

POLITICAL SCIENCES

MILLI MAJLIS AND FOREIGN RELATIONS: TRANSFORMING PARLIAMENT INTO A DIPLOMATIC INSTRUMENT

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Abstract

This article examines the role of the Milli Majlis (National Assembly) of the Republic of Azerbaijan in strengthening the country's international position and the growing importance of parliamentary diplomacy. As the role of parliaments in foreign policy increases globally, the Milli Majlis actively engages in international platforms to represent and protect Azerbaijan's national interests. The article analyzes the National Assembly's participation in international organizations, its authority in ratifying treaties, its function of democratic oversight in foreign affairs, and its contribution to countering disinformation. Particular attention is paid to the diplomatic activities of deputies in the international arena, especially in conveying the truth about the Karabakh conflict to the world community. The article also evaluates the contributions of the Milli Majlis to regional cooperation. Ultimately, the study concludes that the Azerbaijani parliament has become a significant diplomatic actor that complements traditional diplomacy, playing a key role in promoting the country's foreign policy goals and enhancing its global reputation.

Keywords: Milli Majlis, parliamentary diplomacy, international relations, foreign policy, regional stability

Introduction

In the modern world, the role of state institutions in the formation and implementation of foreign policy is rapidly changing. While in the traditional diplomatic paradigm, executive bodies were considered the primary actors, today the role of legislative assemblies' parliaments is becoming increasingly significant. This trend is driven by globalization, the development of information technology, and the increasing complexity of international relations, which are facing a multitude of new challenges that require a comprehensive approach. In such conditions, parliaments act not only as bodies for monitoring and approving foreign policy decisions, but also as independent centers for the formation of international relations, influencing global public opinion, and promoting national interests [4].

Azerbaijan is no exception to this global trend. The country's National Assembly is transforming from a traditional legislative body into an active participant in the diplomatic process. Expanding parliament's functions in the area of foreign relations is an important element in strengthening Azerbaijan's sovereignty and international authority, especially given the specific nature of the region – the Trans Caucasus, where the interests of various global and regional players intersect. Modern challenges hybrid threats, information warfare, and the growing number of non-state international actors make classical diplomacy insufficient for effectively advancing national interests. Parliamentary diplomacy is becoming a key complement and extension of traditional instruments, allowing for a more flexible and effective response to the changing international environment.

The concept and role of parliamentary diplomacy in the 21st century

Parliamentary diplomacy is a set of measures and initiatives aimed at building international contacts and cooperation at the legislative level. In its modern sense,

it extends far beyond the exchange of official visits and participation in international assemblies, but rather is a multifunctional tool that includes:

- dialogue with foreign parliaments and members of parliament;
- promoting national interests through international parliamentary organizations;
- interacting with the public and media abroad;
- promoting cultural, educational, and humanitarian exchanges;
- combating disinformation and strengthening the country's positive image [17]

This is a unique channel of public diplomacy, built on the principles of transparency, openness, and multilateral cooperation.

The historical context of the development of parliamentary diplomacy

Historically, parliaments were initially limited to domestic affairs, and their role in international relations was minimal. However, with the growth of international integration, the strengthening of multilateral institutions, and the development of global communications, parliaments have begun to recognize their role in shaping foreign policy priorities.

A key stage in the development of parliamentary diplomacy was the establishment of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in the late 19th century, which marked the beginning of systematic interaction between legislative bodies across borders. In the following decades, this institution evolved into an important platform for dialogue, exchange of experience, and the development of international standards.

Today, the role of parliamentary diplomacy is recognized by leading international organizations such as the UN, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe. Parliamentary assemblies enhance the democratic legitimacy of international decisions and help minimize political

conflicts by providing a forum for discussing contentious issues [13].

Key functions and tasks of parliamentary diplomacy

Public debate and public awareness: Parliaments serve as venues for debate on foreign policy priorities, which contributes to greater transparency and public awareness.

Formation of public consensus: Deputies influence the development of a unified national position, which increases the effectiveness of foreign policy.

Inter-parliamentary dialogue: serves as a tool for establishing trust and overcoming conflict situations.

Soft power: Parliaments create a positive image of the country by participating in humanitarian, cultural and educational initiatives.

Monitoring and control: ensure the accountability of executive bodies in the implementation of foreign policy strategies.

Milli Majlis of Azerbaijan: Expanding the Horizons of Parliamentary Diplomacy

International Cooperation and Key Areas

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Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE): Azerbaijani representatives protect the rights of internally displaced persons and pay attention to the preservation of Karabakh's cultural heritage. Their activities aim to draw the attention of the international community to the humanitarian and legal aspects of the conflict. [12].

Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU): Azerbaijani MPs are involved in shaping the global agenda on digital transformation, climate change, anti-discrimination, and promoting gender equality [6].

Implementing digital technologies in parliamentary diplomacy

Since 2020, the National Assembly of Azerbaijan has been intensively developing digital parliamentary diplomacy, which has become especially relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. Online meetings, hybrid international forums, and participation in global summits via videoconference provide the opportunity to:

- effective and efficient interaction with international partners;
- expanding the geographic reach of contacts without significant financial outlays;
- rapid response to current global political challenges;
- creating new formats for exchanging experience and collaborating.

This experience makes parliament a more flexible and modern instrument of foreign policy influence [17].

Ratification of international treaties and legal harmonization

The Importance of Ratification for Integration into the International Community

Over the course of more than 30 years of independence, Azerbaijan has concluded and ratified over 700 international agreements, providing a legal basis for foreign economic, political, and cultural integration.

Ratification is not only a legal formality but also a crucial step in confirming national commitments on the international stage. The Milli Majlis makes decisions that ensure:

- consistency of national legislation with international standards;
- transparency and democratic legitimacy of foreign policy actions;
- timely monitoring and analysis of treaty implementation [13].

Energy diplomacy and transport corridors

Azerbaijan has become a key participant in major transnational projects such as:

TANAP (Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline);
TAP (Trans-Adriatic Natural Gas Pipeline);

the development of the Middle Corridor transport corridor (Asia-Europe).

Parliament actively participates in the discussion and support of legislation that ensures the successful implementation of these initiatives, which increases the region's energy security and expands the country's influence in international trade and politics [8].

The Role of the Milli Majlis in Legal Regulation

The Parliament develops and adopts laws aimed at:

- harmonizing domestic law with international law;
- protecting investors and developing foreign economic relations;
- combatting corruption and money laundering;
- ensuring environmental safety within the framework of international treaties.

Control and Parliamentary Oversight in Foreign Policy

Mechanisms of Parliamentary Oversight

Democratic governance presupposes control over the executive branch, including in the area of foreign policy. In Azerbaijan, the committees on international relations and interparliamentary relations:

- Hear reports from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, state committees, and agencies;
- Conduct parliamentary hearings and roundtables with experts;
- Assess the effectiveness of program and strategy implementation;
- Make proposals for improving foreign policy activities [12].

Engaging Society and Experts

Since 2022, the National Assembly has strengthened the practice of public reporting and inviting representatives of civil society and academia to discuss foreign policy initiatives. These include:

- increases transparency;
- promotes public oversight;
- expands the expert base for decision-making.

Parliamentary Diplomacy and Information Security

The Role of Parliament in Information Policy

Modern international relations are increasingly dependent on the information space. The Azerbaijani Parliament is actively involved in shaping the country's positive image and combating disinformation:

- organizing press conferences and briefings for foreign journalists;
- managing official social media accounts for delegations to international organizations;
- publishing analytical bulletins and materials in multiple languages.

Working with the diaspora

The diaspora is a vital resource for supporting national interests abroad. Members of parliament regularly meet with Azerbaijani communities in Europe, the CIS, Turkey, and the Middle East, ensuring:

- Strengthening national unity;
- Expanding the network of supporters and allies;
- Participation of the diaspora in economic and cultural projects.

Deepening regional cooperation and inter-parliamentary dialogue

The importance of regional parliamentary structures

Cooperation with neighboring states and participation in regional inter-parliamentary organizations are important tools for strengthening security and development.

Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic States (TurkPA) - a platform for discussing infrastructure, cultural and educational projects;

The CIS Interparliamentary Assembly is a space for coordinating legislative initiatives and exchanging experiences;

Trilateral meetings with the parliaments of Georgia and Turkey are an effective mechanism for coordinating regional security and economic cooperation issues.

Women and Youth in Parliamentary Diplomacy

Increased participation of women

The proportion of women in the Milli Majlis has increased significantly, opening up new opportunities for advancing gender equality internationally. Women MPs are actively involved in:

- developing policies to protect the rights of women and children;
- international forums on sustainable development;
- promoting initiatives to combat violence and discrimination [3].

Youth programs and exchange of experience

The Young MPs program facilitates the exchange of experience with parliaments in the EU and Eastern Partnership countries;

Young MPs are actively involved in discussions on digital, environmental, and social issues;

Youth delegations are being formed to participate in global forums and congresses.

Institutionalization and modernization of parliamentary diplomacy

Creation of specialized structures

To systematically develop parliamentary diplomacy, the following are being created:

commissions and working groups on international cooperation;

partnerships with universities and think tanks; expert seminars, foresight sessions, and forums with the participation of international colleagues.

International Cooperation and Expanding Geographical Influence

Particular attention is paid to interaction with parliaments in the Global South, allowing Azerbaijan to expand its sphere of influence and strengthen its position in new international arenas.

New Challenges and Development Prospects

Modern Challenges

1. Hybrid threats and cyberattacks;
2. Growing information competition;
3. The need for systematic personnel training;
4. Growing international competition for strategic regions;
5. Challenges of environmental and digital diplomacy.

Strategic Development Areas

- Developing digital platforms for parliamentary interaction;
- Establishing analytical centers within parliament;
- Actively promoting the green agenda and innovative technologies;
- Engaging civil society and the expert community.

Conclusion

Today, the Milli Majlis of Azerbaijan is not only a legislative body, but also a fully-fledged actor in the foreign policy process, combining:

- democratic control over foreign policy activities;
- active promotion of national interests through parliamentary diplomacy;
- deepening regional cooperation and strategic partnerships;
- strengthening the role of women and youth;
- institutional renewal and digitalization.

In the context of rapid global transformation, parliamentary diplomacy is becoming a powerful tool for ensuring stability, sustainable development, and the growth of Azerbaijan's international prestige.

Recommendations:

- Develop a strategic action plan for parliamentary diplomacy;
- Publish annual reports on diplomatic activities;
- Organize advanced training programs for parliamentarians;
- Expand institutional cooperation with international organizations;
- Active involvement of women and youth in international initiatives.

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