities of Uzbekistan, including Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva, have long been regarded as pivotal nodes along the Silk Road. These urban centres facilitated direct connections with Azerbaijan, a key hub along the historical caravan routes. This not only fostered increased commercial, cultural and diplomatic interactions but also contributed to the dissemination of ideas and cultural exchange during the 9th and 10th centuries.

The existence of the Silk Road has had a profound impact on the economic dimension of the relations between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. These routes, which serve as transit points for significant trade goods such as cotton, silk, and spices, have sustained commercial relations between the two countries throughout history. During the Seljuk period, in particular, these trade routes constituted the economic foundation of interstate collaboration.<sup>13</sup> The Silk Road continues to serve as a source of inspiration for contemporary forms of collaboration, functioning as a tangible symbol of the historical ties that bind diverse regions together.

The historical Silk Road represents a trade network that originated in China and extended to Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. This trade route has had a profound impact on world history, facilitating not only the exchange of goods but also cultural, technological, and

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<sup>11</sup> Historical and cultural roots of cooperation between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, Uz Daily, <https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/historical-and-cultural-roots-of-cooperation-between-uzbekistan-and-azerbaijan/>, Access: 12.09.2024

<sup>12</sup> Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992, p. 94.

<sup>13</sup> See: D. G. Normuratovna & A. K. Timurovna, *Spiritual Heritage and Great Silk Road Traditions are an Important Factor in The Development of National Tourism in Uzbekistan*, 2020.

religious interactions. Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, two significant stops along the Silk Road, have benefited considerably from these interactions, contributing to the enrichment of their historical and cultural heritage.

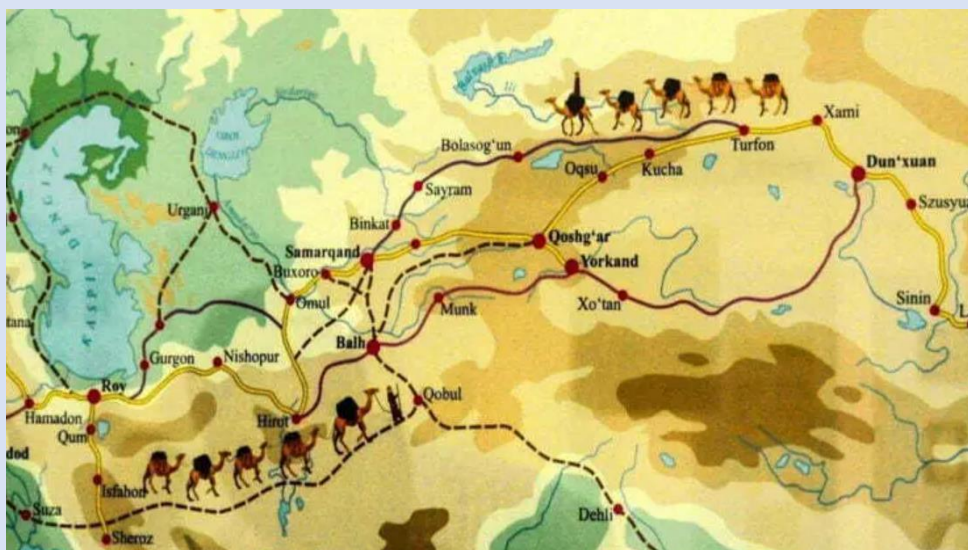


Figure 3: A Map of The Historical Silk Road.

Source: <https://www.turkestantravel.com/ru/velikiy-sheikovyy-put/>

Azerbaijan occupies a geostrategic location at the crossroads of the Silk Road, situated at the confluence of the Caspian Sea and the Persian Corridor. This region constituted one of the principal stops for merchants travelling from Asia to Europe. Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, gained particular significance concerning maritime trade, becoming a focal point for commercial routes. Maritime trade via the Caspian Sea bolstered the local economy of Azerbaijan and contributed to the region's cultural diversity. Through the Silk Road, merchants from diverse national backgrounds arrived in Azerbaijan, contributing to the advancement of the region in the realms of art, science, and technology. Along this trade route, Azerbaijani architecture, music, and handicrafts underwent a process of enrichment through the infusion of diverse cultural influences.<sup>14</sup>

Uzbekistan represents one of the most significant junctures along the terrestrial routes traversed by the Silk Road. Cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara flourished as major trading hubs during the golden age of the Silk Road. These cities functioned as trading points for merchants from both the east and west, as well as cultural centres. Through madrasas, mosques and other architectural structures, cities in Uzbekistan were also known as centres of Islamic

<sup>14</sup> K. Leonard, The Silk Road Renewed? South Asian Entrepreneurs in Uzbekistan. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 33(2), pp. 276-289.



science, art and philosophy. Samarkand in particular was renowned for its astronomy and mathematics studies. Scientists such as Ulug Bey benefited significantly from the transfer of knowledge facilitated by this trade on the Silk Road.<sup>15</sup>

The commercial and cultural mobility facilitated by the Silk Road proved beneficial to both countries, resulting in significant economic and cultural advancement. These regions served as pivotal hubs not only for trade but also for the convergence of civilisations and the dissemination of knowledge. The Silk Road provided a conduit for diverse cultures and religions to coexist in these regions, which became a cornerstone of the rich cultural heritage of both countries.<sup>16</sup>

The countries of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan are situated close to one another and share many linguistic and cultural ties. Both countries have been influenced by the Oghuz and Karluk groups, which are branches of the Turkic language family. Azerbaijani Turkish belongs to the Oghuz group, while Uzbek belongs to the Karluk group. These two language groups have been shaped and influenced by each other within a common Turkic language family throughout history. This linguistic affinity has facilitated communication between people.<sup>17</sup>

Cultural interactions in Central Asia and the Caucasus, especially during the Seljuk and Timurid periods, have left important traces in the fields of art, literature and architecture. The Palace of Shirvanshahs in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, and Registan Square in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, are two examples of significant buildings that contribute to the architectural heritage of the Islamic world.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, poets and writers from these two regions have established a shared tradition of Turkic literature. Notable poets such as Nizami Ganjavi (Azerbaijan) and Ali Shir Navoi (Uzbekistan) have significantly influenced the literature of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Both literary figures addressed universal themes, including love, heroism, and social values, in their works, thereby reinforcing the cultural similarities between the two regions.<sup>19</sup>

The research findings indicate that from the 4th to the 3rd centuries BCE, the Caucasian Alanya state was engaged in economic and cultural relations with Central Asia, China and India via the Kura-Caspian-Amu-Darya. The similarities between the material culture remains unearthed during archaeological excavations in the cities of Efrasiyab (ancient Samarkand),

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<sup>15</sup> A. Schuhbert, H. Thees, V. Herbold, J. Weinreiter & M. Kantsperger, Cultural Tourism Routes as Incubators for Innovation and Economic Diversification: A Potential Analysis in the Framework of the New Silk Road Initiative in Azerbaijan. *Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftsgeographie*, 64, 2020, pp. 211-232.

<sup>16</sup> J. Y. Yaxshilikov, The Great Silk Road The Historical Basis For The Development Of National Tourism In Uzbekistan. *The American Journal of Social Science and Education Innovations*, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Andrée F. Sjoberg, Language structure and cultural identity: A historical perspective on the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, *Central Asian Survey*, 14: (4), 1993, pp. 557 - 564.

<sup>18</sup> Historical and cultural roots of cooperation between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> See: Terane Heşimova, 20. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Azerbaycan ve Özbek Şiirinin Millî İdeolojik Yönden Karşılaştırılması, *Bilgi*, 108, Kış, 2024.

Bukhara, Merv, Nisa and household items found in the cities of Oregala, Baku and Shamakhi substantiate these relations. These artefacts exhibit a high degree of similarity in terms of production technique, forms and patterns.<sup>20</sup>

A comparable phenomenon can be observed in the domain of music. In both Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, traditional musical forms have emerged as an integral aspect of the shared Turkic cultural heritage. Azerbaijan's mugham and Uzbekistan's makom music are deeply entrenched musical genres that encompass improvisation and rhythmic elements. These musical forms serve as a conduit for the emotions and historical experiences of the people, while simultaneously exemplifying the multifaceted richness of Turkic culture.<sup>21</sup>

Cultural interaction was not confined to the realms of art and literature; it also manifested itself in social and religious rituals. Nowruz, celebrated in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, is a common Turkish-Iranian tradition symbolising the arrival of spring. It serves as an indicator of the cultural ties that bind the two countries. This holiday highlights the themes of brotherhood, unity and harmony with nature among the people and symbolises the cultural integration of the two countries throughout history.<sup>22</sup>

One of the most significant historical connections between the two states is their shared Soviet past. In the early 20th century, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan became part of the Soviet Union in 1922, following the collapse of Tsarist Russia. During this period, both countries underwent profound social, economic and political transformations under the influence of the Soviet system. The centralist policies of the Soviet Union transformed both Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan into production centres based on specific agricultural products. In particular, Uzbekistan became renowned for its cotton production, while Azerbaijan became a significant centre for oil production. This economic arrangement led the two countries to assume pivotal roles in the division of labour within the Soviet Union.

During the Soviet era, nationalist movements in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan were repressed, and local cultures were transformed following the tenets of Soviet ideology.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the deeply entrenched cultural identities of both countries remained intact to a certain extent during this period. Notwithstanding the Soviet government's endeavours to disseminate the Russian language and culture, it proved unable to fully integrate the Uzbek and

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<sup>20</sup> A. Seyidov and A. Alekberov, *Azərbaycan tarixşünaslığında Mərkəzi Asya sorunları*. "Tarix, insan və toplum" dergisi. № 2 (13), 2015, s.24

<sup>21</sup> *Азербайджанско-Узбекские литературно-культурные связи*, Az Culture, <https://azculture.uz/ru/nashi-drujba.php?link=let-siviyazi>, Access: 13.09.2024

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> See: Medihanur Argalı, *Dengeleme Stratejisi Bağlamında Özbekistan Dış Politikası*, Ankara, Astana Yay., 2024, ss.71-75; Orkhan Valiyev, *Azərbaycan'da Milliyetçilik: Ulusun ve Ulus - Devletin Oluşumu*, İstanbul, Türkiye Notları Yayınevi, 2021.

Azeri languages and cultural elements. In both countries, the loyalty of the local population to their language and traditions constituted the foundation of the independence movements that emerged after the Soviet era.<sup>24</sup>

The education and industrialisation policies of the Soviet Union played a pivotal role in the modernisation of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. From the 1930s onwards, there was a rapid increase in literacy rates in both countries, accompanied by significant progress in industry and infrastructure. The implementation of collectivisation policies in agriculture by the Soviets led to major social changes in the rural areas of both countries, with agriculture organised through collective farms (*kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz*), which had a profound impact on the livelihoods of local people.<sup>25</sup>

In the final years of the Soviet Union, particularly in the late 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *Glasnost* (openness) and *Perestroika* (restructuring) facilitated the emergence of independence movements in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. The popular movements that commenced in Azerbaijan reached their zenith in the Black January massacre in Baku in 1990, which constituted a pivotal juncture in the opposition to the Soviet regime. During the same period, nationalist movements gained traction in Uzbekistan and subsequently, both countries proclaimed their independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.<sup>26</sup>

The period of common Soviet rule had a profound impact on the political, social and economic structures of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. The experiences of this period have shaped the potential for cooperation between the two countries in the post-independence era. The economic ties and common language policies inherited from the Soviet Union continue to exert a significant influence on the nature of contemporary relations.

In conclusion, the relations between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have been shaped by a complex network of cultural, linguistic, commercial and political ties throughout history. The historical relations between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan are rooted in common Turkic ancestry, the establishment of trade networks along the Silk Road, and the development of political relations under the Seljuk Empire. During the Soviet era, both countries were under a unified political structure, which shaped their relations in the modern period. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have reinvigorated their historical ties and initiated the formation of political, economic, and cultural cooperation.

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<sup>24</sup> Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in the former Soviet Union: Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan compared*, *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, 3: (1), 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> See: Ben Fowkes, *The Disintegration of the Soviet Union: A Study in the Rise and Triumph of Nationalism*. London: Macmillan, 1997; İsmail Polat, *Özbekistan Birinci Cumhurbaşkanı İslam Kerimov Milli İdeolojinin Oluşumu*, Ankara, Astana Yay. 2024.

The historical ties have contributed to the expansion of the depth and scope of the relations that exist between the two countries in the present day. The foreign policy of both countries has been shaped by their historical roots in the period following their respective independence. The diplomatic, economic and cultural cooperation between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan is currently evolving into a noteworthy model of regional and global collaboration. In particular, the two countries are engaged in close communication in areas of mutual interest, such as energy, trade and infrastructure projects. Furthermore, their involvement in the Organisation of Turkic States and other regional organisations reflects the enduring historical ties between the two countries.

#### Cooperation in Education and Language

The establishment of diplomatic relations between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan occurred on 2 October 1995. In 1996, Azerbaijan opened an embassy in Tashkent, and in 1998, Uzbekistan opened an embassy in Baku, thereby demonstrating a willingness to develop relations. Subsequent to this, relations have been maintained through various meetings and visits.<sup>27</sup> A significant element in the evolution of bilateral relations is the migration of Azerbaijani Turks from Azerbaijan to Uzbekistan during the Soviet era. In 1992, Azerbaijanis in Uzbekistan established several organisations with the aim of fostering cultural and economic relations between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. These included the Cultural Centre of the Azerbaijan-Uzbekistan Society for Cultural Economic Relations, the Turan Congress and the Karabakh Relief Committee, all of which were based in Tashkent. Furthermore, Uzbeks provided support to the Karabakh Assistance Committee during the Armenian occupation of Karabakh and condemned the Armenian occupation. This situation had a detrimental impact on relations between Uzbekistan and Armenia.<sup>28</sup>

The initial agreement on cooperation in the field of education between the two states was signed on 18 June 1997. Following this agreement, the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, based on the historical roots of friendship between the two peoples, aimed to promote and develop equal cooperation in the field of education, taking into account the traditional comprehensive Uzbekistan-Azerbaijani ties.<sup>29</sup>

From 1997 to the 2020s, a series of negotiations and agreements were conducted between the two parties, both on a bilateral basis and within the framework of the Turkic Council (subsequently renamed the Organisation of Turkic States). However, this issue has assumed

<sup>27</sup> Qaley Allahverdiyev and Vəhdət Sultanzadə, Heydər Əliyev və Şərq: Türk Dünyası, 6. Cilt, 6. Kitab, Çaşıoğlu, 2006, pp. 194-196.

<sup>28</sup> Seide Kuliyeva, "Özbekistan'da Yaşayan Azerbaycanlı Toplumu: Tarihsel-Demografik Araştırma", Oğuz-Türkmen Araştırmaları Dergisi, II, 1, Haziran 2018, pp. 29-43.

<sup>29</sup> The agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Government of the Azerbaijan Republic on cooperation in the field of education, <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=7006>, Access: 10.09.2024

greater significance between the two states in the 2020s. To illustrate, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan have entered into some agreements to enhance collaboration in the sphere of education, particularly in the 2020s. In 2022, the two countries formalised an agreement about educational cooperation, intending to facilitate student and academic exchange programmes between universities. This agreement is designed to reinforce academic ties between higher education institutions as part of a broader initiative, which is coordinated by the ministries of education of the two countries.

The cooperation agreement between Baku State University and Tashkent State Oriental University represents a significant step forward in the development of student exchange programmes between the two countries. The agreement has facilitated the implementation of joint projects in a range of academic disciplines, including Turkish language and literature, history, international relations and other social sciences.<sup>30</sup>

In the field of language, language cooperation projects have been conducted between the two countries through international organisations such as TURKSOY (International Organisation of Turkic Culture) and the Turkic Academy. Following Uzbekistan's ascension to full membership of the Turkic Council in 2019, collaboration in this domain intensified. In this context, agreements were concluded pertaining to the development of teaching materials on Turkic language and literature and the organisation of joint symposia.

Following the meeting between Presidents Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Ilham Aliyev in August 2024, a number of decisions were taken with regard to cooperation in the field of education. The 'Protocol on Cooperation in the Field of Preschool and General Education' between the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Ministry of Preschool and School Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan was signed by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov and Minister of Preschool and School Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan Hilola Umarova.<sup>31</sup>

The Union of Turkic Universities (TÜRKÜNİB) projects are also of significance concerning the educational and linguistic relations between the two parties. It is encouraged that academic cooperation takes place between universities offering educational programmes related to the Turkic language and culture. Several universities from Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan are affiliated with this union, and student exchange programmes are conducted between the two

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<sup>30</sup> Бакинский госуниверситет и Ташкентский государственный университет востоковедения подписали соглашение о партнерстве, AzerTag, [https://azertag.az/ru/xeber/bakinskii\\_gosuniversitet\\_i\\_tashkentskii\\_gosudarstvennyi\\_universitet\\_vostokovedeniya\\_podpisali\\_soglashenie\\_o\\_partnerstve-1677105](https://azertag.az/ru/xeber/bakinskii_gosuniversitet_i_tashkentskii_gosudarstvennyi_universitet_vostokovedeniya_podpisali_soglashenie_o_partnerstve-1677105), Access: 13.09.2023

<sup>31</sup> Между Азербайджаном и Узбекистаном подписаны документы, Report Az, 2024, <https://report.az/ru/vneshnyaya-politika/mezhdu-azerbajdzhanom-i-uzbekistanom-podpisano-11-dokumentov/>, Access: 12.09.2024



countries. The following Azerbaijani universities are members of this organisation: Baku State University, Azerbaijan Medical University, Azerbaijan University of Architecture and Construction, Azerbaijan University of Languages and Azerbaijan State University of Economics. The following Uzbekistan universities are members of TURKUNIB: Alisher Navoi Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature, University of World Economy and Politics, Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, Kokand University and 'Silk Road' International University of Tourism.<sup>32</sup>

The most significant development concerning linguistic unity occurred on 11 September 2024. At the Organisation of Turkic States, the Turkic States, including Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, resolved to adopt a unified alphabet. Consequently, the Turkic World will have a common alphabet.

In addition to the existing agreements in the field of education and language, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan are engaged in the formulation of new projects to further deepen their cooperation in the future. For instance, proposals to establish joint universities are currently under discussion. These universities will offer educational programmes that will be of interest not only to the students of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan but also to the youth of the entire Turkic world. Furthermore, the development of joint course content through digital education platforms and the adoption of distance education methods in Turkic language education have the potential to enhance cooperation between the two countries based on technology.

### **Art and Cultural Activities**

Cultural events between the two states have a history that extends back to the period preceding the establishment of independent republics. In 1978, Azerbaijan Days were organised in Uzbekistan, while in 1979 Uzbekistan Cultural Days were held in Azerbaijan. This process involved the organisation of a series of meetings, exhibitions and events. As a result, the two peoples had the opportunity to become acquainted with one another, and personal ties were formed between the leaders of other administrations.<sup>33</sup>

The works of Alisher Navoi, Mirza Ulugbek, Nizami Ganjavi, Nasireddin Tusi, Muhammad Fuzuli and numerous other prominent classical authors from Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan are of significant cultural importance to both countries. In light of the aforementioned, monuments to Alisher Navoi have been erected in Baku and Nizami Ganjavi in

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<sup>32</sup> TURKUNİB, <http://turkunib.org/tr/site/index/#member>, Access: 13.09.2024

<sup>33</sup> Elsevar Salmanov, *Azerbaycan-Türkiye İlişkileri ve Haydar Aliyev - 1993-2003*, Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, Ankara, 2019, p. 28

Tashkent. Furthermore, the State Pedagogical University of Uzbekistan is named after Nizami Ganjavi, and in Azerbaijan, a village is named after Alisher Navoi.<sup>34</sup>

These two eminent literary figures represent the pivotal figures in the literary bridges between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. The thematic similarities of their literature demonstrate the shared historical and cultural background of the Azerbaijani and Uzbek peoples. Navoi's defence of the superiority of the Turkish language over Arabic and Persian in his *Muhakamat al-Lugateyn* reinforced the awareness of Turkish in the field of language and literature. Similarly, themes such as love, justice and human dignity in Nizami Ganjavi's poetry established the foundations of the literary heritage in both Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan.

Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan are two countries with a rich musical heritage. One of the most significant commonalities between their musical traditions can be observed in the similarities between the mugham and makom genres. The traditional musical genres of mugham from Azerbaijan and makom from Uzbekistan have their roots in the pre-Islamic period. These genres are characterised by their rhythmic structures, melodic richness and improvisation elements. The instruments used during performances of these genres exhibit similarities in both countries. For instance, traditional instruments such as the tar, kemençe and balaban in Azerbaijan serve similar functions as instruments such as the dutar, gidjak and doira in Uzbekistan.<sup>35</sup>

These two musical genres continue to be maintained as part of the cultural identity of both countries. Music festivals held in Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan contribute to the preservation and dissemination of this shared musical tradition. For example, the Mugham Festival in Shusha and the International Makom Festival in Samarkand are among the significant events that bring together artists from both countries.<sup>36</sup> Such festivals facilitate the perpetuation of artists' cultural heritage, whilst simultaneously reinforcing the cultural bonds between the two countries.

Furthermore, folk dances occupy a significant position within the shared artistic heritage of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. The Azerbaijani lezginka and Uzbek lazgi dances, for instance, encapsulate the historical and cultural identity of the people, characterised by their exuberant rhythms and dynamic movements. These dances are showcased on various international platforms as living exemplars of the traditional arts of both countries.

Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan are home to the most exquisite examples of Islamic art. In both geographical areas, Islamic architecture has been enriched with both religious and civil

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<sup>34</sup> Азербайджанско-Узбекские литературно-культурные связи, *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Theodore Levin, *The Hundred Thousand Fools of God: Musical Travels in Central Asia* (and Queens, New York). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

<sup>36</sup> Özbekistan'ın Tarihi Semerkant Şehrinde, 13'üncü Uluslararası Şark Teraneleri Müzik Festivali Gerçekleşti, <https://www.mgu.edu.tr/ozbekistanin-tarihi-semerkant-sehrinde-13uncu-uluslararasi-sark-teraneleri-muzik-festivali-gerceklesti/>, Access: 15.09.2024

buildings, and works bearing the traces of cultural interactions have emerged. The Palace of Shirvanshahs in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, and Registan Square in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, are among the most magnificent architectural structures of the Islamic world. These artefacts reveal the visual richness and deep historical accumulation of the artistic understanding of both countries.

During the Timurid Empire, Samarkand, the capital of Uzbekistan, emerged as a preeminent architectural hub within the Islamic world. The mosques, madrasas and mausoleums erected during the Timurid period represent a significant transformation in architectural design, encompassing both aesthetic and technical innovations. The architectural heritage of Azerbaijan, spanning the 12th to 15th centuries, exhibits a distinctive blend of Islamic and Turkish-Islamic influences. Prominent examples include the Palace of Shirvanshahs, Yedditelli Castle, and the Ganja Caravanserai, which serve as pivotal landmarks underscoring Azerbaijan's pivotal role in Islamic culture.<sup>37</sup>

The relationship between the two countries in the field of visual arts is also noteworthy. Miniature art occupies a significant position in both countries. Miniatures created for the works of Ali Shir Navoi represent a prominent example of miniature art in Uzbekistan. Similarly, the influence of miniature art in Azerbaijan can be observed particularly in the works of Nizami Ganjavi. The artists of both countries continue this interaction through visual arts, reflecting the shared cultural heritage of the Islamic world.

Cultural exhibitions and projects organised between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan in recent years have contributed to the further consolidation of this artistic heritage between the two countries. In the 21st century, the exhibitions organised in the museums of both countries have facilitated the international dissemination of Islamic art and its historical development in both countries. In this context, art exhibitions organised in Baku and Tashkent have assumed a prominent role as events that reinforce cultural ties through visual arts.

In the field of cinema, there has been a notable acceleration in the level of cooperation between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan in recent years. Both countries had a rich cinematic tradition during the Soviet period, which was subsequently revived with the advent of modern films following the attainment of independence. Asif Kapadia, one of Azerbaijan's internationally award-winning directors, and Ali Hamraev, one of Uzbekistan's successful directors, are two of the most prominent figures in the field of cinema in their respective countries. Film festivals serve as a significant platform for fostering collaboration between the artists and cinema industries of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. The Tashkent International Film Festival and Baku

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<sup>37</sup> See: Sheila Blair and Bloom Jonathan The Art and Architecture of Islam: 1250-1800. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994.

Cinema Days, in particular, have emerged as key events that have reinforced the cinematic partnership between the two countries.

In the period following the attainment of independence, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan have taken significant steps to advance the development of their respective cinema industries. Both countries are engaged in the pursuit of co-productions and film projects, thereby facilitating the production of cinematic works that resonate with both local and international audiences. These collaborative endeavours in the realms of contemporary art and cinema serve to foster the growth of cultural relations between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan.

In the period following their independence, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan have witnessed a notable advancement in the realms of modern art and cinema. Despite the constraints imposed on artistic expression during the Soviet era, artists and filmmakers have been able to pursue their creative endeavours in the post-independence era. In particular, Azerbaijani and Uzbek artists have begun to produce works in modern painting, sculpture, and performance art that have garnered attention both domestically and internationally.<sup>38</sup>

The Azerbaijani painter Togrul Nərimanbəyov and the Uzbek painter Oydin Odilova are among the most prominent figures in the contemporary art scene of their respective countries. Both artists have created a new language in their art by blending traditional art forms with modern aesthetics. This is particularly evident in the field of abstract painting and sculpture, where artists in Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan have gained international recognition by combining traditional motifs of Islamic art with modern artistic approaches. Institutions such as the Baku Museum of Modern Art in Azerbaijan and the Tashkent Art Gallery in Uzbekistan are among the most important venues where these modern artworks are exhibited.

The possibility of future collaboration is also considerable. New initiatives in the realms of contemporary art, cinema and literature will facilitate the preservation of cultural heritage and facilitate its dissemination to a broader audience in the modern era. In this context, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan will continue to assume an influential role in the regional and international arenas by combining their cultural strengths.

### **Future Perspective: Strengthening Cultural Ties**

It is of significant importance to organise a multitude of projects and joint events with the objective of further strengthening the cultural ties between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan in the future. The expansion of existing festivals in the field of art and culture will facilitate a deeper cultural exchange with the participation of a greater number of artists. In addition to traditional events such as music and literature festivals, the implementation of joint projects and

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<sup>38</sup> Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan Join Forces for Film on Renowned Poet, <https://uzreport.news/culture/uzbekistan-and-azerbaijan-join-forces-for-film-on-renowned-poet>, Access: 11.09.2024

cooperation in the field of modern art, digital arts and cinema will serve to maintain the cultural ties of the two countries in the future.

Cultural diplomacy activities between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan play an important role in shaping the international image of both countries. Events such as music and art festivals facilitate cross-cultural exchange and provide a platform for local artists to showcase their work on an international scale. The internationalisation of these festivals has the potential to enhance regional cooperation and reach a broader global audience.

It is imperative that the strengthening of cultural ties between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan is not confined to artistic projects and events alone. Education and youth exchange programmes are of paramount importance in ensuring the longevity of these ties and enabling new generations to contribute to them. To this end, it would be beneficial for both countries to consider the establishment of more educational cooperation and student exchange programmes, with a view to passing on their cultural ties to younger generations and equipping future leaders with the requisite cultural interactions.

The two countries, situated in the Central Asia and Caucasus region, have the potential to enhance their scientific and cultural relations through the implementation of inter-university collaboration and academic exchange programmes. The development of joint projects between the universities of the two countries, particularly in the fields of history, literature, music and linguistics, will facilitate a deeper level of academic collaboration. Furthermore, student-oriented initiatives such as youth camps and cultural excursions will provide Azerbaijani and Uzbek students with the opportunity to expand their cultural horizons and gain a deeper understanding of each other's cultural diversity.

The expansion of student exchange programmes between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan will serve to reinforce the role of younger generations in the transmission of cultural heritage into the future. The cultivation of mutual understanding and appreciation for the shared cultural values of the two countries among younger generations, and their subsequent representation of these values on international platforms, will contribute to the strengthening of not only academic but also diplomatic and cultural ties. In the future, the increase in the number of such programmes will facilitate the preservation of the cultural heritage of both Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, and ensure its transmission to new generations.

In the contemporary era of accelerated digitalisation, digital cultural diplomacy strategies assume a pivotal role in fortifying cultural ties. Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan can enhance their international visibility by disseminating their cultural heritage through digital platforms.



Initiatives such as virtual museums, online cultural exhibitions, and digital festivals represent a crucial step in integrating the rich cultural heritage of the two countries into the digital domain.

Digital cultural diplomacy represents a potent instrument for disseminating the cultural riches of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan to a global audience. The advent of virtual galleries showcasing artworks from both countries will facilitate the discovery of these cultural gems by art aficionados across the globe. Similarly, the utilisation of digital platforms for organising concerts, theatre performances and film festivals will facilitate the transcending of geographical boundaries, enabling a broader reach and increased accessibility to art.

Furthermore, social media and video-sharing platforms can be utilised as an efficacious instrument for the promotion of the cultural riches of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. The intensively active digital presence of younger generations serves to amplify the impact of this strategy. Cultural institutions in both countries can collaborate on the production of digital content as part of joint initiatives, showcasing these creations to global audiences. Digital cultural diplomacy can also bolster the tourism sectors of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, thereby enhancing the international recognition of the cultural and historical heritage of these countries.

It is evident that digital cultural projects and online events will assume a pivotal role in the transmission of the cultural heritage of the two countries to future generations. These projects will serve to reinforce the cultural ties between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan by guaranteeing the preservation and sustainability of culture in the digital domain.

## CONCLUSION

The cultural diplomacy between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, deeply intertwined with their shared history, linguistic ties, and mutual traditions, continues to serve as a powerful vehicle for maintaining and expanding fraternal relations. As nations that share Turkic roots, both Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have historically fostered strong bonds through literature, music, architecture, and visual arts. These cultural connections, deeply rooted in the past, have evolved into modern collaborations that not only celebrate their rich heritage but also pave the way for broader political, economic, and social cooperation.

A key element of this cultural diplomacy is the use of art, music, and literature as tools for building bridges between the two nations. The enduring influence of iconic figures like Ali-Shir Nevai and Nizami Ganjavi, whose works continue to inspire both Uzbek and Azerbaijani intellectual thought, is a testament to the cultural ties that bind these countries. Shared traditions in classical music—such as muğam in Azerbaijan and makom in Uzbekistan—reinforce these historical connections. By participating in and promoting joint cultural events, festivals, and

exhibitions, both nations have reaffirmed their commitment to preserving their unique identities while celebrating their shared cultural heritage.

In recent years, these ties have further expanded into new arenas. The role of digital diplomacy and online cultural exchanges has gained prominence, providing platforms where Uzbek and Azerbaijani artists, musicians, and filmmakers can collaborate and reach a global audience. This form of cultural exchange not only showcases the best of each nation's artistic talents but also allows for greater international recognition of their cultural achievements. Digital initiatives, such as virtual museums, online performances, and cross-border film collaborations, are helping to modernize and globalize the cultural diplomacy of both nations.

Moreover, the strengthening of educational and youth exchange programs represents a strategic investment in the future of Uzbekistan-Azerbaijan relations. By fostering cultural understanding and mutual respect among younger generations, these programs ensure the continuity of the fraternal ties between the two nations. Shared academic endeavors, student exchanges, and cultural youth festivals create lasting impressions on future leaders, deepening their connection to both the cultural heritage and diplomatic relationship between the two countries.

The future of Uzbekistan-Azerbaijan relations through cultural diplomacy looks promising. As both countries continue to explore new opportunities in fields such as digital media, performing arts, and education, their bonds will only grow stronger. Cultural diplomacy will remain a vital force in sustaining fraternal ties, enriching the cultural fabric of each nation, and positioning both Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan as key players in promoting peace and collaboration in the broader Central Asian and Caucasus regions.

In conclusion, the enduring partnership between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, underpinned by cultural diplomacy, is poised to thrive in the years ahead. As both nations embrace the future, their shared values, traditions, and collaborative efforts will not only deepen their bilateral relationship but also serve as a model for regional cooperation, contributing to greater cultural, political, and economic unity across Eurasia. By continuing to invest in cultural exchanges, educational collaborations, and digital diplomacy, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan will solidify their roles as cultural and diplomatic partners on the global stage, fostering mutual understanding and promoting lasting peace.

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