

EUROPEAN VALUES BOUGHT AND SOLD



**AN EXPLORATION INTO AZERBAIJAN'S SOPHISTICATED SYSTEM OF PROJECTING
ITS INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE, BUYING WESTERN POLITICIANS AND
CAPTURING INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS**

Freedom Files Analytical Centre

March 2017



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March 2017

Freedom Files Analytical Centre is an NGO based in Moscow and Warsaw. It conducts research of human rights and democracy problems in authoritarian countries, develops policy recommendations for international action, and advocates with inter-governmental organisations and governments. The Centre's research looks, in particular, into the ways of functioning of autocracies using repression, corruption, and income from exports of natural resources, to control their societies, enrich the ruling groups, consolidate their rule, project their influence at the international level and protect them from criticism on human rights.



The report was produced with support of members of the Working Group on reform of international organisations of the Civic Solidarity Platform, an 80-member NGO network for human rights advocacy in Europe and Eurasia. The Platform is exploring innovative ways for effective advocacy to promote and defend human rights. Individual member organisations of the Platform do not necessarily endorse in detail all of the observations, conclusions and recommendations contained in the report.

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Acknowledgements

This report has been produced by the Freedom Files Analytical Centre with support of members of the Working Group on reform of international organisations of the Civic Solidarity Platform. The authors of this report are international experts in human rights, international organisations, and international politics with many years of experience in research, coalition building, and advocacy. For reasons of security, their names are not made public.

Research for this report has involved studying more than 1,000 documents and publications and conducting over 40 semi-structured interviews in France, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Georgia, Russia, and other countries throughout 2015-2016. Editing of the report was concluded in the beginning of March 2017. Authors' interlocutors have included current and former members of PACE, staff of the delegations to PACE, members of the European Parliament and advisers to political groups and committees in the European Parliament, delegations to OSCE, members of OSCE PA, diplomats from ministries of foreign affairs of several European countries, members and staff of German Bundestag and national parliaments of several other European countries from across party spectrum, journalists, researchers and NGO experts from across Europe, former Azerbaijani officials, and, last but not least, courageous experts and activists from Azerbaijan. Authors thank cordially all of them for their openness and their dedication to human rights, rule of law, and integrity. Without their support, this report could not have been written. Many of them prefer to remain unnamed and authors are reserving the names of all of their interlocutors in this research for security reasons.

Information included in this report is cited to the studied publications (more than 300 publications are referred to) or the authors' interviews. Whenever possible, information obtained in the course of interviews was checked and verified from two or three independent sources. In some cases, when such verification was not possible but the information was deemed particularly important by the authors, it is indicated in the report as obtained from one source and requiring further verification.

The content of this report and its conclusions and recommendations remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

Research into and documentation of international illegitimate lobbying and corrupting practices by representatives of Azerbaijan and other countries will be continued. For inquiries and sharing relevant information with the authors of the report, please contact Yuri Dzhibladze, at yuri.dzhibladze@gmail.com.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of producing this report was born in the summer of 2015 when the crackdown on civil society, independent media, political opposition, and peaceful protesters in Azerbaijan seemed to be at its highest point in more than two decades. Most prominent Azerbaijani human rights defenders, a leading investigative journalist, youth activists, and a score of political opposition members were thrown in jail for years, along with dozens of other political prisoners.¹ Numerous efforts of human rights organisations in many countries to campaign for their liberation had no visible effect. The autocratic government in Baku presided by self-confident ruler Ilham Aliyev appeared totally immune to any international attempts to reverse the crackdown. It acted increasingly defiantly in response to statements of concern by intergovernmental organisations. It seemed that the Azerbaijani leadership became particularly emboldened after their country's chairmanship in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2014 (thereafter referred to as the chairmanship in the Council of Europe) when instead of leading this oldest intergovernmental human rights and democracy organisation by example, it brought internal repression to an unprecedented level without any consequences to its international standing.

The response of most international actors to the full-fledged human rights crisis in Azerbaijan was clearly insufficient. No economic or travel ban sanctions against Azerbaijan which international and domestic human rights groups called for, were feasible, given economic interests of many Western actors and the overall international focus of attention on the gridlock of Russia's annexation of Crimea, its involvement in the war in the east of Ukraine, and related sanctions against Russian officials and companies. As the health of imprisoned human rights defenders deteriorated and repression further increased in Azerbaijan, NGO activists from various countries were frantically looking for new ways to find additional leverage to influence the situation.

Numerous brainstorm led international civic activists to the realisation of the need to develop a better understanding of how the Azerbaijani leadership is able to easily withstand international pressure or, in many cases, pre-empt and prevent it by skilfully using various tools of influence. By then, thanks to the work of leading investigative journalists such as Khadija Ismayilova and her colleagues from the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project,² it was clear that one of the most corrupt regimes in the world had emerged in oil-rich Azerbaijan in the last two decades, where the ruling groups have illegally amassed enormous wealth, derived from unaccounted revenues from foreign sales of oil, a non-transparent system of ownership of merged public and private sectors as well as numerous assets abroad, and developed a vertical, integrated, and all-penetrating system of corruption.

¹ See, for example, Azerbaijan: an area of darkness. Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Nils Muižnieks, Politico, 28.10.2015, <http://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/azerbaijan-an-area-of-darkness>; Justice behind bars: The persecution of civil society in Azerbaijan. Report by the International Partnership for Human Rights, 01.12.2015, <http://iphronline.org/justice-behind-bars-in-azerbaijan-20151201.html#sthash.FjCktbnv.dpuf>, and the European Parliament resolution of 10 September 2015 on Azerbaijan (2015/2840(RSP)), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+TA+P8-TA-2015-0316+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>

² TeliaSonera's behind-the-scenes connection to Azerbaijani president's daughters. Khadija Ismayilova, OCCRP, 15.07.2014, <https://www.occrp.org/en/investigations/2531-teliasoneras-behind-the-scenes-connection-to-azerbaijani-presidents-daughters>; Azeri Enclave in Czech Republic. Pavla Holcova, Khadija Ismayilova and Jaromir Hason, OCCRP, 11.10.2012, <https://www.occrp.org/en/investigations/1666-azerbaijans-czech-enclave>; Azerbaijani First Family Big on Banking. OCCRP, 11.06.2015, <https://www.occrp.org/en/corruptistan/azerbaijan/2015/06/11/azerbaijani-first-family-big-on-banking.html>; The Khadija Project – Corruptistan, <https://www.occrp.org/en/corruptistan/azerbaijan/khadijaismayilova/>

This vast system of corruption is not only stealing public goods from the people of Azerbaijan, feeding the repressive apparatus, and allowing the autocratic regime to deeply entrench its power and control, making it a full-fledged kleptocracy, but also allows to project its corrupting influence at the international level. Thanks to the research and publications by the European Stability Initiative,^{3, 4} information about Azerbaijani officials' successful strategy of corrupting and ensuring favourable positions of Western parliamentarians and members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) by the array of means, including luxury gifts, paid trips to Baku, stays in 5-star hotels, lavish receptions and more, has become public knowledge, and the term "caviar diplomacy" has firmly stuck to the image of Azerbaijan at the international level. It was clear that Azerbaijani rulers were skilfully using the uncontrolled wealth they possess and the instruments of corruption they mastered to deflect international criticism of their human rights record and protect their economic and financial relations. The shocking and unexpected results of the voting in PACE in January 2013 which defeated a draft resolution on political prisoners in Azerbaijan based on a report by the Assembly's rapporteur, German MP Christof Strässer,⁵ was a striking example of the ability of Azerbaijan authorities and their foreign allies to mount successful operations resulting in them exercising effective control of the position of PACE.

However, there also was likely to be more behind the international corruption by Azerbaijani authorities than tins of caviar, expensive carpets, and luxury trips. It was necessary to assess the magnitude of this system, identify various instruments and tools of international influence used by Baku and its friends, look into institutional foundations of this machine, understand weaknesses and liabilities of international organisations and national parliaments, and explore economic and political relations of Azerbaijan with various countries – relations that constrain and influence positions of their governments vis-à-vis the regime of Ilham Aliyev. If you want to devise effective strategies of international pressure to change the behaviour of the Azerbaijani government (or any government, for that matter), you need to develop a better understanding of how it influences international actors.

Based on these reflections in mid-2015, several international NGOs came up with the idea of this research and asked the authors to engage in it. A year and a half later, when this report is published, we can say that our understanding of how this machine works is much better, a number of dots are connected, and many details come out much clearer. Nevertheless, this report still probably shows only a tip of the iceberg, and further fact-finding, documentation, and analysis are needed to expose the real scope of the wrongdoing by the Azerbaijani authorities and attain serious change in the behaviour of relevant international actors. Further comprehensive examination of the workings of Azerbaijani machine of international lobbying and corruption is necessary. The challenge of NGO experts is that they have to combine their research work with advocacy, public education, and campaigning, and always struggle against time and lack of financial resources.

³ Caviar Diplomacy. How Azerbaijan silenced the Council of Europe. European Stability Initiative, 24.05.2012, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=156&document_ID=131

⁴ Disgraced. Azerbaijan and the end of election monitoring as we know it. European Stability Initiative, 05.11.2013, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=156&document_ID=145; "Europe and Azerbaijan: The End of Shame". Gerald Knaus, in Journal of Democracy, July 2015, <http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Knaus-26-3.pdf>

⁵ Azerbaijan debacle: The PACE debate on 23 January 2013. European Stability Initiative, 21.02.2013, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=156&document_ID=136

Meanwhile, as research for this report was being done, after a strong resolution of the European Parliament in September 2015, efforts of Secretary General of the Council of Europe, diplomacy by a number of European actors, and continued NGO campaigning, leading Azerbaijani human rights defenders imprisoned earlier in 2013-2014 were released, soon followed by Khadija Ismayilova.

Nevertheless, dozens of political prisoners remain incarcerated in Azerbaijan,⁶ and new ones have been arrested and convicted recently.⁷ The situation of civil society and human rights defenders in Azerbaijan remains highly critical, as reflected in the recent report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders Michel Forst, presented by him to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2017: “Human rights defenders in Azerbaijan are not able to operate in a safe and enabling environment. In sum, they are increasingly at risk and do not feel safe because of increasingly restrictive legislation, the lack of access to justice and criminalizing actions by government authorities. They do not feel empowered owing to the stigmatization spearheaded by high-ranking officials and the government-affiliated media and in the light of excessively intrusive oversight and scrutiny by the authorities.”⁸ These conclusions by the UN Special Rapporteur are echoed in a recent appeal by 22 leading international NGOs: “...in addition to ...restrictive legislative and regulatory environment, the Azerbaijani authorities continue to harass activists who advocate for good governance, preventing civil society from participating in public debate and decision-making”.⁹

Despite of the release of a group of leading human rights defenders and a leading investigative journalist from prison in 2016, the nature of the repressive and kleptocratic regime in Azerbaijan has not changed a bit, and its corrupting influence on PACE and politicians in various countries has continued and possibly even increased in the last two years.

⁶ A Unified List of Political Prisoners in Azerbaijan, Covering the Period up to 25 November 2016. The Working Group on a Unified List of Political Prisoners in Azerbaijan, December 2016, <http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/List%20of%20Political%20Prisoners%20in%20Azerbaijan%20-%20November%202016.pdf>, Azerbaijan: new human rights structure set up in support of political prisoners. Caucasian Knot, 28.01.2017, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/38287/>

⁷ Azerbaijan: Crackdown on free expression accelerates with conviction of prominent blogger. 24 NGOs condemn today's sentencing of Mehman Huseynov, call for end to crackdown on press freedom in Azerbaijan. 03.03.2017, <https://www.irfs.org/news-feed/azerbaijan-crackdown-on-free-expression-accelerates-with-conviction-of-prominent-blogger/>

⁸ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders on his mission to Azerbaijan. UN Human Rights Council, Thirty-fourth session, 27 February-24 March 2017, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session34/Documents/A_HRC_34_52_Add_3_EN.docx. Here are some additional key quotes from the report: “Over the last several years, civil society in Azerbaijan has faced the worst situation since the country became independent. ... human rights defenders increasingly operate in a rather criminalized and heavily constrained environment. ... Human rights defenders in Azerbaijan have been accused by public officials of being a fifth column of Western governments or of being foreign agents, accusations that are aimed at causing a misperception in the population of the truly valuable role played by civil society. Defenders are attacked, threatened, brought to court and sentenced under political or fabricated charges. They face smear campaigns in an attempt to discredit their work by relegating them to a political opposition, or indeed are branded as traitors. ... Many human rights defenders and dozens of NGOs, their leaders and employees and their families have been subjected to administrative and criminal prosecution, including arbitrary detention, the seizure of their assets and bank accounts, travel bans and enormous fines and tax penalties. Significant challenges are connected to the existing legal framework governing the exercise of fundamental freedoms, such as the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Legislation pertaining to national security can also have a restrictive impact on the environment in which defenders operate.”

⁹ Azerbaijan: No Progress on Key Reforms. A joint letter by 22 human rights groups worldwide to Board members of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 10.02.2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/02/joint-letter-eiti-board-members>

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is in the focus of international attention because it has been affected by this plague the most. Today, many key positions in PACE are filled by people who have systematically shielded the government of Azerbaijan from criticism for violations of human rights, including those of the President of the Assembly, the Chair of the Committee of Legal Issues and Human Rights, and most of the rapporteurs on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. Their position has given reasons to many observers to describe them as “apologists” of the regime in Baku.

A major scandal has developed since November 2016 after a public admission by the former PACE member, the former chair of the largest political group in PACE, the European People’s Party, and the mastermind behind the defeating of the Strässer report in 2013, Luca Volonte from Italy, that in 2012-2014 the Association for Civil Society Development in Azerbaijan (ACSDA), an organisation controlled by the key organiser of Azerbaijani lobbying activities in PACE, Azerbaijani member of PACE Elkhan Suleymanov, transferred via intermediary companies almost 2.4 million Euro to the accounts of Luca Volonte’s organisations in Italy. Volonte admitted that this payment was received for “consultancy services” and that more transfers were agreed by the parties, up to 10 million.^{10, 11, 12} In the last few weeks, this revelation has triggered a strong reaction by many PACE members and finally gives a chance for change. Hopefully, this scandal will serve as an eye-opener for other international actors, including the leadership of the Council of Europe, and will make it more difficult for the apologists of the government of Azerbaijan to continue doing their business as usual.

It will take consistent efforts to counter the vast machine of international lobbying and corruption developed by Azerbaijani rulers. Too many international actors have deeply embedded interests in upholding the status quo, too many high-level politicians have been tainted, and too many institutional arrangements have been developed in various countries to serve the interests of the political elite in Baku. It will take perseverance and courage of many people from different countries to attain meaningful and sustainable change in the way international organisations, national parliaments and political systems of democracies function to insulate them from corrupting influence from the outside and inside. Increased accountability, transparency and integrity of political institutions in democratic countries will produce benefit for the public in these countries as well as for the people living under repressive and corrupted regimes such as the one in Azerbaijan. The authors hope that this report will contribute to this process.

¹⁰ Caviar Democracy. Website of investigative TV programme “Report” of RAI 3 TV channel, 21.11.2016, <http://www.report.rai.it/dl/Report/puntata/ContentItem-3b829e27-145d-4141-b216-1bb41a4cc1bd.html#name>

¹¹ The European Swamp (Caviar Diplomacy Part 2) – Prosecutors, corruption and the Council of Europe. European Stability Initiative. 17.12.2016. http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=de&id=156&document_ID=181

¹² Authors’ interviews in 2015-2016.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL LOBBYING MACHINE OF AZERBAIJAN

Systemic corruption as a basis of the kleptocratic regime in Azerbaijan

The most comprehensive analysis of corruption in Azerbaijan has been developed by Sarah Chayes from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in her recent report based on case studies of three post-Soviet countries, “The Structure of Corruption: A Systemic Analysis Using Eurasian Cases.”¹³ It is worth citing several quotes from her work to give a sense of the scope of corruption in Azerbaijan, which serves as *modus operandi* of the regime, making it not only autocratic but indeed kleptocratic:

“Corruption is not just the behaviour of some venal officials in a particular agency; it often represents the operating system of sophisticated—and successful—networks.” “A combination of a repressive, authoritarian government and a volatile and unaccountable resource-based revenue stream has led to a structuring of Azerbaijani state institutions around systemic corruption—and compounds the difficulty of reform.”

“To correctly understand the operations of today’s kleptocratic networks, it is critical to see them as integrated, if sometimes loosely structured, entities that fully straddle all sectors of ostensibly licit as well as clearly illicit activities. Ideally, the representation of such a structure would not be a flat picture, but a three-dimensional model, displaying the complete inter-penetration among the sectors, especially as individuals move from position to position across the ostensible boundaries over time. According to information revealed in the Panama Papers, for example, Azerbaijan’s minister of taxes also maintained a controlling stake in a private-sector conglomerate whose principal beneficiaries are members of the Aliyev family, so he’s effectively double-hatted...”

“This type of integration is easiest to prove for Azerbaijan, where members of the Aliyev and Pashayev families and other high-ranking government officials hardly try to hide their ownership stakes, not just in gold-mining concerns, but in these massive conglomerates whose subsidiaries work in almost all sectors of lucrative economic activity. Dubai-based DIA Construction, for example, controlled by brothers who are listed as directors of shell companies nominally owned by Aliyev’s daughters, participated in some of the most extravagant megaprojects in the country: the Flame Towers in Baku and the Shahdag tourism complex, for example. Other subsidiaries of DIA Holding have built and operate power plants and provide import and customs clearance services. Ata Holding is another, as is the Aliyev-controlled Silk Way Group, which includes banks and hotels as well as construction firms, as does the family’s Pasha Holding. According to the OCCRP’s Patrucic, the Aliyev/Pashayev clan owns no fewer than eleven banks.”

“With the rise since the 1980s in gifts by public agencies and private philanthropists alike to non-profit organizations carrying out humanitarian or development projects, kleptocratic networks in many countries have sought to capture this important and often poorly supervised revenue stream. [...] The most obvious example of this species of private-sector network element is Azerbaijan’s Heydar Aliyev Foundation, whose president is Mehriban Aliyeva, wife of President Ilham Aliyev.”

¹³ The Structure of Corruption: A Systemic Analysis Using Eurasian Cases. Sarah Chayes, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30.06.2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/structure-of-corruption-systemic-analysis-pub-63991>. The report describes the cases of Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova.

Diverse nature of the Azerbaijani international lobbying and corruption network

During the past 13 years under the rule of President Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan has developed a sophisticated and vast network of international lobbying and corrupting influence on policies and decisions of intergovernmental organisations and governments of Western democracies. High-level Azerbaijani officials have themselves publicly acknowledged their active use of international lobbying to influence decisions and policies of international organisations.¹⁴

Many autocracies in different parts of the world are engaged in this kind of activities at the international level, especially those who can freely use income from rich natural resources as they wish in the absence of parliamentary and public oversight. In the last decade, Azerbaijan has apparently become the champion in pursuing international lobbying and corrupting influence, rivalled lately probably only by Russia in its ability to use a plethora of covert economic and political tools to extend its influence on, manipulate, or undermine whole countries and organisations.

The borderline between lobbying, influencing, and corrupting those you want to influence is often murky. The highly advanced lobbying machine of Azerbaijan employs several mechanisms, which often intertwine and synergise with each other. The array of instruments is diverse, ranging from legal and seemingly benign ones, to those that clearly violate integrity and ethical standards in democratic and rule of law societies, and to those that are openly illegal. The recent report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, “The Kremlin Playbook. Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe”,¹⁵ demonstrates that a country or a whole group of countries “can be captured” by an autocratic regime if public opinion in these countries is skilfully manipulated by foreign propaganda, its leading politicians are bribed or intimidated, and its leading business people are turned into agents of influence, using a whole range of instruments – from trivial corruption to sophisticated PR.

As described in the following chapters, evidence suggests that the same diverse range of instruments is used by Azerbaijani officials in their international lobbying, ranging from personal remuneration of different kind, including cash in envelopes, to paying for restoration of churches in old European cities, from holding international conferences on religious tolerance to funding of pro-Azerbaijani think-tanks headed by former European MPs as a reward for their supportive voting during their term in parliament, from wiring millions of Euros to private accounts via offshore companies to paying for luxury trips of Western politicians to Baku.

¹⁴ The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov, after his speech at PACE in June 2014 to mark the beginning of the country’s Chairmanship in the Council of Europe, was confronted by Irish MP Michael McNamara: “Excellency, at our recent meeting at the Milli Majlis in Baku in May, I marveled at your country’s remarkable economic progress but questioned your use of expensive and extensive lobbying. ... I should like to know whether, as chair of the Committee of Ministers, you believe it appropriate for member states, as opposed to mere corporations, to hire professional lobbyists to engage with other member states and their parliamentarians?” Minister’s reply was as follows: “Mr. McNamara asked me his question for the second time after his visit to Baku. I respect his question but I respond in the same way as I responded in Baku. Lobbying is not a phenomenon that was invented by Azerbaijan. It is a practice that is used here in Strasbourg frequently. It is a practice that members probably use themselves in different capacities and in different groups. Therefore, it is not a strange phenomenon; it is a reality of everyday life. I do not think I have to respond in a different way. I respond honestly: yes, everyone, all around the world, uses lobbying. It is a promoting of one’s interests.” Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Report on the 2014 Ordinary Session. Monday 23 June at 3 p.m. <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/Records/2014/E/1406231500E.htm>

¹⁵ The Kremlin Playbook. Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe. Heather A. Conley et al., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 13.10.2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/kremlin-playbook>. The report presents case studies on Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Latvia, and Serbia.

One should not fall into self-deception: the blame should be put not only on Azerbaijani officials. This international disgrace could not have happened without the willingness of hundreds of Westerners - politicians, members of parliaments, mayors, business people, heads of institutions, PR companies, and academics who are willing to close their eyes on human rights violations, corruption, and abuse of power by the dictatorship in Baku in exchange for favours, contracts, and hand-outs. Sarah Chayes of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace describes such individuals as “active enablers” or even “full members” of a kleptocratic network of a foreign state.¹⁶ The true cost of such relations with the kleptocratic and repressive regime is the continued suffering of the people of Azerbaijan and systemic degradation of democratic institutions in the West.

Key goals of the Azerbaijani leadership and arguments it uses in the lobbying process

The main goal of this vast enterprise of international lobbying and corruption is to suppress international criticism of repression by the Azerbaijani government, boost the perceived legitimacy of the Aliyev regime by arranging positive assessment of fraudulent elections by fake international observers, present the image of the regime as a reliable and indispensable economic and geopolitical partner of the West, and ensure expansion of foreign trade and investment. An additional aim is “to send a message back home that there is nothing that can be done to remove Aliyev and to signal that the West is behind him”.¹⁷ All of this ultimately serves the goal of preserving the power of the ruling family and its close allies and allowing them to reap the fruit of economic globalisation.

Ilham Aliyev has European aspirations and strives to be accepted as an equal and important player in the West. He personally headed the country’s delegation to PACE in 2000-2003 before succeeding his father Heydar as President of the country. Aliyev pursues his sultan-style ruling while seeking acceptance as part of the European community. His ambitions include opening the doors for membership of his party, New Azerbaijan, in the most influential European political group, the European People’s Party. However, despite very warm relations with People’s Parties at the national level in some European countries, these aspirations have been not realised yet, not the least because of the dismal human rights record of the country.

Azerbaijan is disappointed by the Eastern Partnership project, which is aimed at developing EU’s deeper cooperation with Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, including through association agreements which would replace existing Partnership and Cooperation Agreements. In May 2015, Azerbaijan gave up its plans to seek an association agreement with the EU¹⁸ and instead proposed to negotiate with Brussels a Strategic Partnership Agreement, similar to what the EU has with various countries in other regions of the world. In November 2016, the European Council approved a mandate for the European Commission to negotiate a new framework agreement with Azerbaijan.

¹⁶ The Structure of Corruption: A Systemic Analysis Using Eurasian Cases. Sarah Chayes, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30.06.2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/structure-of-corruption-systemic-analysis-pub-63991> and http://carnegieendowment.org/files/8_Azerbaijan_Full_Web1.pdf

¹⁷ Heaping on the Caviar Diplomacy. By Matthew Valencia, The Economist, October-November 2016, <https://www.1843magazine.com/features/heaping-on-the-caviar-diplomacy>

¹⁸ The Eastern Partnership after Riga: Review and Reconfirm. CEPS European Neighbourhood Watch. June 2015. <https://www.ceps.eu/system/files/NWatch116.pdf>; Roadmap: Mandate for a new framework agreement with Azerbaijan. European Commission. 13 May 2016. http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2016_eas_021_framework_agreement_azerbaijan_en.pdf

Less than two years later, the process of a new rapprochement started: Aliyev visited Brussels on 6 February 2017 to personally inaugurate negotiations on a new EU-Azerbaijan partnership agreement. The EU officials rolled a “red carpet” to the Azerbaijani ruler, signifying a shift from EU’s reserved stance in the previous few years. After the Azerbaijani authorities released over a dozen human rights defenders, journalists, and political activists in 2016, many in the EU rushed to congratulate Aliyev on the releases and sought to frame the move as an indication of a shift in Azerbaijan’s punitive attitude towards its critics. The EU and Azerbaijan have gradually restored most of their bilateral ties, despite absence of any systemic change in human rights and persistent non-implementation by Azerbaijan of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and decisions of the CoE Committee of Ministers, including the ones on the immediate release of political prisoner Ilgar Mammadov.¹⁹

Essentially, those in the West who agree to resume business as usual and close their eyes on continued repression, help the government of Azerbaijan to present itself as a respected member of the international community, opposite to what it really is: an archaic, autocratic, natural resources-rich regime based on systemic corruption, absence of rule of law, and brutal repression.

Azerbaijan uses the following standard set of arguments for public consumption in Europe in order to be accepted as an important partner and deflect international criticism of its poor human rights record:

- Azerbaijan is an important actor in ensuring energy security of Europe as an alternative to Russian gas and oil;
- the West should support Azerbaijan in addressing the problem of continued violation of its national sovereignty and territorial integrity in its protracted conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh and several adjoining regions; Azerbaijan is a victim of infringement of its sovereignty and occupation of a large part of its territory; the international community has not been effectively addressing this problem for over twenty years;
- strategic geopolitical importance: Azerbaijan is a stabilising force balancing out Russian, Iranian, and radical Islamic influences in the region;
- Azerbaijan is a secular state with Islamic majority;
- Azerbaijan is a role model for multicultural tolerance; a particular accent is made on cooperation with Israel and outreach to Jewish organisations in other countries;
- Azerbaijan is a young democracy which needs time to develop democratic institutions and should not be judged too harshly.

Many of these arguments capitalise on the “enabling factors and conditions” which contribute to the health of the kleptocratic system in Azerbaijan. According to Sarah Chayes, these factors include image laundering by Western actors, the prestige resulting from country’s presidency of the Council of Europe and its hosting of major international cultural and sports events, and geopolitical context such as the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.²⁰

Azerbaijan has been particularly successful in establishing itself in the European public opinion as an alternative source of gas and oil, through a mix of business relations with large clients like Germany or

¹⁹ EU red carpet for Azerbaijan sends wrong message. Giorgi Gogia, EU Observer, 06.02.2017, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/136802>

²⁰ The Structure of Corruption: A Systemic Analysis Using Eurasian Cases. Sarah Chayes, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30.06.2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/structure-of-corruption-systemic-analysis-pub-63991>

energy dependant countries like Georgia, activities of pro-Azerbaijan energy experts, transnational corporations with equity stakes in Azerbaijan like BP, and Azerbaijan-friendly politicians. However, independent experts' assessment is that Azerbaijan is not capable of providing more than 3-4% share of Europe's needs in gas.²¹ At the same time, Azerbaijan gas supplies are indeed very important for certain countries *en route* of or close to the Southern Corridor.

As The Economist put it, Azerbaijan "wants to be seen as a modern, stable, secular, majority-Muslim ally in a restive region, and as a reliable partner in energy and security matters, by helping Europe to diversify its supply of oil and gas away from less friendly states... The Southern Gas Corridor, a giant gas project, has become a crucial part of Europe's strategy to become less reliant on Russia for its energy needs."²²

Recently, the global drop in oil and gas prices has led to serious problems in the Azerbaijani economy, creating a need for loans from international financial institutions (IFIs). This makes the Azerbaijani regime more susceptible to international influence. Previous rich years of high fossil energy prices have made Aliyev over-confident of his control over the European position on Azerbaijan. However, even now, with low oil and gas prices, the EU and the US are willing to play soft with Azerbaijan for geostrategic reasons. For example, as recently as in March 2015, the EU gave in to Azerbaijani pressure and exempted Azerbaijan from the Third Energy Package requirements,²³ which resolved Azerbaijani concerns with the ownership of gas transportation infrastructure.

The main targets of lobbying

Azerbaijan's lobbying and corruption machine targets various foreign and international political institutions and decision-makers. In particular, it is aimed at influencing, co-opting or buying:

- decision-makers in countries that have direct interests in the Southern Gas Corridor;²⁴
- decision-makers in countries which are dependent on Azerbaijan because of energy supplies and other economic and political reasons;
- decision-makers in countries which have multi-business interests in Azerbaijan and base their policies regarding this country primarily from geopolitical and energy security points of view;
- members and staff of PACE and the European Parliament;
- politicians who have connections to Baku and use them for their personal political or material gain and may influence decision-makers in their governments or organisations or assist Baku in luring in Western businesses (including MPs, officials in the executive branch of governments and ex-politicians who are still influential in their countries);
- lower-level employees of government and state agencies and diplomats (in embassies, etc.);
- large- and medium-size businesses in the countries of interest;

²¹ Authors' interviews in 2015-2016, and Pipe Dreams: Why the Southern Gas Corridor will not reduce EU dependency on Russia. CEE Bankwatch Network. 21 January 2015. <http://bankwatch.org/news-media/for-journalists/press-releases/pipe-dreams-why-southern-gas-corridor-will-not-reduce-eu-d>

²² Heaping on the Caviar Diplomacy. By Matthew Valencia, The Economist, October-November 2016, <https://www.1843magazine.com/features/heaping-on-the-caviar-diplomacy>

²³ TAP pipeline secures exemption from Third Energy Package. Georgi Gotev. Euractiv.com. 30 April 2015. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/tap-pipeline-secures-exemption-from-third-energy-package/>

²⁴ The term stands for a project to bring the Azerbaijani gas from the Shah Deniz offshore field in the Azerbaijani territorial waters of the Caspian Sea to Europe via a planned Trans-Anatolian pipeline (TANAP) through Turkey and further through the Trans-Adriatic pipeline (TAP) via Greece and Albania to Italy. An interconnector in Greece is planned to bring the Azerbaijani gas also to Bulgaria and further north.

- national, regional, and municipal authorities, cultural and educational institutions, engaged in projects funded by Heydar Aliyev Foundation;
- experts in academic institutions and think-tanks;
- public relations agencies and media.

Azerbaijani connections with these different actors are quickly mobilised, if Baku needs to influence a certain policy decision, adoption of a document, or appointment/election to a certain position.

Management of the lobbying machine

According to information we have obtained, different elements of these networks are managed by several people in charge of key state agencies and major private companies in Azerbaijan. Evidence suggests that at the strategic level the whole machine is coordinated at the very top of the ruling regime.²⁵ Some experts point at particular people in the Presidential Administration as persons responsible for running it.²⁶

Analysis of similar, albeit much more modest, lobbying activities by an autocratic regime in another post-Soviet country, Belarus, including in the reports by security agencies of its neighbouring countries (Latvia and Lithuania),²⁷ suggests that Belarusian security and intelligence services are directly involved in managing this machine. We believe that the same is true for Azerbaijan.

However, as some cases described in this report demonstrate, despite the fact that different actors manage various elements of this machine, when there is a clear need to mobilise these networks, it is done at an exemplary speed. We assume that there is a more centralised coordinating mechanism behind it than just several people in the Presidential Administration. Sarah Chayes in her analysis of the structure of corruption in three post-Soviet countries is confident that “in Azerbaijan, the person of President Aliyev is clearly central to the functioning of the current [kleptocratic] network.”²⁸

This coincides with our conclusion that ultimately Ilham Aliyev himself makes strategic decisions on lobbying at the international level which includes questionable lobbying tools. His personal hosting of numerous delegations of mid-level or even low-level foreign interlocutors acting as allies and apologists of his policies, his repeated public praising of “fake election observers” reproduced by numerous publications in the state media, his intimate knowledge of the workings of PACE (he was the head of the Azerbaijani delegation there in 2000-2003), and the very nature of his personalistic regime suggest that Aliyev as the head of the state bears political responsibility for the functioning of this machine.

²⁵ This conclusion is drawn based on a complex analysis of testimonies by authors’ interlocutors, comparison of lists of and publications about people and clans in power, lists of owners of businesses, links between different individuals, groups, and companies. See, for example, Kamaledin Heydarov’s Empire: List of Azerbaijani Oligarch’s Business Companies, Azeri Report, March 15, 2014. http://azerireport.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4280, The Structure of Corruption: A Systemic Analysis Using Eurasian Cases. Sarah Chayes, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30.06.2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/structure-of-corruption-systemic-analysis-pub-63991> and http://carnegieendowment.org/files/8_Azerbaijan_Full_Web1.pdf.

²⁶ Authors’ interviews in 2015-2016 with Azerbaijani and international experts.

²⁷ KGB recruits Belarusian diaspora in Latvia. Charter97. 6 March 2013. <https://charter97.org/en/news/2013/3/6/66255/>

²⁸ The Structure of Corruption: A Systemic Analysis Using Eurasian Cases. Sarah Chayes, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30.06.2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/structure-of-corruption-systemic-analysis-pub-63991> and http://carnegieendowment.org/files/8_Azerbaijan_Full_Web1.pdf

Geographic focus and institutional arrangements

In Europe, the following political centres have been chosen by Azerbaijan as the most important targets for its lobbying activities: Brussels, Berlin, Paris, London, and Strasbourg. In addition, Istanbul plays a special role due to historic and economic reasons.

Azerbaijani embassies in these cities play a leading role in lobbying. They have much larger budgets compared to embassies in other cities and are specifically tasked with building good relations with and enlisting support from local politicians, public officials, and experts. The embassy in Paris is the most active and financially well off, apparently because it is also tasked with provision of assistance to international activities of the first lady Mehriban Alieva and the work of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation she runs. This embassy has also the most developed website among all the embassies.

In addition to these embassies, private Azerbaijani agencies function as lobbying actors in these cities, except Strasbourg. The most important of them, the European Azerbaijani Society (TEAS), was established and is managed by Taleh Heydarov, son of the leading Azerbaijani oligarch,²⁹ minister of emergencies and civilian defence, former head of the Customs Committee Kamaledin Heydarov, who reportedly provides money for the work of TEAS. Kamaledin Heydarov is believed to be the main sponsor of the Azerbaijani lobbying efforts in Europe, both that are seemingly benign and outright questionable, because he and his son have political aspirations in Azerbaijan.

While the key Azerbaijani lobbyist in PACE Elkhan Suleymanov is believed to be in charge of the most ethically and legally questionable part of the lobbying in both Strasbourg and Brussels, TEAS is considered a “clean” hand of the lobbying machine.³⁰ TEAS’ work is aimed at political, geostrategic and cultural promotion of Azerbaijan, engaging with and influencing European elites and high-level politicians. TEAS has been able to hire top European PR professionals, ex-MPs, and former ministers. Sources say that TEAS, as a “semi-diplomatic entity”, is not dealing with “dirty lobbying” such as direct cash distribution but focuses on organising large-scale promotional events. However, at least in London TEAS is known to have donated money to the UK Parliamentary Group “Conservative Friends of Azerbaijan”,³¹ as well as have funded many trips of British MPs to Azerbaijan.³² There is a clear documentary proof of this widespread practice in the public registers of interests of members of both houses of Parliament (see the annex).

According to our interlocutors, personal recruitment of PACE members and their remuneration is a duty of a different group of Azerbaijani representatives, based in Strasbourg or coming there as members of the Azerbaijani delegation to PACE. This group is reportedly headed by PACE member

²⁹ Kamaledin Heydarov's Empire: List of Azerbaijani Oligarch's Business Companies, Azeri Report, March 15, 2014. http://azerireport.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4280

³⁰ Authors’ interviews in 2015-2016 with Azerbaijani and international experts, including former Azerbaijani officials intimately knowledgeable about these lobbying activities and partially involved in them, materials of the investigation in Italy of allegations of bribery of Luka Volonte by Elkhan Suleymanov, and testimonies of Leila Yunus. See more details in further chapters.

³¹ Plush hotels and caviar diplomacy: how Azerbaijan's elite wooed MPs. The Guardian. 24 November 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/24/azerbaijan-caviar-diplomacy-for-mps>

³² Questions over MPs’ all-expense-paid trip to Azerbaijan. Melanie Newman. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. 29 August 2011. <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/29/questions-over-mps-all-expense-paid-trip-to-azerbaijan/>

Elkhan Suleymanov who is assisted by another PACE member Muslum Mammadov. It seems that Strasbourg was chosen as the main base for this activity not only because it is a location of PACE and other Council of Europe institutions and their leading role in addressing human rights and democracy issues, but also because this location provides Azerbaijanis an easy access to members of national parliaments serving as PACE deputies. For more information on the lobbying activities by Azerbaijani representatives in PACE, please see the relevant section of the report.

In addition to Suleymanov's group operating in Strasbourg, there is another key location where Elkhan Suleymanov and his associates use various tools of influencing European politicians, including through very questionable ways. It is Brussels, where members of the European Parliament and staff of other EU institutions are targeted by the Azerbaijani lobbyists. Much of the lobbying in Brussels is done through a private Azerbaijani promotion agency called the Office of Communication of Azerbaijan (OCAZ),³³ which was opened in 2012. In addition, Azerbaijani representatives have access to the Parliament as members of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, a parliamentary forum of the Eastern Partnership project. For more information on the lobbying activities by Azerbaijan in the European Parliament, please see the relevant section of the report.

Besides these main Azerbaijani groups and entities, there are other structures set up by Europeans with financial support of Azerbaijan and serving as tools in its lobbying machine. Some of them are led by former high-level European government officials and ex-parliamentarians. The most prominent example is Society for the Promotion of German-Azerbaijani Relations (GEFDAB), a lobbying agency set up in Germany by a former German MP Edward Lintner. Reportedly, the main funding for the lobbying work, events and trips, organised by these structures run by Europeans, comes from SOCAR, Azerbaijan state energy company.

SOCAR is also an important lobbying actor itself. A number of international pro-Azerbaijani experts are hired by SOCAR as consultants.

The Heydar Aliyev Foundation is an important player for cultural and educational investment projects in many countries that ultimately lead to pro-Azerbaijani bias of politicians in whose constituencies these projects take place. The Foundation has also helped the ruling family of Azerbaijan to gain influence over an important UN agency, UNESCO: the first lady Mehriban Aliyeva is a Goodwill Ambassador of this influential cultural and educational organisation and is believed to be a friend of UNESCO President Irina Bokova.³⁴

In relevant chapters, we look closer at how European politicians are being co-opted and become engaged with Azerbaijan, and how the Azerbaijani government reaps political dividends from these friendly relations.

³³ A website of the Office of Communication of Azerbaijan (OCAZ), <http://ocaz.eu>. Accessed on 9 February 2017.

³⁴ Authors' interviews in 2015.

RELATIONS OF KEY PARTNER COUNTRIES WITH AZERBAIJAN AND THE MAIN LOBBYISTS IN THESE COUNTRIES

Economic and (geo)political interests or dependencies of various countries in their relations with Azerbaijan (and sometimes personal interests of their leaders or ruling groups) strongly define their policies, shape their choices of decisions, and constrain their ability to take critical position regarding actions of the Aliyev regime. Equally importantly, they give arguments and leverage into the hands of both Azerbaijani lobbyists and their partners and enablers in these countries.

For the purposes of analysis, we divide countries reviewed in this report into four main categories:

1. leading Azerbaijani partners with diverse trade and geopolitical interests: France, Germany, UK, Italy;
2. Countries with non-transparent economic connections to Azerbaijan: Spain and Malta;
3. Countries with immediate and direct interest in the Southern Corridor: Georgia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece;
4. Central and Eastern Europe Connections: Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic.

Leading partners with diverse trade and geopolitical interests: France, Germany, UK, Italy

France

It would be fair to say that France–Azerbaijan relationship are the most developed of all the EU countries. Azerbaijan has become France’s largest economic partner in the South Caucasus.³⁵ Also, France is the second largest foreign direct investor in Azerbaijan after the United Kingdom.³⁶

Azerbaijan ranked 4th in exports among the former Soviet countries, following Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan, and currently is France's largest trading partner in the Caucasus. In 2015, trade turnover amounted to 1.3 billion EUR. The trade relations are closely related to the field of hydrocarbons.³⁷

French energy giants TOTAL and GDF-Suez are heavily involved in development of Azerbaijan oil and gas deposits.

French president Francois Hollande has numerous times stated the importance of French-Azerbaijani relations for the economy, military and energy security. More than 40 French companies cooperate with Azerbaijan in the field of oil and gas, aerospace industry, transport, and other sectors.³⁸

Ilham Aliyev holds the Grand Cross of Legion honour decoration.

³⁵ Azerbaijan is France’s largest economic partner in the South Caucasus. AZERTAC. 13.09.2013.

[http://azertag.az/en/xeber/Azerbaijan is Frances largest economic partner in the South Caucasus-83762](http://azertag.az/en/xeber/Azerbaijan%20is%20France%20s%20largest%20economic%20partner%20in%20the%20South%20Caucasus-83762)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ambassador: French enterprises ready to support diversification process in Azerbaijan's economy. Report.AZ. 5 September 2016. <http://report.az/en/foreign-politics/french-enterprises-are-ready-to-support-the-process-of-diversification-of-economy-of-azerbaijan/>

³⁸ Ibid.

Presidents of France and Azerbaijan exchange regular visits. During the visit of Francois Hollande to Baku in 2014, 11 contracts for a total of 2 bln Euro were signed.³⁹ President Hollande was accompanied by a set of usual guests in Baku – MPs and Senators whose visit was covered by the Azerbaijani side such as **Thierry Mariani, Rachida Dati, Jean-Francois Mancel, Nathalie Goulet** and others.

According to our sources, Azerbaijani embassy in France has one of the largest budgets for cultural and other kind of promotional work.

France is considered a special focus of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and its president Mehriban Aliyeva. She is a frequent guest at Françoise Hollande's office.⁴⁰ She is also the head of the Azerbaijan-France Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group.⁴¹

In 2015, French National Assembly ratified a special French-Azerbaijani intergovernmental agreement on establishing and functioning of cultural centres.⁴² Thierry Mariani, Jean Francois Mancel, and Michel Voisin delivered speeches at the National Assembly when the agreement was discussed.⁴³

Twelve agreements on fraternization between cities and regions of Azerbaijan and France have been signed in recent years.⁴⁴

A project initiated by the Presidents of the French Republic and the Republic of Azerbaijan was launched in 2014 and led to the opening of The Azerbaijani-French University (UFAZ) on September 2016. UFAZ is a joint project directed by the University of Strasbourg (Unistra) and the Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University (ASOIU) teaching chemical engineering, oil engineering, geophysics and computer science and offering a double degree program at the bachelor level recognized in France and Azerbaijan. An international academic staff of French and Azerbaijani professors deliver lectures mainly in English language, while French language will be gradually integrated in the future. Governmental scholarships covering the 4 years of the whole program are to the 120 students out of the 160 who enrolling in UFAZ in September 2016.⁴⁵

TEAS is actively involved in organising lobbying and promotion events of different kind in France. It works closely with Azerbaijan-friendly politicians and engages actors from the cultural sphere.

³⁹ Scale of signed contracts indicate Azerbaijan's importance for France. AzerNews, 14.05.2014, <http://www.azernews.az/analysis/67070.html>

⁴⁰ Mehriban Aliyeva meets French President Francois Hollande. Website of Mehriban Aliyeva, 03.09.2015, <http://www.mehriban-aliyeva.az/en/news/node/845703>. Accessed on 3 March 2017.

⁴¹ Mehriban Aliyeva meets Ambassador of France to Azerbaijan Aurelia Bouchez. Website of Mehriban Aliyeva, 10.03.2016, <http://www.mehriban-aliyeva.az/en/news/node/846088>. Accessed on 3 March 2017.

⁴² Jean-François Mancel appelle la France à renforcer ses liens avec l'Azerbaïdjan. Official website of the Embassy of Azerbaijan in France, 22.01.2015, <https://www.azambassade.fr/actualite-410>

⁴³ France, Azerbaijan ratify agreement on cultural center establishment. Trend, 24.01.2015, <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2356612.html>

⁴⁴ President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation Mehriban Aliyeva meets a delegation led by Jean-Marie Le Guen. Website of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, 11.01.2017, <http://heydar-aliyev-foundation.org/en/content/view/59/4432/President-of-the-Heydar-Aliyev-Foundation-Mehriban-Aliyeva-meets-a-delegation-led-by-Jean-Marie-Le-Guen>. Accessed on 3 March 2017.

⁴⁵ Ambassador: French enterprises ready to support diversification process in Azerbaijan's economy. Report.AZ. 05.09.2016. <http://report.az/en/foreign-politics/french-enterprises-are-ready-to-support-the-process-of-diversification-of-economy-of-azerbaijan/>

Azerbaijani state participated in the creation of the Department of Islamic Art in the Louvre Museum, which opened in 2012.⁴⁶

The Heydar Aliyev Foundation participated in the restoration of several landmark historic heritage sites in France – the Louvre (gave a one million euro gift), the Palace of Versailles, the Strasbourg Cathedral, and others.⁴⁷ Azerbaijani studies departments are being opened at French universities, and Azerbaijan culture days are being held in more than a dozen cities of France.⁴⁸ Currently, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation has projects in 25 French cities, while 10 French cities have friendship agreements with the Azerbaijani counterparts.⁴⁹

The Azerbaijan Village was the most notable of them, having been opened right in front of the Louvre. That was in 2015, amid the massive human rights crackdown in Azerbaijan when the most vocal and renowned human rights defenders and opposition activists were put in jail.

Paris seems to be the European capital where the largest number of Azerbaijan-promoting events are held, be it energy security and geostrategic discussions, exhibitions or gala-parties for carefully selected public.

A number of French MPs and MEPs seem to be the most loyal long-time friends of Azerbaijan, more than of any other EU country. There are reports about their relations with Azerbaijan that seem profitable and provide nice personal bonuses. Some French MPs are in this business for more than a decade.

According to our sources, businesses range from services in the favourable election observation to selling cattle to Azerbaijan, in exchange for promoting Azerbaijani agenda and defending it from criticism. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation restoration projects and educational activities are giving some French politicians from these districts advantages for securing a successful re-election. Bringing in Azerbaijani investment in restoration of cultural and historical sites, together with boosting local trade as a result of securing business agreements with Azerbaijan, seem to contribute to these politicians being re-elected over and over again. This is particularly true in the case of French Senators, as they are being elected by local officials and not directly by the public. Some of these MPs and MEPs are former high-ranking government officials, well-connected and capable of high-level lobbying.

Another thing they have in common is almost identical arguments they bring forward for their engagement with the Aliyev regime – promotion of French business, geostrategic and energy security issues, tolerance, the Nagorno Karabakh issue, and “double standards should not be used against a young democracy”. They also praise this Muslim country’s cooperation with Israel.

⁴⁶ Ilham Aliyev attended the opening ceremony of new halls of the Paris Louvre museum dedicated to Islamic art. Official website of the President of Azerbaijan, 18.09.2012, <http://en.president.az/articles/6233>

⁴⁷ Azerbaijan: Baku Pursues Cultural Diplomacy in France. Regis Gente. Eurasianet.org, 20.02.2013, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66580>

⁴⁸ The opening of the Department at the University in France. Official website of the Minister of Education of Azerbaijan, 03.11.2015, <http://edu.gov.az/en/page/9/11496>

⁴⁹ La première dame Mehriban Aliyeva reçue par le président français François Hollande à l'Elysée. AzerTac, 04.09.2015, <http://azertag.az/fr/xeber/881976>

The National Assembly has a French-Azerbaijani Friendship Group. French Senate has a Friendship Group with South Caucasus, where the main actors remain unchanged for years. In addition, there is an NGO, Association of Friends of Azerbaijan, leaders of which are the same frequent guests of Baku. In 2015, they published an open letter “European Games – a chance for Azerbaijan”, aimed at preventing boycott and criticism. It was signed by a number of senators, MPs, local government officials, and former ministers.⁵⁰ In 2013, seven out of 18 PACE members from France voted against the resolution on political prisoners in Azerbaijan, 4 supported it, 1 abstained, and 6 did not vote.⁵¹

The most important friends of the Azerbaijani government among French politicians are:

- **Thierry Mariani** (MP, member of PACE, member of OSCEPA);
- **Rachida Dati** (MEP);
- **André Recharde** (Senator, Republican, President of the Senate Friendship Group with South Caucasus);
- **Nathalie Goulet** (Senator, UDI-UC, Vice President of the Senate Friendship Group with South Caucasus);
- **Jean-Marie Bockel** (Senator, UDI-UC, Secretary of the Senate Friendship Group with South Caucasus);
- **Jean-Francois Mancel** (MP, President of the Association of Friends of Azerbaijan);
- **Jean-Luc Reitzer** (deputy from the province of Haut-Rhin and the mayor of the city of Altkirch);
- **Michel Voisin** (MP, chair of the French-Azerbaijan Friendship Group in the National Assembly).

Almost all of them authored articles in support of the European Games in Baku and the 2015 presidential elections. Some of them are worth to have a more detailed look at.

Thierry Mariani served for a long time as a French MP from his native constituency Vouclouse, then was the secretary of state for transportation and the minister of Transportation in Nicolas Sarkozy’s government (2010-2012), and after that became an MP for the French residents overseas. He is from the UMP party, or the Republicans (a member of EPP). He has a long history of election observation services to Azerbaijan and other mutually beneficial relations with this country. Until 2013, he was the chair of the France-Azerbaijan Friendship Group in the National Assembly and now serves as its Secretary. Mariani figures prominently as a friend of the Aliyev regime in the French documentary series by France 2, called “Cash Investigation: Mon président est en voyage d’affaires.”⁵²

Several other French politicians named above are also featured in this film.⁵³ The crew of the film investigated the scenes of President Hollande’s trips abroad for over a year when he was accompanied by French officials and some fifty entrepreneurs. Authors of the film were looking at contracts signed

⁵⁰ Jeux Européens: une chance pour l’Azerbaïdjan. Le Figaro, 22.06.2015, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/2015/06/22/31002-20150622ARTFIG00218-jeux-europeens-une-chance-pour-l-azerbaïdjan.php>

⁵¹ For information on how PACE members from different countries voted on the 2013 resolution, see p. 45 of the report: Azerbaijan debacle: The PACE debate on 23 January 2013. European Stability Initiative, 21.02.2013, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=156&document_ID=136

⁵² Cash Investigation – Mon président est en voyage d’affaires. France 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-AnuPrxQ3b8&spfreload=10>

⁵³ *Cash Investigation* s’intéresse aux voyages présidentiels. Sarah Lecoeuvre, Le Figaro, 19.08.2015, <http://tvmag.lefigaro.fr/programme-tv/article/television/88270/cash-investigation-s-interesse-aux-voyages-presidentiels.html>

and hidden counterparts as well as at how the issue of human rights in autocratic countries the President visited was addressed during the trips. The first step of this investigation took place in Azerbaijan during the visit in May 2014. The series reporters approached Rachida Dati, Thierry Mariani, and others believed to be close to the Aliyev regime, with questions. After this visit to Azerbaijan, the series reporters Laurent Richard and Emmanuel Bach were kicked out of the country and had their footage confiscated at the Baku airport.⁵⁴

On 1 November 2015, speaking to the Azerbaijani press during presidential elections, Mariani said that it was his tenth visit to Baku and fourth election observation.⁵⁵ He has given numerous interviews to the media in support of the ruling regime in Baku. He has met Ilham Aliyev and his wife Mehriban many times, including on dinner occasions.

In Russia and Central Asia, Mariani is well known as a leading promoter of French companies and a partner of autocratic regimes and their lobbyists. Observers believe that this was one of the reasons why he worked hard to create the position of a Special Representative on Central Asia of OSCE PA, to which he was appointed in 2012. His "clients" reportedly include such companies as Areva, Total, Thales, EADS, and GDF Suez as well as the European Strategic intelligence Company.⁵⁶ Most of these groups received contracts and sponsorship of the European Games in Baku in 2015.⁵⁷ With his support French company SYSTRA received a contract for the Baku subway improvement.⁵⁸

In 2009-2010, Thierry Mariani also acted as president of a mysterious election 'observatory', called the Eurasia New Horizons. Its articles of association were filed in February 2008 in Paris by Thierry Mariani and Michel de Guillenchmidt, a lawyer and a specialist in Russian law. According to its statutes, the association shall be a place of exchange between political actors, academics, and societies.⁵⁹ The domain name of the website was filed in December 2009 by Stratinvest, a company based in Moscow and founded by Emmanuel Gout, an advisor on Russia and France of the former Prime-Minister of Italy and a former official of the media giant Vivendi.^{60, 61}

⁵⁴ Azerbaijan to Sue French TV for Calling Ilham Aliyev a "Dictator". Eurasia Net, 10.09.2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/75021>

⁵⁵ French observers happy with Azerbaijani parliamentary election. AzerNews, 01.11.2015, <http://www.azernews.az/nation/89342.html>; Thierry Mariani: "Je soutiens l'Azerbaïdjan dans le règlement du conflit de Haut Karabakh". Vision Azerbaïdjanaise, 11.11.2015, <http://fr.azvision.az/news.php?id=2521>

⁵⁶ Lobbying: les aventures de Thierry Mariani au pays des Soviets. Francois Krug. L'Obs. 5 June 2012. <http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/rue89-politique/2012/06/05/lobbying-les-aventures-de-thierry-mariani-au-pays-des-soviets-232726>

⁵⁷ France and Azerbaijan teaming for Baku 2015. Website of the Embassy of France in Baku, 25.09.2013, http://www.ambafrance-az.org/IMG/pdf/Offre_francaise_seminaire.pdf?1441/f6981045b6f6603f9be0fcedfd7f5bc8b990e075. Accessed on 04.03.2017.

⁵⁸ France and Azerbaijan have great prospects for cooperation in the sphere of transport - Secretary of State. Trend News Agency, 12.02.2011, <http://en.trend.az/business/economy/1828115.html>

⁵⁹ Lobbying: les aventures de Thierry Mariani au pays des Soviets. Francois Krug. L'Obs. 5 June 2012. <http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/rue89-politique/2012/06/05/lobbying-les-aventures-de-thierry-mariani-au-pays-des-soviets-232726>

⁶⁰ Web page of the Farayand Group. <http://www.artprocessor21.com/MEMBERS%205.html>. Accessed on 9 February 2017.

⁶¹ Lobbying: les aventures de Thierry Mariani au pays des Soviets. Francois Krug. L'Obs, 05.06.2012, <http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/rue89-politique/2012/06/05/lobbying-les-aventures-de-thierry-mariani-au-pays-des-soviets-232726>

In April 2010, Thierry Mariani went to Baku for an international conference on parliamentary elections which were due in the next November. The organisers were the Association for Civil Society Development in Azerbaijan (ACSDA, once headed by the key Azerbaijani lobbyist Elkhan Suleymanov) and Mariani's election 'observatory' Eurasia New Horizons.

Mariani claimed that he resigned from the presidency of Eurasia New Horizons shortly after joining the government in 2010; however, he never declared it while taking the government position.⁶²

In August 2010, Eurasia New Horizons became a founder of an international Brussels-based NGO, the European Academy for Elections Observation, which has emerged since then as a key instrument in the new business of election observation aimed at whitewashing rigged elections and referenda under autocratic regimes. For more information on this, please read a special section in this report.

A delegation of observers of one of Mariani's client organisations, the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center (ESISC), also observed Azerbaijani elections in 2015 and assessed them positively. After 2013 elections in Azerbaijan, they attacked the ODIHR monitoring mission findings; this statement can still be found on their website.⁶³

It is not a surprise that all elections observation trips of Mariani to Azerbaijan were followed by his statements praising democratic achievements of the country. The 2015 mission was no different: Mariani and his colleague in the parliament Michel Voisin were "happy with the elections".⁶⁴

In July 2015 and again in July 2016, Mariani led delegations of French MPs to Crimea, annexed by Russia in 2014 in direct violation of international law.⁶⁵ In interviews and meetings with Russian officials, he expressed support for the annexation.⁶⁶ In 2016, he brought non-binding resolutions to the National Assembly and Senate calling on the European Union to lift economic sanctions against Russia and support all Russian annexations.⁶⁷ The resolutions, which had symbolic value, were adopted by both chambers in April and June, respectively.

Since 2012, Mariani has been a member of the French delegation to PACE and is a member of several committees, including the Monitoring Committee. In the 2013 debate in PACE, Mariani worked actively to kill Christoph Strässer's report on political prisoners in Azerbaijan.⁶⁸

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Remarks on the second interim report of the OSCE/ODIHR. Claude MONIQUET, CEO and William Racimora, Vice-CEO. Web site of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Centre, 05.10.2013, <http://www.esisc.org/publications/analyses/remarks-on-the-second-interim-report-of-the-osceodih>

⁶⁴ French observers happy with Azerbaijani parliamentary election. AzerNews, 01.11.2015, <http://www.azernews.az/nation/89342.html>

⁶⁵ French MPs' Crimea visit condemned by France and Ukraine. BBC, 23.07.2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33633874>

⁶⁶ 'Crimea is Russian, It Will Never Change' - French Lawmaker Delegation's Head. Sputnik International, 31.07.2016, <https://sputniknews.com/politics/201607311043806577-crimea-russia-mariani-france/>

⁶⁷ French MPs call to lift Russia sanctions. EU Observer, 29.04.2016, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/133271>

⁶⁸ Azerbaijan debacle: The PACE debate on 23 January 2013. The European Stability Initiative. 21 February 2013. http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=156&document_ID=136#16

Rachida Dati is a member of the European Parliament, formerly the Minister of Justice under President Sarkozy, and the mayor of the 7th district in Paris.

Rachida Dati is a good personal friend of Mehriban Aliyeva and a frequent guest in Baku. According to our Azerbaijani sources, Dati happily uses Azerbaijani hospitality: for example, she brought 11 members of her family to the European Games in Baku. Sources also claim that she likes to use long and expensive luxury SPA procedures, which, as the sources claim, are normally part of the hospitality covered by the Azerbaijani side.⁶⁹

She has written a number of articles in French media advocating for and praising the Aliyev regime, using a standard set of arguments.

Declaring the country “an example of democracy for other Islamic countries”,⁷⁰ she sent a letter of congratulation to Aliyev after the 2013 elections, saying: “The result of this election represents a high assessment given by the people of your country for the activities carried out under your leadership.”⁷¹

In 2012, President Aliyev and his wife Mehriban Aliyeva opened a lavish 3000 m² Azerbaijani Cultural Centre, paid for by Heydar Aliyev Foundation and the Azerbaijani embassy, in Rachida Dati’s constituency in the 7th arrondissement of Paris where she served as the mayor.⁷² Three months later Dati said in an interview: “The Azerbaijani model is the result of a real political will.”⁷³

Dati is also a managing member of the Association of Friends of Azerbaijan. The organisation is headed by a member of the French National Assembly Jean-Francois Mancel. Along with Dati, French parliamentarians, senators, celebrities, as well as representatives of the Azerbaijani diaspora are represented in the association.⁷⁴

In 2011, Rachida Dati co-organized, together with Mehriban Aliyeva, a conference in Paris, called “Azerbaijan: a strategic partner for energy security in Europe”. In attendance were Azerbaijani Ministers, European politicians and heads of energy companies, including Jean-François Cirelli, Vice-President of GDF-Suez, and Elshad Nasirov, Vice-President of SOCAR. This was followed by a 400-seat dinner for politicians, business people, and celebrities at the Rodin Museum, where Dati and the head of GDF-Suez Gérard Mestrallet were pictured together. The event covered significant gas discoveries in Absheron in Azerbaijan, as well as the opening of negotiations between the EU and Azerbaijan on access to Caspian gas, something GDF-Suez is very much in favour of. Heydar Aliyev Foundation funded the conference and the dinner.⁷⁵ In 2012, GDF-Suez, Total, and SOCAR developed the Absheron fields.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ Authors’ interviews in 2015.

⁷⁰ Spin doctors to the autocrats: how European PR firms whitewash repressive regimes. Corporate Europe Observatory, 20.01.2015, <https://corporateeurope.org/pressreleases/2015/01/european-pr-firms-whitewashing-brutal-regimes-report>

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Azerbaijan: Baku Pursues Cultural Diplomacy in France. EurasiaNet, 20.02.2013, www.eurasianet.org/node/66580, and Organized by Heydar Aliyev Foundation, Azerbaijani Village opens in Paris, AZERTAC, 20.09.2016.

http://azertag.az/en/xeber/Organized_by_Heydar_Aliyev_Foundation_Azerbaijani_Village_opens_in_Paris-993916

⁷³ Azerbaijan: Baku Pursues Cultural Diplomacy in France. EurasiaNet, 20.02.2013, www.eurasianet.org/node/66580

⁷⁴ Website of l’Association des Amis de l’Azerbaïdjan, <http://www.aaaz.fr/>. Accessed on 4 March 2017.

⁷⁵ Spin doctors to the autocrats: how European PR firms whitewash repressive regimes. Corporate Europe Observatory, 20.01.2015, <https://corporateeurope.org/pressreleases/2015/01/european-pr-firms-whitewashing-brutal-regimes-report>

⁷⁶ Ibid.

In 2013-2014, two NGOs, Friends of the Earth and Corporate Europe Observatory, questioned Dati's dealings with the French gas company GDF-Suez. They said a working relationship between the two, mentioned in several media reports, raised a potential conflict of interest with regards to Dati's membership of the European Parliament's Economic Affairs and Monetary Affairs Committee (ECON) and the Industry, Research and Energy Committee (ITRE). The two NGOs wonder whether Dati has a conflict of interest, defined by the code of conduct as a situation "where the member has a personal interest that could improperly influence the performance of their functions."⁷⁷

In April 2014, MEP Gerald Häfner, then the Chair of the Code of Conduct advisory committee in the European Parliament, noted: "[MEP Rachida Dati] was completely inactive for a long time, and then she suddenly started to do a huge amount of work on energy, and strangely enough, everything that she does seems to correspond exactly to the interest of one particular industry lobby, namely Gaz De France [GDF-Suez]. At one time a publicist admitted that she was acting on behalf of Gaz De France and specifically stated the amount she got in payment for that; and that case was... recommended for an official investigation."⁷⁸

French Senator **Jean-Marie Bockel** is a native of Strasbourg. French diplomatic sources were quoted by the press saying that the Heydar Aliyev Foundation activities, including restoration of one of the famous stained glasses in the Strasbourg Cathedral, have had an influence on Bockel's views regarding Azerbaijan.⁷⁹ The Heydar Aliyev Foundation made a 40,000-euro gift for the restoration of stained glass windows in the city of Strasbourg's Cathédrale de Notre Dame.⁸⁰

Jean-Marie Bockel claims to have known Ilham Aliyev since 2000⁸¹, when the latter was the head of the Azerbaijani delegation to PACE. During the 2013 debate in PACE, Bockel worked actively to vote down Strässer's report.⁸²

He has made several trips to Baku, including one in February 2015, when he was the head of the delegation and was received by president Aliyev. One of the aims of the visit was business promotion of Alsace – Bockel's domain – in Azerbaijan.⁸³

In the same year, in November 2015, in Bockel's constituency a Department of Literature and Culture named after Nizami Ganjavi was opened at the University of Upper Alsace in Mulhouse. Speaking at the event, Bockel who is a President of Mulhouse Alsace Agglomeration, said that he is a friend of Azerbaijan.⁸⁴ The project was supported by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and Mehriban Aliyeva.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Azerbaijan: Baku Pursues Cultural Diplomacy in France. EurasiaNet, 20.02.2013, www.eurasianet.org/node/66580

⁸⁰ Ibid + authors' interviews in 2016.

⁸¹ Ilham Aliyev received a delegation led by member of the French Senate Jean-Marie Bockel. Official website of the President of Azerbaijan, 11.02.2015, <http://en.president.az/articles/14307/print>

⁸² Azerbaijan debacle: The PACE debate on 23 January 2013. The European Stability Initiative, 21.02.2013, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=156&document_ID=136#9

⁸³ Ilham Aliyev received a delegation led by member of the French Senate Jean-Marie Bockel. Official website of the President of Azerbaijan, 11.02.2015, <http://en.president.az/articles/14307/print>

⁸⁴ The opening of the Department at the University in France. Official website of the Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan, 03.11.2015, <http://edu.gov.az/en/page/9/11496>

Bockel is quite often quoted by the Azerbaijani media and was interviewed by TEAS–France.⁸⁵ Like Thierry Mariani, he is always satisfied with the level of democracy in Azerbaijan, praises its European aspirations, and always supports the Azerbaijani position in PACE. Bockel underlines the geostrategic and energy security importance of Azerbaijan, sponsors or participates in discussions on the subject, being a member of Energy Study Group in the French Parliament.

Member of the National Assembly and President of the Association of Friends of Azerbaijan in France **Jean-Francois Mancel** is a regular guest in Baku. Among other sites, he leads French delegations visiting cultural institutions.⁸⁶ President Aliyev called him “a close friend of Azerbaijan” and hailed his role in developing the relations between the two countries.⁸⁷ In his turn, Mancel praised “the close friendship and cooperation with head of Azerbaijan-France Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group, Azerbaijan’s first lady Mehriban Aliyeva”.⁸⁸

Senator **Nathalie Goulet** represents Bellou-sur-Huisne’s Département of Orne. She advocated for Azerbaijan’s controversial 2001 accession to the Council of Europe.⁸⁹

Several communities and organisations in Goulet’s constituency have received the Heydar Aliyev Foundation’s grants. Besides the restoration of the church of Saint Paterne, the Foundation has been involved in the renovation of another church, located in Reveillon, a village with 363 inhabitants. The Foundation has helped to sponsor jazz and dance festivals in the small towns of L’Aigle and Argentan. According to Goulet, the Foundation’s overall contribution has totalled 150,000 Euro.⁹⁰

Goulet is a frequent guest in Baku and an observer at every election in Azerbaijan. Our Azerbaijani sources say that it is not only the cultural heritage interests that have bound mutual sympathy, but also the local business interest, like selling cattle from Goulet’s electoral district to Azerbaijan.⁹¹

Goulet has authored several pro-Azerbaijani articles in the French media using a standard set of arguments.^{92, 93, 94} Goulet, together with Dati and Mariani, was in the focus on France 2 Cash Investigation TV documentary.⁹⁵

⁸⁵ Interview with Jean-Marie Bockel. Official website of the European Azerbaijan Society, 13.03.2012, <http://teas.eu/teas-tv-interview-jean-marie-bockel>

⁸⁶ Delegation headed by MP of French National Assembly visited National Museum of Azerbaijan Literature of ANAS. Website of the Nizami Museum, 07.10.2016, <http://nizamimuseum.az/en/news/1235>. Accessed on 05.12.2016.

⁸⁷ Ilham Aliyev received delegation led by member of National Assembly of France Jean-Francois Mancel. Website of the President of Azerbaijan. 25.04.2016, <http://en.president.az/articles/19553>. Accessed on 10.09.2016.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Azerbaijan: Baku Pursues Cultural Diplomacy in France. EurasiaNet, 20.02.2013, www.eurasianet.org/node/66580

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Authors’ interviews in 2016.

⁹² “Apprenons à connaître l’Azerbaïdjan”. Interview de Nathalie Goulet, senatrice. L’Orne Combattante, 08.10.2015, <http://azambassade.fr/tinymce/uploaded/xerberler/2015/10-2015/20151008-art-Nathalie-Goulet-OrneCmbt.pdf>

⁹³ Les jeux de Baku, les jeux de l’intolérance médiatique. Nathalie Goulet. Le Huffington Post (Fr), 12.05.2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/nathalie-goulet/jeux-europeens-bakou-b_7248638.html?utm_hp_ref=tw

⁹⁴ Collection of articles by Nathalie Goulet. Le Huffington Post (Fr), <http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/nathalie-goulet/>

⁹⁵ Cash Investigation: "C'est quoi ces méthodes?" LCI, 8 September 2015. www.metronews.fr/info/cash-investigation-nathalie-goulet-persiste-et-signe-sur-l-azerbaïdjan/moih!SWJvy72G2f90w/

Michel Voisin is a member of the French National Assembly and the current chair of the France-Azerbaijan Friendship Group in the National Assembly.⁹⁶

He has a long history of relations with Azerbaijani authorities, having been received by President Aliyev on numerous occasions^{97, 98} and having participated in the election observation many times. In 2013, at the meeting with the Minister of the Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan Voisin noted that it was his fourth visit to Azerbaijan to observe the elections in this country, and he “highly appreciated the progress he witnessed”.⁹⁹

Voisin played a particularly important role in the scandalous observation of presidential elections in Azerbaijan in October 2013 as a special OSCE coordinator for the election observation, attacking critical conclusions by OSCE ODIHR, praising the elections, and siding with missions of PACE and the European Parliament. For more details on this, see the chapter on OSCE PA.

Michel Voisin continued his positive assessment of “Azerbaijan’s progress” during observation of parliamentary elections in 2015 and the referendum in 2016. It was at this latest observation in September 2016 when he said, together with two other French parliamentarians – Azerbaijani apologists, Thierry Mariani and Nathalie Goulet, “to tell the truth, we know without observing that everything is all right”.¹⁰⁰

Germany

Germany is Azerbaijan's second largest trade partner and a country with very active political connections with Azerbaijan and a lot of organizations and politicians involved in mutual activities.

At the end of 2014, around 180 companies with German investment were operating in Azerbaijan's commercial, construction, industrial, banking, insurance, agriculture, as well as service sectors. 67 documents had been signed between Azerbaijan and Germany in various fields during that period, and the Azerbaijani-German Chamber of Foreign Trade was established in 2012 in Baku. At the end of 2014, there were over 100 German companies active in Azerbaijan. German companies also acted as contractors in 10 investment projects at that time worth more than 460 million euros.¹⁰¹

Foreign Minister of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier said in a 2016 interview: “For us, Azerbaijan is an important partner in the region of the Southern Caucasus, strategically located at the Caspian Sea and blessed with enormous energy resources. Our economic exchange increased in 2015, and this was

⁹⁶ Profile of Michel Voisin on the website of the National Assembly of France, http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/instances/fiche/OMC_PO675745. Accessed on 05.03.2017.

⁹⁷ President Ilham Aliyev received deputy chairman of the Defense Committee of the French National Assembly. Website of the President of Azerbaijan, 10.05.2011, <http://en.president.az/articles/2134>. Accessed on 5 December 2016.

⁹⁸ Azerbaijani President receives French parliamentarian. Trend, 15.09.2013, <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2190780.html>

⁹⁹ Press Release by the Press Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 16.09.2013, <http://www.mia.gov.az/index.php?preview/en/news/view/599/>

¹⁰⁰ International “election observers” whitewash fraudulent referendum in Azerbaijan. European Platform for Democratic Elections, September 2016. <http://www.epde.org/en/newsreader/items/international-election-observers-whitewash-fraudulent-referendum-in-azerbaijan.html>

¹⁰¹ Azerbaijan, Germany ties rapidly developing. AzerNews, 03.09.2014, <http://www.azernews.az/nation/70246.html>

not only due to the fact that Germany buys significant quantities of oil from Azerbaijan. The German-Azerbaijani Chamber of Commerce is very active.”¹⁰²

In 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel called Azerbaijan “an increasingly important partner”. Merkel stressed that the German government “expressly” supports the Southern Gas Corridor project, which is to bring Azerbaijani gas from the Shah Deniz offshore field to Europe.¹⁰³ Many actors in Germany believe that this project will help to diversify Europe’s energy supplies. Chancellor Merkel said then that she hoped to see even closer economic relations between Germany and Azerbaijan in the future: “I believe that we still have potential to expand our economic relations.” She pointed out that German investors could be helpful in expanding infrastructure and diversifying Azerbaijan’s economy.¹⁰⁴

Germany mainly imports oil from Azerbaijan; around 4 million tons of petroleum is delivered from Azerbaijan to Germany annually.¹⁰⁵

Chancellor stressed that Germany has wide-ranging relations with Azerbaijan, embracing not only the economic and political spheres, but also matters relating to civil society. German foundations and other organisations must be sure that they can work on a sound and secure legal basis, she said. In spite of differences of opinion on this point, the Chancellor believes that the most important thing is to keep the lines of communication with Azerbaijan open.¹⁰⁶

On 26 February 2015, at an event in German Parliamentarian Society, organised by the German-Azerbaijan Forum, the Embassy of Azerbaijan, SOCAR Germany, and the German Atlantic Society, Vice-President of the German Bundestag Johannes Singhammer highlighted the common interests of the two countries, related to questions of energy supply as well as stability in Europe and the Caucasus. He referred to the 2009 resolution of the German Bundestag and considered Azerbaijan to be a reliable partner of the West, entitling the country as an example for multi-ethnic and multi-religious tolerance. Cooperation in economic terms is already developing closely, as Singhammer further continued, and “the German Federal Government explicitly supports the Southern Gas Corridor. We are looking forward to seeing Azerbaijan on its orientation towards Europe”.¹⁰⁷

Several pro-Azerbaijani lobbying groups are active in Germany, given its political and business role. TEAS–Berlin is regularly taking journalists on paid trips to Baku. There are also German “native” lobbying groups, headed by former German politicians. Azerbaijan and its lobbyists engage high-ranking, well-connected politicians in their activities in Germany.

¹⁰² Azerbaijan important partner, says German FM, OSCE chair. Trend News Agency, 22.01.2016, <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2483768.html>

¹⁰³ Germany calls Azerbaijan ‘an increasingly important partner’. Georgi Gotev. Euractiv.com, 23.01.2015, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/europes-east/germany-calls-azerbaijan-increasingly-important-partner-311511>

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ 3rd Symposium: Security and Stability in the South Caucasus – German-Azerbaijan Cooperation Perspectives. Website of SOCAR-Germany, 18.04.2015, <http://socar.de/2015/04/3rd-symposium-security-and-stability-in-the-south-caucasus-german-azerbaijan-cooperation-perspectives/>. Accessed on 9 February 2017.

The Berlin-based Society for the Promotion of German-Azerbaijani Relations (GEFDAB) is headed by **Eduard Lintner**, former Bundestag and PACE member. *Der Spiegel* described GEFDAB as “essentially a lobbying group funded by Azerbaijan.”¹⁰⁸ Lintner became the executive director of GEFDAB shortly before leaving PACE in 2010, and according to our sources, this position and further funding of GEFDAB by Azerbaijan is seen by many actors as a gratitude from Baku for the job done by Lintner in the Azerbaijani interests in PACE and investment in his future activities.¹⁰⁹

Lintner had earlier chaired two key PACE committees that deal closely with the situation in the country: in 2002-2005, the Committee for Legal Affairs and Human Rights, which monitored the situation with political prisoners in Azerbaijan, and later the Monitoring Committee (in 2006-2007). He observed the 2005 parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan, which were marred by numerous violations. In a PACE debate in January 2006, he argued against imposing sanctions on Azerbaijan, saying that “...the Council of Europe needed to support and accompany it [Azerbaijan] along the road to democracy, acting critically and intensively.” In an interview given to a German newspaper in 2011, Lintner explained that he travelled to Azerbaijan six to ten times a year. He described the essence of his work as “accompanying the country on the way to a parliamentary democracy.”¹¹⁰

GEFDAB was behind the 36-strong “German Election Observation Group” in October 2013 invited by the Azerbaijani Central Election Commission. The group’s statement said that the vote in the elections complied with “the basic and democratic rules of a free and independent election.”^{111, 112} Lintner was also quoted on the election day: “The election process itself was organised at a high level and meets such standards as in Germany, for example... All procedures stipulated by the law were observed during voting at all the polling stations that we visited. Our team did not notice any irregularities.”¹¹³

GEFDAB also provided financial support for observers from the European Academy of Elections Observation (EAEO) during their observation missions to Azerbaijan in 2010 and in 2013. The EAEO president, **Stef Goris**, a former Liberal member of the Belgian parliament, said that the EAEO’s delegation in 2013 comprised “135 MPs and political experts from 24 European Union countries and Canada”. He refused to provide details on the delegation members’ names, citing confidentiality, but described GEFDAB as its “sponsor”.¹¹⁴ The trips organised by EAEO and GEFDAB paid for business class flights and lodging for the delegation members. GEFDAB refused to reveal its sources of funding, saying

¹⁰⁸ A Dictator's Dream: Azerbaijan Seeks to Burnish Image Ahead of Eurovision. Ralf Neukirch. Spiegel Online, 04.01.2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/a-dictator-s-dream-azerbaijan-seeks-to-burnish-image-ahead-of-eurovision-a-806769.html>

¹⁰⁹ Authors’ interviews in 2016.

¹¹⁰ Disgraced. Azerbaijan and the end of election monitoring as we know it. European Stability Initiative, 05.11.2013, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=de&id=156&document_ID=145

¹¹¹ No action in Azerbaijan case: Schulz says a warning to MEPs is enough. Toby Vogel, European Voice, 26.03.2014, <http://www.politico.eu/article/no-action-in-azerbaijan-case-3/>

¹¹² Statement of German Election Observation Group regarding presidential elections in Azerbaijan. Website of MEP Alexandra Thein, 09.10.2013, http://www.alexandra-thein.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Infos_etc/Statement_of_the_German_Observation_Group_regarding_the_Presidential_Elections_in_Azerbaijan.pdf. Accessed on 01.10.2016.

¹¹³ Elections met international standards: Eduard Lintner. AzerNews, 10.10.2013, <http://www.azernews.az/nation/60514.html>

¹¹⁴ European Parliament goes soft on flawed Azerbaijan election. Politico, 16.10.2013, <http://www.politico.eu/article/european-parliament-goes-soft-on-flawed-azerbaijan-election/>

it was “an internal matter of no public interest”.¹¹⁵ For more information on EAEO, please see the chapter on “fake election observers”.

In the run-up to Eurovision song contest in 2012, a campaign to improve Azerbaijan image in Germany was launched.¹¹⁶

Der Spiegel names **Hans-Erich Bilges** as a key figure in Azerbaijan's efforts to develop its positive image and promote itself in Germany.^{117, 118} Previously, he served as a high-ranking member of the editorial team at Germany's mass-circulation daily *Bild*. These days, however, he heads the Berlin-based public relations agency Consultum Communications. In this capacity, Bilges has also advised Belarus and Kazakhstan.¹¹⁹

Consultum Communications' Secretary General is **Michael-Andreas Butz**, and he is responsible in the organisation for everyday business related to Azerbaijan. He served for many years as the spokesperson for the Berlin Senate (the official name for the capital city's government). As well as GEFDAB, the agency is believed to be instrumental in building Azerbaijani-German bridges of a certain kind.¹²⁰ For example, in 2014, it organised a major trip of German lobbyists and business figures to Baku, which included meeting with President Aliyev. The delegation included **Hanns-Eberhard Schleyer**, chairman of the Board of the German-Azerbaijani Forum, former Secretary General of the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts and former State Secretary; **Karin Strenz**, an MP and chair of the Parliamentary Friendship Group for Relations with the States of the Southern Caucasus; Raynold Robben, chair of the German-Israeli Society; **Michael-Andreas Butz**, Secretary General of the German-Azerbaijani Forum; Rainer Lindner, CEO of the Eastern Committee of German Economy, and representatives of leading German businesses such as Knauf, Deutsche Bank, SMS Meer, Claas Global Sales, and Herrenknecht.

The Council of State Support to NGOs under the President of Azerbaijan, a grant-making arm of the Azerbaijani government, signed a grant agreement with the German-Azerbaijan Forum during that visit in 2014. While there is no doubt that the Azerbaijani government pays Consultum Communications through contracts, it prefers giving grants to pro-Azerbaijani German think-tanks and NGOs. Consulting companies are often interconnected with lobbying NGOs, however.

Consultum Communications has also organised a range of events in Germany to promote Azerbaijan, among which was a celebration at Berlin's German Historical Museum to fete the 20th anniversary of Azerbaijan's independence, hosted by Ilham Aliyev himself. Bettina Wulff, the wife of then German President Christian Wulff, delivered a welcome address. Pictures from the event show her next to the first lady of Azerbaijan Mehriban Aliyeva.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ A Dictator's Dream: Azerbaijan Seeks to Burnish Image Ahead of Eurovision. Ralf Neukirch. Spiegel Online, 04.01.2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/a-dictator-s-dream-azerbaijan-seeks-to-burnish-image-ahead-of-eurovision-a-806769.html>

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Berliner Hans-Erich Bilges macht PR für Aserbaidtschan. Berliner Morgenpost, 26.05.2012, <http://www.morgenpost.de/politik/article106380479/Berliner-Hans-Erich-Bilges-macht-PR-fuer-Aserbaidtschan.html>

¹¹⁹ A page on Hans-Erich Bilges in Lobbypedia. https://lobbypedia.de/wiki/Hans-Erich_Bilges. Accessed on 9 February 2017.

¹²⁰ Authors' interview in Berlin in 2015. Needs additional verification.

¹²¹ A Dictator's Dream: Azerbaijan Seeks to Burnish Image Ahead of Eurovision. Ralf Neukirch. Spiegel Online, 04.01.2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/a-dictator-s-dream-azerbaijan-seeks-to-burnish-image-ahead-of-eurovision-a->

Among the distinguished guests attending the Berlin gala were dignitaries such as the former Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher (1982-1992) and the former Economics Minister Michael Glos (2005-2009).¹²² Although that calibre of guests was unusual for this kind of events, things start to make more sense when one peers behind the scenes. Genscher was the honorary chairman of the advisory board of Consultum Communications, and Glos holds a seat on its board.

Former Economics Minister Michael Glos, among other politicians, went on a paid trip in September 2011 to Baku for the celebration of Azerbaijan's independence. In addition to Glos, the group included Karl-Georg Wellmann, a parliamentarian with Chancellor Angela Merkel's centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and Stefan Liebich, a parliamentarian with the Left Party. The trip included business-class plane seats, lodging in a luxury hotel, a gala dinner, and a speech delivered by President Aliyev. Liebich and Glos have acknowledged that the trip was paid for by the Azerbaijani side. Stefan Liebich has many times since then denounced this trip as a mistake.¹²³

Another lobbying agency, German-Azerbaijani Forum, is closely connected to TEAS. It is also closely connected to Consultum Communications, with which it shares key actors, and is also close to the Embassy of Azerbaijan and SOCAR Germany (which is, as our sources say, a primary source of money for the Forum). **Hanns-Eberhard Schleyer**, chair of the Board of the Forum, is the former Secretary General of the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts. **Otto Hauser**, an ex-Secretary of State of Germany, is the honorary chair of the Forum and the Honorary Consul of Azerbaijan in Stuttgart.

There is another group that works for Azerbaijan interests, Berlin-based European Institute for the Caucasus and Caspian Studies, headed by **Matthias Dornfeldt**. It seems that they are handling a part of the geopolitical aspect of relations (energy cooperation, Karabakh, European integration, good governance) and give an intellectual think-tankish touch to the Azerbaijani PR activities in Germany. Dornfeldt travelled to Baku in April 2015 "to enhance Azerbaijan-Germany civil society cooperation", meeting GONGOs and government officials.¹²⁴ Interestingly enough, the Institute also works to promote Kazakhstan. Later that year, Dornfeldt wrote a letter of protest to the European Parliament over its highly critical resolution on Azerbaijan.¹²⁵

According to observers, German Bundestag is "infested" with Azerbaijani lobbyists.¹²⁶ In 2012, **Christoph Strässer**, a Bundestag member with the Social Democratic Party and the PACE rapporteur on the situation of political prisoners in Azerbaijan, a politician with strong human rights credentials, was preparing a report for PACE according to his mandate. For months, Baku refused to grant him a visa. The Bundestag Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid responded by drafting a resolution demanding that the Azerbaijani government grant Strässer a visa and free access to its detention

[806769.html](#)

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ The NGO Council authorities signed Grant Agreements with British, German and Estonian NGOs. Official website of the Council on State Support to Non-Governmental Organizations under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 16.09.2014, <http://www.cssn.gov.az/news.php?id=1662&lang=en>. Accessed on 9 February 2017.

¹²⁵ Head of Berlin-based European Institute for Caucasus and Caspian Studies sends letter of protest to European Parliament President over anti-Azerbaijani resolution. AzerTag, 29.09.2015, http://azertag.az/en/xeber/Head_of_Berlin_based_European_Institute_for_Caucasus_and_Caspian_Studies_sends_letter_of_protest_to_European_Parliament_President_over_anti_Azerbaijani_resolution-888308

¹²⁶ Authors' interviews in 2015-2016.

places. Interestingly, Strässer claims that Azerbaijan's ambassador to Germany already had a draft copy of the resolution before it was even decided upon by Bundestag. It appears that someone from inside Bundestag leaked the document to the Azerbaijanis. In response, the Azerbaijani ambassador wrote letters to all of the heads of the parliamentary groups asking to block the resolution.¹²⁷

We learned from a trusted source that after this attempt did not succeed and the resolution was adopted by the Bundestag, in 2012 before Strässer completed his report for PACE and before new elections to Bundestag in his constituency, letters from a German MP were received by the Social Democratic Party leadership urging them not to nominate Strässer for elections in this constituency. It turned out that the letter was written by **Hakki Keskin**, a German politician of Turkish origin and a member of Bundestag for the SPD at that time.¹²⁸ Keskin is a professor of political science, a well-known German politician and the first person of Turkish descent to become a member of German parliament. In June 2005, he withdrew from the Social Democratic Party in protest of its policies and joined the Left Party. Should Strässer not have been re-elected in 2012, he would not have been able to present his report to PACE in January 2013.

The head of the German delegation to PACE **Axel Fischer** is another important ally of Azerbaijan. According to observers, he holds a strong pro-Azerbaijani position; he is now chairing the EPP group in PACE as a successor for Luca Volonte and Pedro Agramunt.¹²⁹

His comment on the presidential elections in Azerbaijan in 2013 was praising: “The elections were free, fair and transparent.” He was in the country on election day as the head of the German group of observers and during his visit of a voting station he had not seen anything wrong, he said.¹³⁰

In January 2013, Fischer was one of the only two German members of PACE who did not support the resolution on Strässer’s report on political prisoners (abstained).

Most recently, during the PACE session in January 2017 where a grandiose scandal broke out caused by well-grounded allegations of corruption by Luca Volonte and Azerbaijani MPs, Axel Fischer wrote a scandalous letter to Pedro Agramunt as the President of PACE, calling on him to open investigation – not of the behaviour of MPs – but of the NGOs who had raised the issue: “We expect that all current and former members of the Parliamentary Assembly... respect the Assembly's rules and that prior to collaboration with NGOs, the members ascertain the work, objectives and financial arrangements of said NGOs... We request that the current Rules and Procedures of the Assembly and all other Codes of Conduct be verified in order to ensure that they are adapted to this end and can react in a responsive and effectively manner. Be assured Mr. President that our position regarding corruption is one of zero tolerance.”¹³¹

¹²⁷ Authors’ interviews in 2015-2016.

¹²⁸ Authors’ interviews in 2016.

¹²⁹ Axel Fischer’s page on the official website of PACE, <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/AssemblyList/MP-Details-EN.asp?MemberID=5654>. Accessed on 9 February 2017.

¹³⁰ Die Helfer der Diktatoren. Der Spiegel, 26.10.2014, https://magazin.spiegel.de/digital/index_SP.html#SP/2014/26/127739811

¹³¹ Three days that shook Strasbourg – human rights and corruption. European Stability Initiative, 27.01.2017, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=yu&id=236&newsletter_ID=111#6

Karin Strenz, a member of Bundestag and PACE, is maybe not the most influential but certainly the most vocal and open advocate of Azerbaijan in the Bundestag. She has had meetings with Ilham Aliyev several times and has been on election observation missions. While she is not well known to many of her colleagues in Bundestag, she is featured prominently in the official Azerbaijani media.

Strenz is a chair of the Parliamentary Friendship Group for Relations with the States of the Southern Caucasus in Bundestag. She is a speaker at essentially every event related to Azerbaijan in Germany. Since 2010, when she went on the election observation mission to Azerbaijan for the first time, she has travelled a lot to Baku, often bringing German business people with her. Well-informed sources are asking questions in this regards on whether German companies could have rewarded her for helping them get contracts in Azerbaijan.

Not all of her trips are known to the German public. For example, while once being on a trip, she posted on her official blog a picture of her allegedly meeting with her voters in Germany on that very day.¹³²

Strenz often complains about double standards applied to Azerbaijan by the critics of its human rights and democracy record and underlines the importance of Azerbaijan for Germany's energy security. Nagorno Karabakh issue is also in her focus, which makes her pro-Azerbaijani activism legitimate in the eyes of many MPs.

In May 2015, on the eve of the European Games, she brought a delegation of MPs to Baku and again organised a meeting with Ilham Aliyev. One of discussion items were TAP and TANAP projects. She was accompanied by Tankred Schipanski (CDU), Heidrun Tempel, Johannes Kahrs (both from SPD), Katrin Kunert (Linke), and Tabea Rößner (Greens).¹³³

During PACE observation mission at the presidential elections in 2013, Karin Strenz, according to our sources, preferred to go to polling stations alone, though normal practice is to go at least in pairs. She arrived in Baku earlier and left later than other PACE observers. According to our sources, each time she comes to Baku, she enjoys special treatment from the Azerbaijani authorities, like a government limousine-style car.¹³⁴

Michal Fuchs of the CDU on his 2012 trip to Baku to give a speech at the Diplomatic Academy received, according to sources, between 3500 and 7000 euro as a fee plus travels costs and per diem which was reflected in his declaration to Bundestag. He also had a meeting at SOCAR. Quite possibly, it was SOCAR who paid for the whole trip through the Diplomatic Academy, which appears to be a typical practice.¹³⁵

Our interlocutors in and around Bundestag have pointed out especially at CDU/CSU members as the main supporters of Azerbaijan. This is in line with Azerbaijan's special relations with the EPP, of which the CDU is a member. However, it is also clear that while counting on CDU/CSU/EPP, Azerbaijan is working across the party spectrum in Bundestag, aiming to engage different factions.

¹³² Unkritischer Besuch bei Diktator Ilham Alijew. Claudia von Salzen, Der Tagesspiegel, 21.05.2015, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/deutsche-abgeordnete-in-aserbajdschan-unkritischer-besuch-bei-diktator-ilham-alijew/11807924.html>

¹³³ Official website of Karin Strenz. <http://www.strenz.de/2015-1.html>. Accessed on 9 February 2017.

¹³⁴ Authors' interviews in 2016.

¹³⁵ Authors' interviews in 2015-2016.

Der Tagesspiegel wrote on the occasion of Ilham Aliyev's January 2015 visit to Germany: "Aliyev met on Tuesday with representatives of the German-Azerbaijani Forum and Bundestag deputies, including the foreign policy spokesman of the CDU parliamentary group Philipp Mißfelder. Later, the CDU MP **Olav Gutting** wrote on Twitter that the topic of human rights was mentioned. In the same tweet, he published proudly a "selfie", a photo that shows him with Aliyev."¹³⁶

In 2010, Azerbaijan succeeded in establishing a department of Azerbaijani history at Humboldt University, one of Germany's leading universities. Main pro-Azerbaijan experts from all over the world were invited to a grand celebration, an Azerbaijan Week of Culture and Science in Germany.¹³⁷

Azerbaijan-related issues, as well as extensive pro-Azerbaijan interviews, are regularly aired on TV Berlin, an Azerbaijan-sponsored TV outlet, with money for it channelled through TEAS, according to observers.¹³⁸

United Kingdom

The UK is home for the largest investor in Azerbaijan, the transnational energy giant BP. Many different sources say that a lot of Azerbaijani lobbying in the UK is done through BP. It is just over 20 years since BP signed what was dubbed the "contract of the century" to develop the country's vast oil reserves.

BP is one of the main players in the TAP (Trans-Adriatic Pipeline) consortium. **Charles Hendry**, an MP and the prime ministerial trade envoy to Azerbaijan, at one of the conferences on the subject said that the "UK government wants British businesses to be the partner of choice for their Azerbaijani counterparts".¹³⁹

Great Britain (London and the British Overseas Territories) is one of the key locations where corrupt Azerbaijani officials keep their money in offshore banks, along with the Czech Republic, Dubai, Malta, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United States.¹⁴⁰

London is also seat of an office of TEAS, run by Oxford-educated **Taleh Heydarov**, son of the number one Azerbaijani oligarch, Kamaledin Heydarov. TEAS was launched in the House of Lords in 2008.¹⁴¹

According to the numerous reports in the British media, Azerbaijani lobbying in Britain has reached the highest levels of British society, including lords and royal family.

¹³⁶ Heikles Tischgespräch. Aserbajdschans Präsident bei Angela Merkel. Claudia von Salzen. Der Tagesspiegel. 21.01.2015. <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/aserbajdschans-praesident-bei-angela-merkel-heikles-tischgesprach/11261986.html>

¹³⁷ Azerbaijan Week of Culture and Science in Germany. Visions of Azerbaijan. March-April 2011. <http://www.visions.az/diaspora,261/>

¹³⁸ Authors' interviews in 2016.

¹³⁹ Plush hotels and caviar diplomacy: How Azerbaijan's elite wooed MPs. Jamie Doward and Charlotte Latimer. The Observer, 24.11.2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/24/azerbaijan-caviar-diplomacy-for-mps>

¹⁴⁰ The Structure of Corruption: A Systemic Analysis Using Eurasian Cases. Sarah Chayes, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30.06.2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/structure-of-corruption-systemic-analysis-pub-63991>

¹⁴¹ Questions over MPs' all-expense-paid trip to Azerbaijan. Melanie Newman. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 29.08.2011, <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/29/questions-over-mps-all-expense-paid-trip-to-azerbaijan/>

TEAS, which boasts the well-connected political lobbyist **Lionel Zetter** as director, is based at Queen Anne's Gate, close to Parliament, and enjoys strong links with Westminster.¹⁴² TEAS officially acts as a Secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Azerbaijan and for the Conservative Friends of Azerbaijan.¹⁴³ As a parliamentary investigation of another matter uncovered, while all-party parliamentary groups (APPGs) can be “utterly useless,” they were attractive to MPs seeking trips to exotic locations. They also provided a way to hand out security passes, allowing lobbyists to come in the Parliament buildings freely.¹⁴⁴

As of the beginning of 2017, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Azerbaijan leadership includes **Bob Blackman** (Chair, Conservative, was the Group's Secretary for many years), **Mark Menzies** (Vice Chair, Conservative), **Baroness Manzoor** (Vice Chair), **Lord Kilclooney** (Vice Chair), **Angus Brendan McNeil** (Vice Chair), and **Roger Godsiff** (Secretary, Labour).

A corporate investigator called TEAS “the Europe-focused, unofficial Foreign Office/State Department for the Azeri government, a mouthpiece for its elite families”. Documents obtained from Britain's Foreign Office, following a freedom-of-information request, show extensive communications between TEAS and British officials in recent years. These include discussions of TEAS's interest in sponsoring political, trade and investment events. An undated annex says TEAS is “well known” to British officials and “cultivates many parliamentary relationships”, paying for MPs and peers to visit Azerbaijan, and tabling debates and parliamentary questions.¹⁴⁵

As the Guardian put it in an article on the society's activities, “TEAS has assiduously cultivated relationships with politicians from all sides, throwing glitzy receptions for MPs at their parties' annual conferences. The society boasted that some 400 Tories attended its jazz reception after a Conservative Party conference” in 2013.¹⁴⁶ A conservative MP **Mark Field**, a member of the All-Party Group on Azerbaijan and its former chair, was at one stage being paid £6,000 a year by the society for his advice.¹⁴⁷

In March 2011, the Conservative Home, a centre-right political blog close to the Tories, thanked TEAS as ‘generous sponsors’ of its special event during the Conservative party's spring conference in Cardiff.¹⁴⁸ Conservative MP Liam Fox, Secretary of State for Defence, was a special guest and speaker at the event sponsored by TEAS.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴² Plush hotels and caviar diplomacy: How Azerbaijan's elite wooed MPs. Jamie Doward and Charlotte Latimer. The Observer, 24.11.2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/24/azerbaijan-caviar-diplomacy-for-mps>

¹⁴³ Register of All-Party Groups [as at 30 July 2015]. Official website of the House of Commons. <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmllparty/register/azerbaijan.htm>. Accessed on 9 February 2017.

¹⁴⁴ Patrick Mercer investigation puts parliamentary groups under scrutiny. Edward Malnick and Robert Mendick. The Telegraph, 01.06.2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/conservative/10093648/Patrick-Mercer-investigation-puts-parliamentary-groups-under-scrutiny.html>

¹⁴⁵ Heaping on the Caviar Diplomacy. Matthew Valencia, The Economist, October-November 2016, <https://www.1843magazine.com/features/heaping-on-the-caviar-diplomacy>

¹⁴⁶ Plush hotels and caviar diplomacy: How Azerbaijan's elite wooed MPs. Jamie Doward and Charlotte Latimer. The Observer, 24.11.2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/24/azerbaijan-caviar-diplomacy-for-mps>

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Questions over MPs' all-expense-paid trip to Azerbaijan. Melanie Newman. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 29.08.2011, <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/29/questions-over-mps-all-expense-paid-trip-to-azerbaijan/>

¹⁴⁹ Conservative Home event at the Cardiff Spring Forum. An announcement of the event published in the Conservative Home blog, 28.02.2011, <http://www.conservativehome.com/frontpage/2011/02/conservativehome-event-at-the-cardiff->

Active lobbying by TEAS in London appears to have started in 2010-2011 and has actively continued since then. TEAS is reported to take MPs, MEPs and officials on trips to Baku “with royal luxury”.¹⁵⁰

As cited in the article by the Guardian in November 2013, TEAS had given at least £71,740 to Tory MPs to cover trips to Azerbaijan in previous years, according to the list of registered interests.¹⁵¹ At that time, the society had also spent at least £9,700 on sending Labour MPs to the country,¹⁵² while the Labour pressure group Progress held an event that enjoyed its sponsorship.¹⁵³ In 2010, the Liberal Democrats received £11,500 in donations from TEAS.¹⁵⁴

For example, in May 2011, a delegation of parliamentarians, including MPs **Bob Blackman, Stephen Hammond, Gerry Sutcliffe, Mark Field** and his assistant, Julia Dockerill, as well as peers **Lord Kilclooney** and **Lord Rogan**, went on a five-day visit to Azerbaijan, paid for by TEAS.¹⁵⁵

Some of these politicians have visited the country at TEAS’ expense on several occasions. In addition to the May 2011 visit, **Mark Field** received a trip worth £2,500 in July 2010 to ‘speak at a NATO conference and meet senior Azerbaijani political and business figures’.¹⁵⁶ In addition, Mr. Field, who was the Conservative MP for Cities of London and Westminster and chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Azerbaijan, was paid as a member of TEAS advisory board and received £1,000 for six hours’ work done in April and May 2011.¹⁵⁷

Separately in the same year, **Baroness Eccles** and **Viscount Eccles**, members of PACE, took trips to Baku, funded by TEAS.¹⁵⁸ They were among those who voted against Strässer’s report in 2013.

Importantly, the UK is probably the only country where media has taken up investigation of politicians’ dealings with Azerbaijan and has come up with concrete numbers of remuneration and costs of the trips.

Despite critical publications in the UK media in 2011-2013 exposing extensive connections of British MPs to Azerbaijani government, such relations have flourished in the more recent years, involving both MPs that already figured prominently in the early years and the new ones, according to the register of interests of members of both houses of the British Parliament in 2014-2016. For numerous examples of covered trips to Baku and honoraria paid by TEAS, Azerbaijani Embassy in London, SOCAR, Trend News Agency, and other Azerbaijani entities to British MPs in 2014-2016, see the annex to the report.

[spring-forum.html](#)

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Plush hotels and caviar diplomacy: How Azerbaijan’s elite wooed MPs. Jamie Doward and Charlotte Latimer. The Observer, 24.11.2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/24/azerbaijan-caviar-diplomacy-for-mps>

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Questions over MPs’ all-expense-paid trip to Azerbaijan. Melanie Newman. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 29.08.2011, <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/29/questions-over-mps-all-expense-paid-trip-to-azerbaijan/>

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Plush hotels and caviar diplomacy: How Azerbaijan’s elite wooed MPs. Jamie Doward and Charlotte Latimer. The Observer, 24.11.2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/24/azerbaijan-caviar-diplomacy-for-mps>

According to the registered donations by MPs, in 2014 – beginning of 2017, TEAS spent almost £50,000 on trips to Baku and tickets to expensive events for members of the UK House of Commons.¹⁵⁹ Members of the House of Lords declare their interests in their declarations but are not required to indicate amounts of money received.¹⁶⁰ As seen from these declarations, besides TEAS, it is SOCAR and the Azerbaijan Embassy in London that pay for the travels of MPs.

Some outstanding recent examples are worth looking at in more detail. In 2014, two Conservative MPs, **Rt Hon Sir Tony Baldry** (Banbury) and **Sir Peter Luff** (Mid Worcestershire), received each £15,000 plus travel and accommodation expenses of approximately £1,700 (including costs of visit to Baku on 17-18 September) from Trend News Agency “for advice and discussions on matters relating to parliamentary relations and business, academic and educational links between the UK and Azerbaijan and discussions of two international conferences. They indicated approximately 4 working days.”¹⁶¹

Tony Baldry was a personal aide to Margaret Thatcher and served as the state minister in the governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major.¹⁶² What is more interesting, Baldry has interest in energy companies.¹⁶³ Both of them highly praised Azerbaijan in interviews.¹⁶⁴

Peter Luff is a former defence minister. According to the Intelligence Online, a true cause for Luff's visit in 2014 was the following: “Under a £15,000 contract with Trend News Agency, Luff has also been assigned a more discreet mission to help Azerbaijan's leaders foster political and business relationships in Britain.” According to our interlocutors, while the pro-government Trend News Agency is owned by one of the oligarchs close to Aliyev, it is not a structure that would normally pay fees to foreign politicians or cover their trips.¹⁶⁵ It might be quite possible that Trend has been used as a channel for the transfer of payment originating in another source, similar to the case of GEFDAB in Germany.

Luff is also chairman of the Democracy Forum, a British NGO which aims to promote democracy in Asia and Europe. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in the 2014 New Years' Honours List.¹⁶⁶ Luff left the House of Commons on 30 March 2015.¹⁶⁷ Baldry also left the House of Commons on 30 March 2015.¹⁶⁸

¹⁵⁹ Register of Members' Financial Interests, House of Commons, <https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliamentary-commissioner-for-standards/registers-of-interests/register-of-members-financial-interests/>

¹⁶⁰ Register of Members' Financial Interests, House of Lords, <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/house-of-lords-commissioner-for-standards-/register-of-lords-interests/register-of-lords-interests-previous-versions/>

¹⁶¹ Register of Members' Financial Interests, House of Commons, <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmregmem/150330/150330.pdf>

¹⁶² Personal website of Tony Baldry, <http://www.tonybaldry.co.uk/about-tony/>. Accessed on 05.03.2017.

¹⁶³ CV of Tony Baldry on his personal website, <http://www.tonybaldry.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/TONY-BALDRY-CV-2016-31.doc>. Accessed on 05.03.2017.

¹⁶⁴ Azerbaijan has very important story to tell the world, British MP says. Trend News Agency, 28.09.2014, <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2313340.html>

¹⁶⁵ Authors' interview in 2016.

¹⁶⁶ Peter Luff, Baku's man in Westminster. Intelligence Online, 29.10.2014, <https://www.intelligenceonline.com/corporate-intelligence/2014/10/29/peter-luff-baku-s-man-in-westminster,108044891-GRA>

¹⁶⁷ A page on Peter Luff in “They work for you”. A website covering British Parliament, https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/10373/peter_luff/mid_worcestershire. Accessed on 03.03.2017.

¹⁶⁸ A page on Tony Baldry in “They work for you”. A website covering British Parliament, https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/10023/tony_baldry/banbury. Accessed on 03.03.2017.

In another very interesting example of buying influence, **Liam Fox**, a Tory MP and former defence secretary, received £11,400 from TEAS in 2014 for translation rights of his book, *Rising Tides: Facing the Challenges of a New Era*.¹⁶⁹ In September 2014, he presented his book to Ilham Aliyev, praising Azerbaijan. On the same day, the book was unveiled in Baku. It was translated into Azerbaijani language and released by the “TEAS Press” publishing house. Chairman of TEAS Taleh Heydarov was the editor of the book and the project manager of translation.¹⁷⁰

Commenting on Fox's attacks on Liddington upon criticism of the latter of the Aliyev regime, The Guardian called this book contract “not a normal “publishing deal”. The “TEAS Press” publishers were not an established company. *Rising Tide* was the first book ever published by TEAS. It had also paid for Fox's flights and hotels. In the words of the Guardian referring to TEAS, “the regime’s overseas lobbying and propaganda arm is based in expensive offices in Westminster from where it pumps freebies to pliable publishers, PR men and politicians.”¹⁷¹

Liam Fox resigned from the Cabinet in October 2011 after a series of newspaper stories concerning his relationship with Adam Werrity, a close friend who worked as a lobbyist. He acknowledged at the time that he had allowed his private and professional lives to become “blurred”.¹⁷²

When trips to observe elections are paid for by the government of the host country or its proxies, one would naturally question lack of bias in the observers’ conclusions. There are plenty of such examples among the UK MPs documented in the parliamentary Register of Members' Financial Interests. For example, a trip of **Lord Evans** and **Baroness O’Cathain** to Baku on 31 October - 2 November 2015 to act as election observers was paid by Azerbaijan Embassy in London.¹⁷³ Amount of funding received was not specified as it is not required for members of the House of Lords. Not surprisingly, both of them praised elections as democratic, free, transparent, and absent of pressure on citizens.^{174, 175}

Another member of the House of Lords, **Lord Kilclooney** was actually paid to be on the TEAS advisory board, numbers were not specified (see the annex to the report).

Viscount Trenchard enjoyed hospitality of SOCAR when he visited Azerbaijan on 11-14 June 2015 as a guest of the state oil company to attend the opening ceremony of the 2015 European Games. Earlier, he visited Azerbaijan on 6-9 October 2014 together with other lords as a guest of SOCAR “to look at energy security and regional issues”.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁹ Register of Members' Financial Interests, House of Commons, <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmregmem/150330/150330.pdf>

¹⁷⁰ British MP praises Azerbaijan’s growing importance, AzerNews, 16.09.2014, <http://www.azernews.az/nation/70777.html>

¹⁷¹ How Liam Fox got into bed with Azerbaijan’s kleptocrats. **Nick Cohen**, The Guardian, 07.08.2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/aug/07/liam-fox-azerbaijan-relationship-book-publishing>

¹⁷² Liam Fox: 'We should shape the world in our own image'. **Robert Watts**, The Telegraph, 08.09.2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/conservative/10293101/Liam-Fox-We-should-shape-the-world-in-our-own-image.html>

¹⁷³ Register of Members' Financial Interests, House of Lords, <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/publications-records/House-of-Lords-Publications/Records-activities-and-membership/Register-of-Lords-Interests/Register120916.pdf>

¹⁷⁴ Azerbaijan ensures transparent parliamentary election – UK House of Lords. Trend News agency, 02.11.2015, <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/election2015/2451496.html>

¹⁷⁵ UK House of Lords: Azerbaijan ensures transparent parliamentary election. News.Az, 02.11.2015, <http://news.az/articles/elections/102388>

¹⁷⁶ Register of Members' Financial Interests, House of Lords, <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/publications->

The event that Viscount attended in 2014 was the Forum on Azerbaijani-British Co-operation, marking the 20th anniversary of the “Contract of the Century”, held in Baku on 9 October. The event brought together members of the House of Representatives and the House of Lords **Lord Risby, Lord St John of Bletso, Viscount Trenchard, Sir Gerald Howarth, David Morris, James Wharton, Paul Goodman**, as well as Azerbaijani Ambassador to the UK Tahir Taghizadeh, representatives of government ministries, parliament of Azerbaijan, SOCAR, and BP-Azerbaijan.¹⁷⁷ Not all of the UK participants of the trip have actually declared this travel in the register as seen in in the parliamentary Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Quite obviously, Bob Blackman, as the chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Azerbaijan (and its secretary in the past), has repeatedly enjoyed Azerbaijani hospitality, together with one more person (see the annex).

While figures regarding travels of British MPs shown in their declarations might not look over-impressive (often in the range of £2,500-5,000), there are several caveats to it. First, the register allows putting in an “estimated amount”. Secondly, luxury hotels belonging, for example, to Heydarov's business empire, may show special discounted rates. And, most importantly, luxury foods, receptions, travels by limousines, and treatment in spas would never be declared, although there are many witness stories about them. Also, as told by our interlocutors, guests would come either in advance or stay longer than it would be needed for the working matters. Therefore, it is not that easy to estimate the real amount of the Azerbaijani money spent on the UK (and other) politicians to make them sensitive to the interests of the regime in Baku.

At the elections of 2013, two British MPs, **Mike Hanckok** and **Robert Walter**, who were members of the PACE mission, praised elections as free and fair.¹⁷⁸ They were instrumental in PACE for all the years they were in it, to protect Azerbaijan from any criticism regarding human rights and to organise voting.¹⁷⁹ Mike Hanckok (now a former MP) is said to have a common business with Kamaledin Heydarov¹⁸⁰ and was named as a key person to establish connections in London for Azerbaijan.¹⁸¹

It is said that at a certain point Robert Walter was hired as a TEAS consultant.¹⁸² In 2013, he was the head of PACE observation mission at the presidential elections in Azerbaijan. He has an Azerbaijani-Turkish wife and has acquired a Turkish citizenship. Robert Walter has left PACE in 2016 and, therefore, apparently there is no Azerbaijan-Britain liaison in PACE at this point.

According to a poll carried out by TEAS in 2013, “72% of [British] MPs appreciate Azerbaijani president Aliyev's activity and have stressed that he is a reliable partner of the West”.¹⁸³

[records/House-of-Lords-Publications/Records-activities-and-membership/Register-of-Lords-Interests/Register150416.pdf](https://www.parliament.uk/records/House-of-Lords-Publications/Records-activities-and-membership/Register-of-Lords-Interests/Register150416.pdf)

¹⁷⁷ Azerbaijani-British relations and cooperation in the energy field. Energy Global, 10.10.2014, <https://www.energyglobal.com/pipelines/business-news/10102014/azerbaijani-british-relations-and-co-operation-in-the-energy-field/>

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Authors' interviews in 2015-2016.

¹⁸⁰ Authors' interviews in 2015-2016. Needs additional verification.

¹⁸¹ Authors' interviews in 2015-2016.

¹⁸² Authors' interviews in 2015-2016. Needs additional verification.

¹⁸³ Plush hotels and caviar diplomacy: How Azerbaijan's elite wooed MPs. Jamie Doward and Charlotte Latimer. The

Not only MPs but members of the royal family and former heads of government are targeted by Azerbaijani lobbying activity. For example, **Prince Andrew** is a regular visitor to the country, where he is known as a “dear guest”.¹⁸⁴ He has helped negotiate several energy deals and is said to have met Aliyev many times, enjoying a warm relationship with him.¹⁸⁵ Labour MP for Newport West Paul Flynn, who has previously criticised Prince Andrew for his activities as trade envoy to Azerbaijan, comparing Aliyev to Ceausescu, said he was worried by apparent Parliamentary links with the Azerbaijani regime, which he said had a ‘dreadful record of corruption and jailing opponents’.¹⁸⁶

When in 2009 former Labour Prime Minister **Tony Blair** visited Azerbaijan, he had a private meeting with Aliyev and is thought to have accepted £90,000 for a speaking engagement in Baku.¹⁸⁷ Other sources say that he helped plug a pipeline deal and reportedly earned nearly \$150,000 for speaking at the opening of a methanol plant in Azerbaijan.¹⁸⁸

Interestingly enough, in 2013, TEAS director **Lionel Zetter** bought one of the fanciest London restaurants called Sheperd's, a traditional place for lobbyists to meet, and it is believed that he is just a front person for TEAS being a real buyer.¹⁸⁹

British politicians are active in defending Azerbaijani interests not only in the national parliament and PACE but also in the European Parliament. For example, during the debate on the September 2015 resolution of the European Parliament, a leading member of European Conservative Reformists group **Sajjad Karim**, a British MEP, said, “Azerbaijan is frustrated with the lack of progress over Nagorno-Karabakh. It feels that, far too often, the international community disregards the challenges it has had to face in the aftermath of this war in terms of refugees and internally displaced persons. It is true that the international community has probably not been as active as it could have been in solving this protracted conflict which is still, as we speak, claiming lives. As a friend of Azerbaijan and its people, on a principled position, it is simple and clear: we want Azerbaijan to return to its path towards a European future.”¹⁹⁰

There are numerous organisations in the UK working to promote Azerbaijani-British relations, including the London office of TEAS, Azerbaijan House, Oxford-Azerbaijan Society, Caspian Khazri Society, and Britain-Azerbaijan Business Council.

Observer, 24.11.2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/24/azerbaijan-caviar-diplomacy-for-mps>

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Heaping on the Caviar Diplomacy. Matthew Valencia, The Economist, October-November 2016, <https://www.1843magazine.com/features/heaping-on-the-caviar-diplomacy>

¹⁸⁶ MP to defy 800-year-old rule to attack Prince Andrew in House of Commons. Glen Owen, Daily Mail, 08.05.2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1384755/MP-defy-800-year-old-rule-attack-Prince-Andrew-House-Commons.html#ixzz3nEiYrwJt>

¹⁸⁷ As if Andrew Was Not in Enough Trouble. Lragir, 16.03.2011, <http://www.lragir.am/index/eng/0/politics/view/21061>

¹⁸⁸ Heaping on the Caviar Diplomacy. Matthew Valencia, The Economist, October-November 2016, <https://www.1843magazine.com/features/heaping-on-the-caviar-diplomacy>

¹⁸⁹ Reopening of Westminster's popular Shepherd's restaurant raises uncomfortable questions over links to Azerbaijan. Independent, 13.12.2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/food-and-drink/news/reopening-of-westminsters-popular-shepherds-restaurant-raises-uncomfortable-questions-over-links-to-9923420.html>

¹⁹⁰ MEPs explain objecting to Parliamentary resolution condemning Azerbaijan. European Business Review, 25.09.2015, <http://www.europeanbusinessreview.eu/page.asp?pid=1381>

The Anglo-Azerbaijani Society merits particular attention due to its high-level activities and because it is co-chaired by Nargiz Pashayeva, sister of the first lady of Azerbaijan Mehriban Aliyeva, and Lord German.¹⁹¹ Nargiz Pashayeva is also the head of Nizami Ganjavi Scientific Centre at the University of Oxford on behalf of Azerbaijan, established in 2013.¹⁹² According to Azerbaijan Embassy website, the society, “established in 1997, is the pioneer which actively contributed to the development of humanitarian relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the United Kingdom. The Society helps promote Azerbaijani culture and arts in Britain, organising fundraising and charity events and helping educate young, talented Azerbaijani musicians in Britain.”¹⁹³

However, according to media reports, the Society’s interests go well beyond purely humanitarian and cultural agenda, as it “supports Azerbaijani-British relations in all spheres and assists charitable endeavours in Azerbaijan, as well as keeps members closely informed on developments in Azerbaijan and increases public awareness about Azerbaijan in the UK. The membership comprises major British companies in the oil, banking, insurance, engineering, services, communications, law and other sectors.”¹⁹⁴ Society’s membership comprises companies such as BP, Amec, Connaught Investments, KCA Deutag, ITE Exhibitions, CB&I, and Rapid Solutions, SOCAR and Caspian Broking, along with many smaller firms, as well as individuals who have worked in or have an interest in Azerbaijan.¹⁹⁵

Annual meetings and dinners are held in the House of Lords¹⁹⁶ and are attended by members of British Parliament, diplomats accredited in London, representatives of the Azerbaijani diaspora, local and foreign businessmen, public figures, media representatives, and the Azerbaijani Ambassador.¹⁹⁷

In May 2016, the Society held a meeting with Member of the Parliament, co-rapporteur of Council of Europe on Azerbaijan in 2003-2006 Lord Malcolm Bruce. Lord German, member of the House of Lords, co-chairman of the Society, also attended the meeting, which featured the establishment of the British Foundation for the Study of Azerbaijan and the Caucasus. Nargiz Pashayeva proposed establishing the British Foundation for the Study of Azerbaijan and the Caucasus. The idea was born as a result of consultations with scholar and historian specialising in the medieval history of the Middle East Robert Hoyland, professor at the University of St Andrews Andrew Peacock, and Professor of Arabic Studies at University of Exeter Robert Gleave. The scholars are members of the Board of Trustees of the British Foundation. Nargiz Pashayeva was elected as chairperson of the Board. She invited Lord Malcolm Bruce to become a member of the Board of Trustees of the Foundation. Lord Malcolm Bruce accepted the invitation. They agreed to hold the presentation of the Foundation in London in near future.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹¹ How we are run? Website of the Anglo-Azerbaijani Society, <http://www.anglo-azerbaijani-society.com/about-us/how-we-are-run/>. Accessed on 16.02.2017.

¹⁹² Nargiz Pashaeva: British Foundation for Study of Azerbaijan and Caucasus registered. Trend News Agency, 28.09.2016, <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/society/2666000.html>.

¹⁹³ Bilateral relations. Website of the Embassy of Azerbaijan in the UK, <http://london.mfa.gov.az/content/3>. Accessed on 17.02.2017.

¹⁹⁴ Anglo-Azerbaijani Society Re-Elects Board of Directors. AzerNews, 29.01.2016, <http://www.azernews.az/nation/92254.html>

¹⁹⁵ Annual Dinner of Anglo-Azerbaijani Society Held in London. AzerNews, 29.01.2016, <http://www.azernews.az/nation/106101.html>

¹⁹⁶ Events. Website of the Anglo-Azerbaijani Society, <http://www.anglo-azerbaijani-society.com/azerbaijani-events/>. Accessed on 16.02.2017.

¹⁹⁷ London hosts annual meeting of Anglo-Azerbaijani Society. AzerTag, 29.01.2016, http://azertag.az/en/xeber/London_hosts_annual_meeting_of_Anglo_Azerbaijani_Society-922751

¹⁹⁸ Professor Nargiz Pashayeva: Establishment of the British Foundation is already a historical and cultural necessity. AzerTag,

On 25 January 2017 Nargiz Pashayeva, Chair of the Trustees of the British Foundation for the Study of Azerbaijan and the Caucasus¹⁹⁹ launched the foundation at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. Guests at the event were Mr. Gordon Birrell from BP with members of his team, business groups from Azerbaijan, and Lord and Lady German, Co-Chair of the London Society.²⁰⁰

Baku has spent heavily on British PR firms, including Bell Pottinger. Some suspect the firm of being behind Aliyev's appearance on the *Times's* list of 100 people to watch in 2012. But the PR firm with the closest ties to Azerbaijan's first family is Freuds Communications, headed by Matthew Freud, a great-grandson of Sigmund Freud. It was, as one former associate puts it, tasked with "branding the despot's daughter", Leyla Aliyeva. The firm works closely with Aliyeva on *Baku*, a glossy magazine published quarterly by Condé Nast. The publication has helped smooth her passage into London high society.²⁰¹ The PR work of the Freuds Communications with Leyla Aliyeva is still going on.²⁰²

Italy

Italy is the leading trade partner of Azerbaijan for the last eight years, with trade amounting to approximately 5.6 billion Euro in 2015, absorbing 23% of Azerbaijani export (to a value of 3.39 billion euro in 2015), and is its fourth supplier, with a value of Italian exports to Azerbaijan of about 600 million Euro in 2015, an increase of 40% over the same period in 2014. Azerbaijan is the second largest supplier of oil to Italy since 2013.²⁰³

Due to the drop in the fossil fuel prices, in 2016 the trade turnover between Azerbaijan and Italy amounted to \$1.89 billion, decreasing by 33.5 percent compared to 2015. As a result, Italy dropped to the third place among Azerbaijan's trade partners by late 2016. In that year, Azerbaijan exported goods to Italy at \$1.56 billion, accounting for 17.06 percent of the total export of Azerbaijan. Imports from Italy amounted to \$332.19 million, decreasing by 43.5 percent compared to 2015.²⁰⁴

Baku and Rome are strategic partners in the energy sector. Since 1999, Italy has begun to receive a large part of Azerbaijani oil exported through the Baku-Supsa pipeline and then through the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline. This made Italy number one buyer of Azerbaijani oil, a position maintained today.²⁰⁵

26.06.2016.http://azertag.az/en/xeber/Professor_Nargiz_Pashayeva_Establishment_of_the_British_Foundation_is_already_a_historical_and_cultural_necessity-955218

¹⁹⁹ Website of the British Foundation for the Study of Azerbaijan and the Caucasus, <http://www.bfsac.org.uk/>. Accessed on 16.02.2017.

²⁰⁰ The Launch of the British Foundation for the Study of Azerbaijan and the Caucasus. Website of the Anglo-Azerbaijani Society, 25.01.2017, <http://www.anglo-azerbaijani-society.com/the-launch-of-the-british-foundation-for-the-study-of-azerbaijan-and-the-caucasus/>

²⁰¹ Heaping on the Caviar Diplomacy. By Matthew Valencia, *The Economist*, October-November 2016, <https://www.1843magazine.com/features/heaping-on-the-caviar-diplomacy>

²⁰² Baku. Website of Freuds Communications, <https://www.freuds.com/casestudy/baku>. Accessed on 1 March 2017.

²⁰³ Cooperazione economica. Website of the Embassy of Italy in Baku. http://www.ambaku.esteri.it/ambasciata_baku/en/i_rapporti_bilaterali/cooperazione_economica/. Accessed on 15.01.2017.

²⁰⁴ Italy eyes to increase trade with Azerbaijan. *AzerNews*, 06.02.2017, <http://www.azernews.az/business/108463.html>

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

The priority targets of Italian investment in Azerbaijan are the energy sector and the construction sector. The Italian presence is also strong in the interior design industry, the hotel infrastructure, the high-tech sector, the agro-wine sector, and the banking sector. Currently, about 45 Italian companies are operating in Azerbaijan in insurance, banking, trade, and other areas.²⁰⁶

Italian company ENI holds 5% of the BTC pipeline consortium in Azerbaijan (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan) launched in 2006; it allows carrying oil from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean, without requiring oil tankers crossing the Bosphorus. At its full capacity the pipeline can carry up to one million barrels per day, of which 50,000 are under ENI's control.²⁰⁷ Moreover, in 2007 an Italian company "Saipem" completed the construction of six platforms for the extraction of crude oil and two for the production. In 2008, "Saipem" signed a long-term contract with BP for the provision of maintenance of the deep-water installations. Meanwhile, in 2011 the same Italian company, "Saipem" signed two other contracts in Azerbaijan for the construction and installation of a model that links engineering operations already started in the area²⁰⁸.

During his visit to Baku on August 11, 2013, Prime Minister Enrico Letta stressed the good relations with the Azerbaijani government based on "mutual interests" since the TAP pipeline project (Trans Adriatic Pipeline) bears strategic importance for both Italy and Azerbaijan. In Letta's view, the TAP project will strengthen bilateral relationships with the European Union.²⁰⁹

According to our sources, the Italian Ambassador who left his post recently, was a friend of the Aliyev family.²¹⁰

In Rome, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation was funding renovation of historical heritage sites, including sites in Vatican.²¹¹

A number of Italian politicians are have been acting in the interests of Azerbaijan. MEP **Pino Arlacchi** was in the centre of a scandal during the Azerbaijani presidential elections of 2013. He was leading the EP/PACE delegation for the election monitoring and claimed that "the elections were free and fair",²¹² while OSCE ODIHR monitoring mission provided a diametrically opposite report, highlighting heavy rigging and rights abuses.

²⁰⁶ Cooperazione economica. Website of the Embassy of Italy in Baku.

http://www.ambbaku.esteri.it/ambasciata_baku/en/i_rapporti_bilaterali/cooperazione_economica/. Accessed on 15.01.2017.

²⁰⁷ Azerbaijan: Pino Arlacchi imbarazza l'Europa. Anna Mazzone, Panorama. 28.10.2013.

<http://www.panorama.it/news/marco-ventura-profeta-di-ventura/azerbaijan-elezioni-arlacchi-regime-parlamento-europeo-onu-scandalo/>

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Authors' interview in 2015. Needs verification.

²¹¹ Rome Municipality thanks Azerbaijan for restoring ancient catacombs. AzerNews. 12.02.2014.

<http://www.azernews.az/culture/64334.html>

²¹² Azerbaijan: Pino Arlacchi imbarazza l'Europa. Anna Mazzone, Panorama, 28.10.2013,

<http://www.panorama.it/news/marco-ventura-profeta-di-ventura/azerbaijan-elezioni-arlacchi-regime-parlamento-europeo-onu-scandalo/>; Europe, Azerbaijan, and caviar. Luka Zaroni, Osservatorio balcani e caucaso transeuropa. 21.11.2013.

<http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Regions-and-countries/Azerbaijan/Europe-Azerbaijan-and-caviar-144030>

The trip was paid for by the German lobbying organisation GEFDAB (see the section on Germany). Arlacchi and six other MEPs – members of the mission (**Filip Kaczmarek**, Poland, EPP; **Joachim Zeller**, Germany, EPP; **Evgeni Kirilov**, Bulgaria, SD; **Norica Nicolai**, Romania, ALDE; **Milan Cabrnock**, Czech Republic, European Conservatives and Reformists; and **Fiorello Provera**, Italy, Europe of Freedom and Democracy) were suspected of receiving favours from the Azerbaijani side.²¹³

The European Parliament heard Pino Arlacchi in a closed-door meeting, asking him why his election observation report was so different compared to that of the OSCE. The MEP answered that it was done to “defend” the Italian interests in the region.²¹⁴ Arlacchi has had in the past an unfavourable record with UNODC, related to grant distribution.²¹⁵ He was not re-elected to European Parliament in 2016 at least partially because of a problem with non-transparent funding sources.²¹⁶

In PACE, almost the entire Italian delegation voted against the Strässer report in January 2013 (the list includes, among others, **Luca Volonte** and **Andrea Rigoni**; the latter is still in PACE, now reporting on Belarus).

Luca Volonte, an ex-chair of the EPP Group in PACE, is not in PACE anymore and runs his own think tank but remains vocal pro-Azerbaijani. Before elections in Azerbaijan in 2015, he said that the coming elections offer a chance for European institutions to show there are no double standards in their treatment of the country and instead to “positively contribute to the election process”. He went as far as saying that he fears that in the wake of the jailing of journalist Khadija Ismayilova the media will conflate judicial matters and the electoral process. “Unfortunately, recent controversies triggered by western media indicate double standards and partisan evaluations could be employed in the Azerbaijani elections,” he said.²¹⁷ While being in PACE and chairing the EPP Group, he brought a PACE delegation to Baku, met with Aliyev, and, for some reason, paid a visit to Sangachal oil terminal.

A grandiose scandal erupted in 2016 after prosecutors in Milan obtained important documentary proof in the course of their investigation of allegations of bribes of almost 2.4 million Euro that were allegedly paid to Luca Volonte’s organisations over several years by an organisation controlled by the key Azerbaijani lobbyist in PACE Elkhan Suleymanov via a score of offshore companies.²¹⁸ According to the prosecutors, the politician would have orchestrated the vote of the EPP in PACE to reject Strässer’s

²¹³ European Parliament goes soft on flawed Azerbaijan election. Andrew Gardner and Toby Vogel. European Voice. 16.10.2013. <http://www.politico.eu/article/european-parliament-goes-soft-on-flawed-azerbaijan-election/>

²¹⁴ Azerbaijan: Pino Arlacchi imbarazza l'Europa. Anna Mazzone, Panorama, 28.10.2013, <http://www.panorama.it/news/marco-ventura-profeta-di-ventura/azerbaijan-elezioni-arlacchi-regime-parlamento-europeo-onu-scandalo/>

²¹⁵ Top Corruption Fighter Corrupted. IOWatch, 24.10.2001, <http://www.iowatch.org/archive/recentdevelopments/topcorruptioncorrupted.shtml>

²¹⁶ Authors’ interview in 2016.

²¹⁷ Ahead of Azerbaijan Elections, Prominent Italian Politician Calls on Europe to “Positively Contribute” to the Process. Azerbaijan Monitor, 16.09.2015, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/ahead-of-azerbaijan-elections-prominent-italian-politician-calls-on-europe-to-positively-contribute-to-the-process-527824861.html>

²¹⁸ Corruzione, “tangente da due milioni dall’Azerbaijan”: indagato a Milano ex Udc Volonte. Il Fatto Quotidiano, 25.06.2016, <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2016/06/25/corruzione-tangente-da-due-milioni-dallazerbaijan-indagato-a-milano-ex-udc-volonte/2859414/>

report on political prisoners to the benefit of the Azerbaijani government.^{219, 220} For more information on Luca Volonte, read the chapter on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Sergio Divina, a Senator from the Lega Nord party and an OSCE PA member, endorsed the presidential elections in Azerbaijan in 2015.²²¹ Previously, he had gone on election observation in 2013, with a similar result, and later praised the controversial constitutional referendum in 2016.²²²

MEP **Gianluca Buonanno**, a member of the Europe of Nations and Freedom Group, publicly condemned the September 2015 the resolution of the European Parliament on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. He said he “did not at all agree” with the resolution. The Lega Nord member added, “Europe must go there [to Azerbaijan] and talk with them and find solutions. This is the serious way to make a decent foreign policy.”²²³

Countries with non-transparent economic connections to Azerbaijan: Spain and Malta

Spain

On the surface of it, Spain and Azerbaijan have quite limited economic relations, as shown in the official statistics. However, Azerbaijan receives full support from Spanish MPs in PACE where they are considered a key base for Azerbaijan lobbying as well as from MEPs from Spain and EU officials of Spanish origin.

We have been told by our sources that most of the relations between Spain and Azerbaijan are of unofficial nature. They claim that the Azerbaijani ruling family and its close circle of oligarchs are heavily investing in Spanish resorts and hotels, located in tourist-attractive areas. We do not have a documentary proof of that at the moment. However, the fact that EPP's **Pedro Agramunt** from Valencia and ALDE's **Jordi Xuclà** from Girona in Catalonia are united in PACE in their active support of Azerbaijan, makes one wonder whether there is a connection with Azerbaijan here through investment in tourism. Both regions gain a lot from tourism and are interested in development of tourist infrastructure. Recent interest of trade representatives from Valencia in establishing business ties with Azerbaijan²²⁴ as well as Valencia becoming in 2016 a part of the Silk Road project where Azerbaijan plays an important role²²⁵

²¹⁹ «Tangente da due milioni dall'Azerbaijan». Accuse all'ex deputato comasco Volonti. Pa Provincia di Como, 25.06.2016, http://www.laprovinciadico.it/stories/como-citta/tangente-da-due-milioni-dallazerbaijan-accuse-all'ex-deputato-comasco-volonte_1189472_11/

²²⁰ Corruzione, “tangente da due milioni dall'Azerbaijan”: indagato a Milano ex Udc Volonti. Il Fatto Quotidiano, 25.06.2016, <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2016/06/25/corruzione-tangente-da-due-milioni-dallazerbaijan-indagato-a-milano-ex-udc-volonte/2859414/>

²²¹ Italian parliament: Elections in Azerbaijan were close to an ideal (in Russian). Sputnik Azerbaijan, 02.11.2015, <http://ru.sputnik.az/azerbaijan/20151102/402570968.html>

²²² International “election observers” whitewash fraudulent referendum in Azerbaijan. European Platform for Democratic Elections, September 2016. <http://www.epde.org/en/newsreader/items/international-election-observers-whitewash-fraudulent-referendum-in-azerbaijan.html>

²²³ MEPs explain objecting to Parliamentary resolution condemning Azerbaijan. European Business Review, 25.09.2015. <http://www.europeanbusinessreview.eu/page.asp?pid=1381>

²²⁴ La Generalitat organiza una misión comercial a Turquía y Azerbaijan. Valencia News, 20 October 2014, <http://valencianews.es/economia/empresa/la-generalitat-organiza-una-mision-comercial-a-turquia-y-azerbaijan/>

²²⁵ Las Fallas en Turquía y otras redes que tejera Valencia como ciudad de la seda. Valencia Plaza, 19 December 2015, <http://valenciaplaza.com/las-fallas-en-estambul-y-otras-redes-que-tejera-valencia-como-ciudad-de-la-seda>

also serve as an evidence of deepening economic ties. Agramunt's strong connections with Valencian businesses for several decades²²⁶ may come very handy.

The most notorious Spanish support group for Azerbaijan is based in PACE and led by **Pedro Agramunt**, an EPP member, former PACE rapporteur on Azerbaijan and PACE President since January 2016. While we will get back later to his actions in favour of Azerbaijan and his impressive career in PACE, it is worth noting that he is a senator from Spanish province of Valencia, the head of Valencia Trade Chamber, and well connected with Valencian businesses and banks. His own business is a rather small textile trading company, which, however, is not shown in his declaration. It is unclear whether he has sold it.²²⁷

Jordi Xuclà is a well-known apologist of the government of Azerbaijan in PACE and has systematically voted in support of Baku. He chairs the ALDE group in PACE since 2014 and was re-elected to this position in January 2016 for another two-year term.²²⁸ Importantly, in 2011-2013 he chaired the PACE Subcommittee on the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh which existed from 2005 to 2013 when it was closed because of duplication of the OSCE Minsk Group activities.²²⁹ When in its place a new Sub-Committee on Conflicts between the Council of Europe Member States was established in PACE in 2015²³⁰, it was again Xuclà who became its chair.²³¹ These important positions give Xuclà leverage.

At the peak of repression in Azerbaijan in autumn 2015, when OSCE ODIHR decided not to send an observation mission to monitor parliamentary elections in November because Baku required that ODIHR reduce its number of observers, which would have prevented ODIHR from conducting an UN-compliant election observation,²³² and the European Parliament also refrained from sending an official mission because of massive human rights violations, PACE made a highly disputed and controversial decision to send a short-term election observation mission.

This opened an opportunity for the Azerbaijani authorities to claim international endorsement of the country's electoral process. The PACE delegation was led by Jordi Xuclà and included Agustín Conde and 26 other members. It issued a highly positive statement on November 2, signed by 16 out of 28

²²⁶ Biography of Pedro Agramunt on the website of Nueva Economía Fórum, <http://www.nuevaeconomiaforum.org/ponentes/pedro-agramunt>, assessed on 15 February 2017.

²²⁷ Relacionan a un senador del PP con los sobornos de Azerbaiyan con caviar. El Plural.com. 26 May 2012. <http://www.elplural.com/2012/05/26/relacionan-a-un-senador-del-pp-con-los-sobornos-de-azerbaiyan-con-caviar>; <http://www.senado.es/web/composicionorganizacion/senadores/composicionsenado/fichasenador/index.html?legis=10&id1=10558>; Results of search for "textiles y confecciones Tycesa Agramunt" in the "Medium Companies of Europe 1993/94: Volume 1: Medium Companies of the Continental European Community". Ed. R.M. Whiteside. 1993. <https://books.google.ru/books?id=fs33CAAQBAJ&lpg=PA682&ots=uupr0qsCte&dq=Textiles%20y%20confecciones%20Tycesa%20Agramunt&hl=ru&pg=PA682#v=onepage&q=Textiles%20y%20confecciones%20Tycesa%20Agramunt&f=false>

²²⁸ Interview with Jordi Xuclà, ALDE-PACE President. Website of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats, 04.05.2016, <https://www.aldeparty.eu/en/news/interview-jordi-xucla-alde-pace-president>

²²⁹ The activity of the PACE Sub-Committee on Nagorno Karabakh not to be resumed. Public Radio of Armenia, 21.01.2013, <http://www.armradio.am/en/2013/01/21/the-activity-of-the-pace-sub-committee-on-nagorno-karabakh-not-to-be-resumed/>

²³⁰ Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in focus of Council of Europe sub-committee. AzerNews, 21.04.2015, <http://www.azernews.az/nation/80771.html>

²³¹ Jordi Xuclà's webpage on the website of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/AssemblyList/MP-Details-EN.asp?MemberID=6362>. Accessed on 19.02.2017.

²³² Azerbaijan: Whitewashing of Flawed Parliamentary Elections through PACE and Other EOMs. European Platform for Democratic Elections, 05.11.2015, <http://www.epde.org/en/newsreader/items/azerbaijan-whitewashing-of-flawed-parliamentary-elections-through-pace-and-other-eoms.html>

delegation members, attesting that Azerbaijan’s electoral process “...demonstrates another step forward taken by the Republic of Azerbaijan towards free, fair and democratic elections and that the results of this vote express the will of the Azerbaijani people.”²³³

Three members of the PACE delegation signed a *votum separatum* which contested the official positive PACE assessment and pointed to the failing preconditions to hold democratic elections in Azerbaijan due to the ongoing abuse of human rights in the country. The European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE), the main European network of election-observing NGOs, strongly condemned the PACE mission and stated that it “delegitimised the institution of election observation”, “violated the central requirements of the United Nations “Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation,” and “whitewashed flawed parliamentary elections.”²³⁴

Xuclà’s response to the December 2016 report by the European Stability Initiative on Luca Volonte’s alleged bribery and the appeals for investigation by the ESI, Amnesty International and Transparency International, was quite revealing: he called it “defamation”. “We are politicians. We are not here simply to look at this matter from a legal angle; we need to talk about this organisation’s reputation and image, so let us fight defamation.”²³⁵

A native of Catalonia, Xuclà took an Azerbaijani delegation to the neighbouring country of Andorra for establishing Azerbaijan-Andorra connections. Representatives of this small country regularly act in the interests of Azerbaijan in inter-governmental organisations, we have been told.²³⁶

Agustín Conde from EPP, another Spanish member of PACE, has been one of the most active Azerbaijani supporters and apologists in PACE. In April 2011 and again in October 2012, he led the efforts of a group of PACE members to change the PACE definition of political prisoners, first calling on PACE to set up “objective criteria” on how to identify “a genuine political prisoner” before any report on an individual country is prepared, and later arguing that PACE had no authority “to assess violations of fundamental rights and freedoms.”²³⁷ These efforts were aimed at preventing Christof Strässer from presenting his report on political prisoners in Azerbaijan and tabling a resolution. These efforts failed but in January 2013 a resolution based on Strässer’s highly critical report was defeated in PACE thanks to a large-scale operation by the delegation of Azerbaijan, Luca Volonte and other Azerbaijani apologists. For more on this, read the chapter on PACE in this report. Remarkably, Conde called the political prisoners included in Strässer’s report “candidates for terrorists.”^{238, 239}

²³³ Nation makes choice, new parliament elected. AzerNews, 03.11.2015, <http://www.azernews.az/nation/89390.html>

²³⁴ Azerbaijan: Whitewashing of Flawed Parliamentary Elections through PACE and Other EOMs. European Platform for Democratic Elections, 05.11.2015, <http://www.epde.org/en/newsreader/items/azerbaijan-whitewashing-of-flawed-parliamentary-elections-through-pace-and-other-eoms.html>

²³⁵ Three days that shook Strasbourg – human rights and corruption. European Stability Initiative, 27.01.2017, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=yu&id=236&newsletter_ID=111#6

²³⁶ Authors’ interviews in 2016.

²³⁷ Showdown in Strasbourg: The Political Prisoner Debate in October 2012. European Stability Initiative, February 2013, http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_document_id_135.pdf

²³⁸ El senador del PP Pedro Agramunt minimizó la represión en Azerbaiyán y allanó la construcción del gasoducto. 26 December 2016. http://www.eldiario.es/politica/PP-Pedro-Agramunt-Azerbaiyan-construccion_0_595291055.html

²³⁹ Azerbaijan debacle: The PACE debate on 23 January 2013. European Stability Initiative, 21.02.2013, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=156&document_ID=136

In an interesting development making one wonder whether this was a reward for all these activities, a year and a half later, in June 2015, Conde was appointed a co-rapporteur on human rights in Azerbaijan,²⁴⁰ along with Tadeusz Iwinski from Poland, replacing Agramunt when the latter became the chair of the EPP group in PACE.

In November 2015, Conde participated in the PACE delegation engaged in observation of parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan at the peak of repression. The mission was led by Jordi Xuclà and issued a highly positive statement. Conde left PACE in 2016 and currently holds the position of the Secretary of Defence of Spain.

So far, we could not find a proof of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation cultural heritage restoration activities in Spain. However, our sources indicate that the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, a government-sponsored Nizami International Center,²⁴¹ and the Public Union IDEA, headed by the President's daughter Leyla Aliyeva, are active in Spain in the framework of intercultural dialogue.

A company from a small town of Figeiros in Catalonia received a large contract for supplying chairs for the music hall in Baku.²⁴²

Some of our interlocutors say that the overall Spanish support for Azerbaijan might be connected to the territorial integrity issue, important for Madrid.

A source told us that at the height of economic crisis in Spain several years ago, Azerbaijan came to the rescue of Spanish banks, investing around 8 bln Euro in their bonds.²⁴³ Official information from the Azerbaijan Embassy in Spain gives a figure of 1.2 bln Euro invested in Spanish bonds.²⁴⁴ Possibly, in these huge investment in Spanish bonds lies the answer to why inquiries by MPs from other Spanish parties about allegations of corruption in Agramunt's relations with Azerbaijan have gone nowhere.²⁴⁵ However, there is a definite need for further investigation.

We have been told that the current European Commissioner for Energy and Climate Miguel Arias Cañete, a Spaniard, is a big supporter of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan-related projects.²⁴⁶ Vice-President of the European Commission for Energy Maroš Šefčovič, a Slovak, is also known for his strong support of energy cooperation with Azerbaijan.

²⁴⁰ Agustín Conde becomes new PACE co-rapporteur on Azerbaijan. Vestnik Kavkaza, 21.06.2015, <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/news/Agustin-Conde-becomes-new-PACE-co-rapporteur-on-Azerbaijan.html>

²⁴¹ Official website of Nizami International Center. <http://www.nizamiganjavi-ic.org/>

²⁴² Authors' interview in 2016.

²⁴³ Authors' interview in 2016. Information needs verification.

²⁴⁴ Presentation in the embassy of Azerbaijan in Madrid on 16 June 2012, <http://madrid.mfa.gov.az/es>

²⁴⁵ Esquerra unida reclama explicacions sobre el presumpte suborn d'Azerbaidjan a Pedro Agramunt. EUPV. 26 May 2012. <http://www.eupv.org/blog/2012/05/26/esquerra-unida-reclama-explicacions-sobre-el-presumpte-suborn-dazerbaidjan-a-pedro-agramunt/>

²⁴⁶ Authors' interviews in 2016.

Malta

Maltese MPs are known for their support for Azerbaijan in PACE, especially **Joseph Debono Grech**, a long time MP, former minister of labour, and PACE member in the Socialist Group. In 2009, he managed to get the position of the PACE co-rapporteur on human rights in Azerbaijan, competing with a Norwegian MP known for her human rights credentials. A lot of mobilisation around his election was done by Azerbaijan and its friends.

Later, when Debono Grech left this position, during a PACE debate on Azerbaijan in 2015 he failed to make any mention of imprisoned human rights activist Annar Mammadli, after having himself flagged Mammadli's politically motivated imprisonment in 2013. In a debate on a new report on Azerbaijan's ailing democratic institutions he complained that Azerbaijan was never absent from the Parliamentary Assembly's agenda and warned that "the oil and gas-rich republic could head down the road of Libya or Iraq if president Ilham Aliyev is removed."

"Let's make it clear, I do not condone dictatorships," Debono Grech later told in an interview, adding that Azerbaijan is "not a democracy". However, in the same breath he said that Azerbaijan's situation was delicate given its geographical position and insisted that "the Council of Europe cannot remove the government as the Azerbaijani opposition expects".²⁴⁷

Debono Grech was part of the scheme developed by the key Azerbaijani lobbyists in PACE Luca Volonte and Elkhan Suleymanov to defeat Strässer's report on political prisoners. As discovered by Italian prosecutors in Volonte's electronic letters, he called on Pedro Agramunt, at the time serving as rapporteur on Azerbaijan for the Monitoring Committee, in a letter on 24 November 2012: "...your new chapter should be focused on the Strässer Report. In any case, my suggestion is that you should convince Mr. Del Bono [*apparently referring to Debono Grech*] to present and discuss this specific chapter in the "Monitoring Meeting", in order to reveal the division within the Socialist Group!!!" Indeed, Debono Grech took part in the opposition to Strässer's report and voted against it.

As early as in January 2013, Debono Grech was suspected in receiving gifts while travelling to Azerbaijan.²⁴⁸

Another MP from Malta, **Angelo Farrugia**, currently speaker of the Maltese Parliament, was appointed as head of Malta's delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in 1996. Since then, he has served on a number of international missions as an observer of various elections. He is also a member of the OSCE PA's Committee on Human Rights. Throughout his career, he observed many elections in Azerbaijan and always spoke highly positively about them, ignoring electoral fraud and gross human rights violations.

In October 2013, Farrugia described the presidential elections in Azerbaijan as "fair, democratic and transparent". His assessment sharply conflicted with that of ODIHR observers who said they had

²⁴⁷ Speaker, MPs meet Azerbaijan ruler Ilham Aliyev on sham election day. James Debono, Malta Today, 24.11.2015, http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/59579/speaker_mps_meet_azerbaijan_ruler_ilham_aliyev_on_sham_electi_on_day

²⁴⁸ El senador del PP Pedro Agramunt minimizó la represión en Azerbaiyán y allanó la construcción del gasoducto. 26 December 2016. http://www.eldiario.es/politica/PP-Pedro-Agramunt-Azerbaiyan-construccion_0_595291055.html

documented “widespread irregularities, including ballot-box stuffing and what appeared to be fraudulent counting”.²⁴⁹ Farrugia did this monitoring on behalf of the European Academy for Elections observation (EAEO), a notorious organisation specialising in giving positive assessment of fraudulent elections in autocratic countries after short-term and superficial observation visits with no proper methodology and contradicting international principles of election observation. For more information on EAEO and similar enterprises, read the section on “fake observers” in this report. Farrugia was monitoring elections of 2013 just a few days before the ElectroGas consortium, which includes SOCAR Trading, a company owned by the Azeri government, won a bid to supply Malta with natural gas for 18 years. Good timing.

Angelo Farrugia was back to Baku in November 2015. On the day of controversial parliamentary elections 2015 at the peak of repressions, Ilham Aliyev warmly greeted a delegation of Maltese observers, which was headed by Farrugia and included the former PACE rapporteur on Azerbaijan Joe Debono Grech, Labour MP **Joseph M. Sammut** and Nationalist MP **Frederick Azzopardi**.²⁵⁰ During the meeting, Aliyev said that the two countries enjoyed very active contacts on various levels, noting that fruitful discussions had been held with the Maltese Prime Minister during his visits to Azerbaijan.²⁵¹ Aliyev also emphasized that the relations between the two countries were developing successfully and referred to the ElectroGas plant in Malta developed by the Azerbaijani state oil company SOCAR. Noting that the two countries enjoyed “very close and friendly ties”, Aliyev said that Azerbaijan wants to develop partnership relations with Malta.²⁵²

In 2016, Farrugia returned to Baku to observe the referendum, this time as the head of the European Academy of Elections Observation mission. He said, “we observed a peaceful and organized voting at polling stations” and that “the voters had a careful approach to every issue put to referendum”.²⁵³

Besides a likely personal interest of certain Maltese MPs, a reason for Malta’s pro-Azerbaijani position may be that, according to our sources in Baku, Malta is considered by Azerbaijani oligarchs as one of the “provinces” of Azerbaijan.²⁵⁴ Malta is one of the key locations where corrupt Azerbaijani officials keep their money in offshore banks, along with Great Britain, the Czech Republic, Dubai, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United States.²⁵⁵

²⁴⁹ ‘Democratic and transparent’ – Anglu Farrugia’s verdict on Azeri sham elections. James Debono, Malta Today, 22.10.2013, <http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/30834/democratic-and-transparent-anglu-farrugia-s-verdict-on-azeri-sham-elections-20131021#WKWeYX2-m9d>

²⁵⁰ Speaker, MPs meet Azerbaijan ruler Ilham Aliyev on sham election day. James Debono, Malta Today, 24.11.2015, http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/59579/speaker_mps_meet_azerbaijan_ruler_ilham_aliyev_on_sham_electi_on_day

²⁵¹ President Ilham Aliyev received the Speaker of the Maltese Parliament. AzerTag, 01.11.2015, http://azertag.az/en/xeber/President_Ilham_Aliyev_received_the_Speaker_of_the_Maltese_Parliament_VIDEO-898037

²⁵² Speaker, MPs meet Azerbaijan ruler Ilham Aliyev on sham election day. James Debono, Malta Today, 24.11.2015, http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/59579/speaker_mps_meet_azerbaijan_ruler_ilham_aliyev_on_sham_electi_on_day

²⁵³ Ilham Aliyev: All necessary measures taken to excellently organize referendum. APA Azeri Press Agency, 26.09.2016, <http://en.apa.az/print/249628>

²⁵⁴ Authors’ interviews in 2016.

²⁵⁵ The Structure of Corruption: A Systemic Analysis Using Eurasian Cases. Sarah Chayes, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30.06.2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/structure-of-corruption-systemic-analysis-pub-63991>

Malta also has an important relationship with the Azerbaijani government through its gas plant under construction that will use liquefied natural gas provided by the Azerbaijani state company SOCAR. SOCAR is a part of the ElectroGas consortium supplying liquefied natural gas to the new 250MW gas plant in Malta. Malta has been hosting SOCAR since 2007 thanks to its favourable tax regime, exempting foreign companies from paying tax on profits generated outside of the island.²⁵⁶

Socar Trading Holding Ltd (STHL) acts as the parent company to Socar Trading SA in Geneva, without incurring a 35% corporate tax rate. An office in the town of Ta' Xbiex hosts STHL, which acts as a back-office to the real companies where the money is made: subsidiary SOCAR Trading SA, which trades in crude oil from its Geneva offices. It is this company that will source and sell LNG to the ElectroGas consortium and then on to Enemalta, to power the new Delimara plant.²⁵⁷

In 2014, President's daughter Leyla Aliyeva personally brought to Malta a children's photography exhibition as the Vice-President of Heydar Aliyev Foundation, where she was toasted for by Malta's President George Abela.²⁵⁸

A Maltese shell company has featured as one of the vehicles used in a network of holding companies to house the financial interests of Ilham Aliyev's two daughters in the country's largest mobile phone business, Azercell. FA Invest Malta Limited, a company located in Birkirkara, was created in October 2011 to take over a 6.5% shareholding from a shareholding company of Azercell.²⁵⁹

Countries with direct interest in the Southern Corridor: Georgia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece

Our sources say that for a smaller country to get an agreement on supplies of oil and gas from Azerbaijan, there is always a conditionality: political support for Azerbaijan in international relations and no criticism of human rights issues.

Georgia

Georgia is a neighbouring country, heavily dependent on Azerbaijani petro-products. The Baku–Supsa–Jeykhan pipeline carries oil to Georgia and further to Turkey. Azerbaijan has deeply penetrated the Georgian economy. SOCAR gasoline stations are the most common ones in Georgia. Pasha-Bank, a bank, owned by Aliyev's in-laws, the powerful oligarchic family of the Pashaevs, is located on Tbilisi central street, Rustaveli Avenue.

Our sources told us that ex-president of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili has been an important lobbyist of Aliyev with the EPP and in Europe in general during his presidency. Reportedly, his sphere of interests includes a joint business with Azerbaijan in Georgia, a SOCAR daughter enterprise, which is the largest

²⁵⁶ Azerbaijan's SOCAR chooses Malta for tax purposes. Matthew Vella, Malta Today. 17.03.2015, http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/business/business_news/50731/azerbaijans_socar_chooses_malta_for_tax_purposes#.Vg1brMmbs24

²⁵⁷ Malta shell company helps Azerbaijan's ruling family gain millions at country's expense. John Cordina, The Malta Independent. 7 June 2015. <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2015-06-07/local-news/Malta-shell-company-helps-Azerbaijan-s-ruling-family-gain-millions-at-country-s-expense-6736136878>

²⁵⁸ Leyla Aliyeva presents "Children's Eyes on Earth" expo in Malta. Nazrin Gadimova. AzerNews. 18.02.2014. <http://www.azernews.az/culture/64492.html>

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

taxpayer in Georgia. Experts assess his control over almost half of this business through shell offshore companies. Saakashvili is believed to continue his lobbying efforts now while living in Ukraine.²⁶⁰

Ilham Aliyev holds the Order of Honour of Georgia. A monument to his father Heydar Aliyev is located on the square of his name in the old town in the centre of Tbilisi. Another memorial to Heydar Aliyev is located on the embankment named after him.

We were told that under the current government in Georgia it has become more difficult for exiled Azerbaijani civic activists in Tbilisi to operate without the risk of persecution from Baku and travel outside of Georgia.²⁶¹

Bulgaria

Good relations between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria are said to stem from the Soviet past. However, now they are fuelled by Bulgaria's energy needs. In 2015, the Bulgarian government proposed a large package of energy cooperation projects to Azerbaijan.²⁶² It remains unclear whether this offer of a massive deal was proposed as a swap of property linked to a plan to divest 17% of Azerbaijan's shares of Greek gas operator DEFSa to a third country, needed to overcome anti-monopoly restrictions imposed by the European Commission. Bulgaria has no cash available to buy 17% of DEFSa, but a property swap could obviously solve Baku's problems with the European Commission and strengthen its positions in the broader region. However, the EU decision to make an exception for Azerbaijan in the Third Energy Package made in March 2016 has resolved this problem for Azerbaijan.

Bulgaria is reported to have invited Azerbaijan to participate in the construction of filling stations and invest in the construction of oil and gas storage facilities and refineries. Bulgaria has only one refinery near the port city of Burgas, owned by the Russian company Lukoil, which has been designed to process only Russian crude. Bulgarians frequently complain about Russia's monopoly on the fuel market as a result of the dominant position of Lukoil.

Bulgaria is also interested in purchasing Azerbaijani gas, and its government has already committed to purchase one billion cubic meters of gas per year (bcm/y),²⁶³ when Azerbaijani gas will start flowing through the Southern Gas Corridor. At present, Bulgaria uses 3 bcm/y of gas, exclusively from Russia.

ICGB (Greece-Bulgaria Inter-Connector), known also as the Stara Zagora-Komotini interconnector, is the gas pipeline which will allow Bulgaria to receive Azerbaijani gas from the TAP section of the Southern Gas Corridor. A Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation was signed between TAP and ICGB in January 2014.²⁶⁴ The document provides an opportunity for cooperation between the two companies to work together on connecting the pipelines near Komotini (Greece), which will open the way for new supplies of gas to the gas distribution network in Bulgaria, and further to South-Eastern Europe.

²⁶⁰ Authors' interviews in 2015-2016.

²⁶¹ Authors' interviews in 2015-2016.

²⁶² Bulgaria offers Azerbaijan 'a package' of energy projects. Georgi Gotev, EurActiv. 31 August 2015. <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/energy/bulgaria-offers-azerbaijan-package-energy-projects-317180>

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

Bulgaria wanted the European Commission to revive plans for the Nabucco pipeline that would bring gas from the Shah Deniz gas field by a different route than the currently planned Southern Gas Corridor. This desire was stated by Bulgarian president Boyko Borissov in March 2015, following his talks with Aliyev.²⁶⁵ Nabucco was designed to pass through the Bulgarian territory, and Bulgarian company BEH was part of the Nabucco consortium. However, in 2013, Azerbaijan chose another pipeline project, TAP, which would bring the Azerbaijani gas from Turkey via Greece and Albania to Italy, and the Nabucco project was shelved.

Bulgaria meets more than 80% of its gas needs by imports from Russia and is keen to diversify its energy supplies due to the Ukraine crisis. Sofia was caught off guard by President Vladimir Putin's announcement in December 2014 that Russia was abandoning plans for the South Stream pipeline that would have supplied gas to Europe via Bulgaria, while bypassing Ukraine.²⁶⁶ On a visit to Brussels in January 2015, Bulgarian President Boyko Borissov even warned of an “energy catastrophe” looming for his country.²⁶⁷ “We want to revive the Nabucco project, more specifically the stretch that goes through Bulgaria. Our country is an extremely loyal EU member and has implemented all legal requirements of the Third Energy Package, unlike many other countries. Therefore, together with President Aliyev, we will present the revival project to the European Commission,” Borissov said, according to an official transcript.²⁶⁸

“We think that we can unite TAP and Nabucco. It is not important what you call this route. Our main goal is that the volumes of Azerbaijani gas enter Europe,” Aliyev said in March 2015. “The more EU countries receive our gas, the better for all.” From Bulgaria, Azerbaijani gas could also be sent to Romania and Hungary, Aliyev said.

The amount of Azerbaijani gas to be delivered remains modest, compared to the plans to bring 63 bcm/y of Russian gas to Europe through the South Stream or the Turkish Stream pipeline, possibly even earlier than the TAP pipeline. But Aliyev said in Sofia in March 2015 that Azerbaijan has rich gas resources, specifying a total amount of gas reserves of 2.5 trillion cubic metres.²⁶⁹ After development of the Shah Deniz gas field, the Absheron gas field is expected to be developed next.

“Azerbaijan is not under sanctions. There is no problem for us to raise the issue with Brussels,” Borissov said, referring to his idea of resuscitating the Nabucco pipeline.²⁷⁰ He also expressed appreciation for the proposal that Bulgaria becomes a shareholder in the Southern Gas Corridor.

All this indicates an extreme interest of Bulgaria, an EU member state, in developing relations with Azerbaijan apparently unconditionally, disregarding human rights problems. Our sources indicate that

²⁶⁵ Bulgaria wants to revive Nabucco, Azerbaijan says pipeline name ‘not important’. Georgi Gotev, EurActiv, 05.03.2015, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/energy/bulgaria-wants-revive-nabucco-azerbaijan-says-pipeline-name-not-important-312645>

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Borissov warns of Bulgarian energy ‘catastrophe’. Georgi Gotev, EurActiv, 12.02.2015, <http://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/borissov-warns-of-bulgarian-energy-catastrophe/>

²⁶⁸ Bulgaria wants to revive Nabucco, Azerbaijan says pipeline name ‘not important’. Georgi Gotev, EurActiv, 05.03.2015, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/energy/bulgaria-wants-revive-nabucco-azerbaijan-says-pipeline-name-not-important-312645>

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

this interest has a direct influence on how MPs from Bulgaria in PACE and Bulgarian MEPs in the European Parliament vote and act in relation to initiatives on Azerbaijan.

Here are a few examples. Bulgarian MEP **Ilhan Kyuchyuk** was promoting the idea of MEPs coming to Baku for the European Games.²⁷¹ MEPs **Evgeniy Kirilov** and **Slavi Binev** participated in the scandalous 2013 visit of the EP delegation to Azerbaijan which found the presidential election free and fair.²⁷² The following Bulgarian MPs made a positive assessment of the 2015 parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan which were not monitored by OSCE/ODIHR: **Daniela Daritkova-Prodanova**, head of the Bulgarian observers delegation,²⁷³ **Petar Kanev**,²⁷⁴ and **Kancho Filipov**.²⁷⁵

Romania

Romania boasts special relations with Azerbaijan. It was the second country in the world to recognise its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since then, the relationship has evolved, as Romania is counting on Azerbaijan's oil and gas to reduce its dependence on Russian gas.

President Aliyev has twice received high honours in Bucharest, from both President Traian Băsescu and his predecessor Ion Iliescu: the Order of the Star of Romania and the Grand Cross of Faithful Service.²⁷⁶ Iliescu was among the few heads of state to meet with both Aliyevs (father and son) in their respective capacities as presidents of the Azerbaijani state.

In 2009, Băsescu and Aliyev signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement between the two countries. Before that, Romania had this kind of agreement only with USA. The Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Romania also have a special cooperation agreement.

Traian Băsescu, starting his presidency as a liberal democrat, later, after a conflict in his party, created his own People's Party, now an EPP member. This became a valuable asset for Azerbaijan's ruling party lobbying efforts to become a member of the EPP. In Bucharest, President Băsescu personally opened a memorial park for Heydar Aliyev. Traian Băsescu's daughter Elena Băsescu continued the work of her father, actively engaging with Azerbaijan while she was a MEP until 2014.

In 2007, an office of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation was opened in Bucharest. A leading international consortium of investigative journalists, the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) has discovered a criminal connection behind the real estate allocation to the Foundation in Bucharest, which is being guarded and treated as an official diplomatic representation.²⁷⁷

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Azerbaijan: Pino Arlacchi imbarazza l'Europa. Anna Mazzone, Panorama, 28.10.2013, <http://news.panorama.it/esteri/Azerbaijan-elezioni-Arlacchi-regime-parlamento-europeo-ONU-scandalo>

²⁷³ Parliamentary election in Azerbaijan held at high level - Bulgarian monitoring mission. By Anahanum Khidayatova, Trend News Agency. 02.11.2015. <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/election2015/2451533.html>

²⁷⁴ Election turnout in Azerbaijan exceeds European standards – Bulgarian MP. By Azad Hasanli. Trend News Agency. 02.11.2015, <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/election2015/2451451.html>

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Building on a Shaky Foundation. Roxana Jipa, Victor Ilie, and Daniel Bojin, Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 04.12.2015, <https://www.occrp.org/freekhadijajismayilova/stories/building-on-a-shaky-foundation.php>

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

Romania is both interested in the Southern Gas Corridor and working on another project. In 2010 Azerbaijan, Georgia and Romania signed a deal on AGRI – Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnection that would deliver Azerbaijani gas via Georgia and the Black Sea (after liquefaction) to the port of Constanca in Romania. After the freeze of the Russian project Southern Stream, following the Russian-Turkish conflict in 2015, experts see a revival of the AGRI project as most likely.

Romania also had ambitions to be a part to Pan-European Oil Pipeline (PEOP), a proposed oil pipeline from Constanta in Romania via Serbia to Rijeka in Croatia and from there through Slovenia to Trieste in Italy. The aim of the pipeline was to bypass the Turkish straits in the transportation of Caspian oil to Central Europe. In Trieste, the pipeline would be connected with the Transalpine Pipeline, running to Austria and Germany. However, currently the project is frozen.²⁷⁸ By 2011, SOCAR had more than 300 gasoline stations in Romania and planned to open more.

MEPs and MPs from Romania, especially those connected to the EPP and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE), often act in Azerbaijani interests and, according to our sources, receive direct instructions from Bucharest in order to ensure good Romania-Azerbaijan relations.²⁷⁹

In September 2015, following a critical resolution on Azerbaijan in the European Parliament, EPP's **Ramona Manescu** and **Dan Christian Preda** (EPP group coordinator for foreign affairs) and ALDE's **Norica Nicolai** went public in criticising this resolution as anti-Azerbaijani.²⁸⁰ Norica Nicolai, being a rapporteur on EU-Azerbaijan framework agreement and the Euronest coordinator in ALDE, continued her calls for restoring cooperation with Azerbaijan.²⁸¹ Norica Nicolai was also part of the scandalous election observation delegation of the European Parliament in autumn 2013.

In July 2013, **Elena Antonescu**, a MEP from Romania, visited Baku as a part of a mixed delegation upon invitation of ill-reputed Azerbaijani PACE delegation member Elkhan Suleymanov, responsible for recruiting new friends for Baku. His name is often mentioned in connection with dubious lobbying stories and can be found in various parts of this report. Many of those who became friends of Azerbaijan received an opportunity to come for a luxury visit covered by hospitable hosts and receive various benefits. This delegation in July 2013 consisted of well-known friends of Azerbaijan²⁸² (more details on this trip are given below).

In spring 2016, a well-known Azerbaijani apologist, Romanian MP from the EPP **Florin Preda** was appointed by PACE Monitoring Committee a co-rapporteur on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan, after the previous co-rapporteurs Agustin Conde from Spain and Tadeusz Iwinski from Poland were not re-elected to their national parliaments in 2015 and lost their PACE membership. For more information on Florin Preda, see the section on PACE in this report.

²⁷⁸ Aliev, Saakashvili și Băsescu vor semna un acord privind livrările de gaz în Europa. Romania Libero, 14.09.2010, <http://www.romanalibera.ro/actualitate/international/aliev--saakasvili-si-basescu-vor-semna-un-acord-privind-livrarile-de-gaz-in-europa-199417>

²⁷⁹ Authors interviews in 2015-2016.

²⁸⁰ MEPs explain objecting to Parliamentary resolution condemning Azerbaijan. The European Business Review, 25.09.2015, <http://www.europeanbusinessreview.eu/page.asp?pid=1381>

²⁸¹ The European Parliament and diplomacy: the case of Azerbaijan. Norica Nicolai, EP Today 2015, <http://eptoday.com/the-european-parliament-and-diplomacy-the-case-of-azerbaijan/>

²⁸² Members of European Parliament visit Azerbaijan. APA. 8 July 2013. http://en.apa.az/xeber_members_of_the_european_parliament_visit_195976.html

A well-known tactic of Romania is to take in inter-governmental organisations positions responsible for relations for countries important for Romania from the trade perspective, like Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, and use these positions to minimise criticism of these countries.

Greece

There are two main reasons for Greece's support of Azerbaijan: the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) project and the DESFA contract.

TAP is a part of the Southern Gas Corridor. Brussels wants to bring Azerbaijani gas to Europe by 2019-2020 via this Corridor. The 870 kilometre-long TAP is planned to be connected to another element of the Southern Gas Corridor, the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) near the Turkish-Greek border at Kipoi, and cross Greece, Albania, and the Adriatic Sea before reaching southern Italy. Thus, Greece will play an important role as a transit country.

The Greek gas distribution system, DESFA, is majority owned by Azerbaijan. In 2013, at the height of financial crisis in Greece, Azerbaijan's SOCAR state company bought a 66% stake in DESFA, reportedly at the insistence of the European Commission, to fend off attempts of Russian companies to become owners of the Greek grid. However, in November 2014, the European Commission opened an in-depth investigation to determine whether the acquisition of DESFA by SOCAR was in line with the EU's Third Energy Package. One of the ways out of this collision was a possible swap with Bulgaria (see above in the chapter on Bulgaria).

Greek Foreign Minister Nikolaos Kotzias said in February 2016 during his visit to Baku: "We are willing to contribute in any way, in all the forms we can, to promote the relations between the European Union and Azerbaijan. We are a good advocate for Azerbaijan in the European Union. We are truly friends. We are not neighbours, but we are friends. Sometimes the friends who are a little bit far away are the best friends for such kinds of cooperation. ... About energy, we have a very specific political situation. We are situated in a very important corner for energy. We are now getting energy from the Eastern Mediterranean space. As you know, Israel, Egypt and Cyprus have found large energy deposits, and for us it is very important to make a connection between these possibilities coming from the Eastern Mediterranean and the possibility of getting gas from Azerbaijan, through the TAP gas line. And we are creating, together with Bulgaria and Romania, another gas line, which will also use Azerbaijan's gas."²⁸³

Ilham Aliyev holds the Golden Medal of the Hellenic Republic.

²⁸³ Foreign Minister Kotzias' statements at his joint press conference with the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan, Elmar Mammadyarov. Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece, 02.02.2016, <http://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/top-story/foreign-minister-kotzias-statements-at-his-joint-press-conference-with-the-foreign-minister-of-azerbaijan-elmar-mammadyarov-baku-february-2016.html>

Central and Eastern Europe Connections: Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic

Hungary and Azerbaijan: A personal interest of Viktor Orbán?

Hungary and Azerbaijan have very close political relations and aspirations for developing economic ties; however, this is not yet reflected in high trade volume.

Hungarian Prime Minister **Viktor Orbán** has paid several visits to Azerbaijan, raising criticism from the opposition inside Hungary.^{284, 285} His cordial relations with Ilham Aliyev also raised worries of Westerners because of Orbán's close relationship with another autocrat, Vladimir Putin.^{286, 287}

In 2014, Azerbaijan and Hungary signed a strategic partnership agreement. During state visits, Orbán and his government members claimed that the trade between the two countries is developing, and Hungarian Eximbank opened a credit line for that purpose, having joint dealings with Pasha-Bank.²⁸⁸

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung reported that although it is known that Orbán would like to acquire natural gas from Azerbaijan and that the two countries signed a strategic agreement, the details of such a deal are still unknown. At the same time, Orbán – while claiming to only build economic ties with Azerbaijan – openly praised the political regime of Ilham Aliyev and his father, emphasizing that “respect for our nations and family values” are the principal ties between Azerbaijan and Hungary.²⁸⁹

However, the primary goal of all this friendship on Hungarian side is access to the Azerbaijani gas. In 2010, when the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector (AGRI project) was in the plans, Orbán was among those who signed the agreement on AGRI, along with leaders of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Romania. After this project was frozen, Hungary was still hoping to get its deal of gas – now from a side branch of the TAP project.²⁹⁰

In 2014, shortly after Aliyev's visit to Budapest, Orbán started acting openly as a lobbyist of Azerbaijan, urging the EU to build gas pipeline interconnectors across borders to ensure that natural gas from Azerbaijan reaches markets in central Europe. Speaking as Ilham Aliyev paid a state visit and they signed a strategic partnership agreement, Orbán said that it was in the strategic interest of Europe as a whole to let Azerbaijani gas reach central Europe: “Our job in the coming years is to create the conditions for Azeri gas to make the journey from southern Europe to central Europe”.²⁹¹

²⁸⁴ Hungarian opposition parties criticise Orbán-Aliyev talks. XpatLoop, 12.11.2014, http://www.xpatloop.com/news/hungarian_opposition_parties_criticise_orban-aliyev_talks

²⁸⁵ Shock and outrage over Hungary's special relationship with Azerbaijan. The Budapest Beacon, 17.11.2014. <http://budapestbeacon.com/politics/shock-and-outrage-over-hungarys-special-relationship-with-azerbaijan/14980>

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Hungary urges EU to ensure route for Azeri gas to central Europe. Reuters, 11.11.2014. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-hungary-gas-azerbaijan-idUKKCN0IV11H20141111>

²⁸⁸ Viktor Orbán visits Azerbaijan with USD 200 million Eximbank loan facility in hand. The Budapest Beacon, 06.03.2016, <http://budapestbeacon.com/public-policy/iktor-orban-visits-azerbaijan-with-usd-200-million-eximbank-loan-facility-in-hand/32961>

²⁸⁹ Shock and outrage over Hungary's special relationship with Azerbaijan. The Budapest Beacon, 17.11.2014, <http://budapestbeacon.com/politics/shock-and-outrage-over-hungarys-special-relationship-with-azerbaijan/14980>

²⁹⁰ Eastern Opening: Azerbaijan. The Orange Files, 12.11.2014, <https://theorangefiles.hu/eastern-opening-azerbaijan/>

²⁹¹ Hungary urges EU to ensure route for Azeri gas to central Europe. Reuters, 11.11.2014, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk->

In his turn, Aliyev said during Orbán's visit to Baku in March 2016: "There is excellent cooperation in the field of energy. The cooperation between SOCAR and MOL already has a good history, and it should rise to a new level."²⁹²

Importantly, a number of Hungarian experts and opposition members indicate that Orbán might have very personal interest in promoting gas deals with Azerbaijan. The energy sector in Hungary, according to a number of investigative publications, is a priority interest of Orbán and businessmen with close ties to Orbán. In his remarks, Aliyev specifically mentioned MOL – a Hungarian oil company – as a partner for energy cooperation. MOL owns 40% of MET Holding A.G., a group of companies headquartered in Zug, Switzerland,²⁹³ which plays a central role in the energy sector in Hungary. Another part is owned by Hungarian individuals – people formerly employed by MOL and businessmen with close ties to Orbán. Experts claim that the control gears over MET Holding are leading through shell companies and proxies ultimately to Orbán.²⁹⁴

Indeed, MET has become famous in Hungary for its unclear ownership structure. Investigative portal Átlátszó (translated as Transparent and called "the Hungarian WikiLeaks") revealed connections of MET through the firms on Cyprus and the Cayman Islands to the real owners: the oligarchs with close relationships with Viktor Orbán. MET was founded in 2007 by the managers of MOL energy syndicate. While MOL is still the 40% owner of MET, further 50% is owned by WISD Holding (formerly called RP Explorer Funds), registered in Cyprus. According to Átlátszó, WISD is in possession of several offshore companies leading to Orbán and his associates. The company registers in Cyprus support this claim.²⁹⁵

The Hungarian subsidiary of MET managed to make a huge amount of money by securing an exceptional place on the domestic gas market thanks to government orders and very beneficial contracts.²⁹⁶

In addition, three energy companies – MOL, MET and MVM – were involved in a huge scandal involving sales and resales of Russian and Western gas.²⁹⁷

In the case that Azerbaijani gas comes into play, it will be Orbán who will hugely benefit from the gas flows and its distribution in Hungary and further on. Cheap gas is crucial for Orbán, as he hopes that it can help him deliver his next parliamentary victory in 2018, as it helped him in 2014.²⁹⁸

hungary-gas-azerbaijan-idUKKCN0IV11H20141111

²⁹² Ilham Aliyev, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán made press statements. Official website of the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Hungary, 06 March 2016, <http://budapest.mfa.gov.az/news/4/3011>

²⁹³ Official website of the Met Group of Companies. <https://group.met.com/en/met-group-companies>. Accessed on 14 February 2017.

²⁹⁴ Mysterious trips of Viktor Orbán and János Lázár to Switzerland. Hungarian Spectrum, 10 November 2014, <https://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/11/09/mysterious-trips-of-viktor-orban-and-janos-lazar-to-switzerland/>

²⁹⁵ Hungary: Energy trading connections of MET & Hungary, A network of companies that shares an address in Zug. Serbia Energy, 19 January 2015, <http://serbia-energy.eu/hungary-energy-trading-connections-of-met-hungary-a-network-of-companies-that-shares-an-address-in-zug/>

²⁹⁶ Mysterious trips of Viktor Orbán and János Lázár to Switzerland. Hungarian Spectrum, 10.11.2014, <https://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/11/09/mysterious-trips-of-viktor-orban-and-janos-lazar-to-switzerland/>

²⁹⁷ Hungary: Energy trading connections of MET & Hungary, A network of companies that shares an address in Zug. Serbia Energy, 19.01.2015, <http://serbia-energy.eu/hungary-energy-trading-connections-of-met-hungary-a-network-of-companies-that-shares-an-address-in-zug/>

²⁹⁸ Putin-Orbán axis assails the EU. Peter Kreko, EU Observer, 30.01.2017, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/136706>

Our sources indicate that members of EPP from Hungary lobbied for Aliyev's party to become an EPP member. They also tell us about special relations between Azerbaijan and Jobbik, Hungary's right-wing radical nationalist party.²⁹⁹

It is not surprising, therefore, that Hungary is one of the countries consistently standing up for Azerbaijan within the European Union.

Poland: Active pro-Azerbaijani MEPs and changing government policy

Polish relations with Azerbaijan are said to have been balanced in the recent past, under the Civic Platform government which did not pursue close relations with Baku. However, we know of a number of Polish parliamentarians and members of the European Parliament who took openly pro-Azerbaijan positions in those years.

The most notorious of them is **Tadeusz Iwinski**, who, until autumn 2015, was a member of the Polish parliament and a PACE deputy in the Socialist group. He was a co-rapporteur on Azerbaijan in PACE in 2014-2015, first with Pedro Agramunt and later with Agustin Conde, and in this capacity was systematically protecting the Azerbaijani government from criticism on human rights. He lost in 2015 elections in Poland and is not PACE member anymore.

Polish MEP from EPP **Jacek Saryusz-Wolski** called for an application of double standards in the case of Azerbaijan in a closed meeting of Euronest coordinators in early 2016, citing geopolitical reasons.³⁰⁰ Another Polish MEP from EPP, **Filipp Kaczmarek**, was involved in the scandalous election observation trip to Azerbaijan in 2013. Before that in the same year he went to Baku on a trip of "friends of Azerbaijan" upon invitation of the key Azerbaijani lobbyist in PACE and EP Elkhan Suleymanov.

Ilham Aliyev holds the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland.

Warsaw-based International Institute of Civil Society (Międzynarodowy Instytut Społeczeństwa Obywatelskiego, MISO³⁰¹) is a pro-Azerbaijani Polish think-tank. It is often quoted by government media in Azerbaijan as a source of information about Polish policy regarding Azerbaijan. Information produced by MISO is regarded by others in Poland as "dubious". While MISO is referred to by the Azerbaijani official media as "a prominent Polish think-tank", it is hardly known in Poland.³⁰²

The right-wing Ruch Narodowy movement (similar to Jobbik in Hungary) is believed to have connections with Azerbaijan.

Leading Azerbaijani investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova said at one point that Azerbaijani corruption ties in Poland need investigation.³⁰³

²⁹⁹ Author's interviews in 2015-2016.

³⁰⁰ Authors' interview with an EP adviser, 2016.

³⁰¹ Website of the Międzynarodowy Instytut Społeczeństwa Obywatelskiego, <http://miso.org.pl>.

³⁰² Authors' interviews with Polish experts in 2016.

³⁰³ Authors' interview in 2016.

Current conservative and populist Polish government of the Law and Justice party (PiS) has changed Poland's approach to relations with Azerbaijan and seems to pursue cooperative relations with Baku from the point of view of security cooperation in order "to counterweight Russia" (similar to the position of Kristina Ojuland, a MEP from Estonia, and a number of other European politicians). This attitude to relations with Azerbaijan was at least partly initiated by the former Polish Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Michal Labenda who served in 2010-2014.

There are rumours that one of his predecessors, former Ambassador **Krzysztof Krajewski** (served in 2005-2010), has business ties to Azerbaijan which flourished soon after Lech Kaczyński, president of Poland at that time, awarded Azerbaijani Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmar Mammadyarov and Minister of the Interior Ramil Usubov with high Polish orders at the initiative of Ambassador Krajewski.³⁰⁴ Of course, this might be just a mere coincidence; however, it raises some questions, especially after earlier precedents when two former US ambassadors to Azerbaijan, Matthew Bryza and Stanley Escudero, started their commercial ties with this country right after the end of their postings in Baku.³⁰⁵

Current Polish official line regarding Azerbaijan is, according to our sources, as follows: Azerbaijan is needed for energy; it contributes to security and stability; Azerbaijan is not a state mature enough for democracy. Since the ruling Law and Justice party is known for its decision to develop relations with energy-rich autocratic Turkmenistan, Polish connections with Azerbaijan should be investigated, and Polish government's policy towards Azerbaijan should be watched closely.

The Czech Republic: A heaven for Azerbaijani oligarchs

The Czech Republic is known to be a heaven for Azerbaijani oligarchs, as reports by OCCPR³⁰⁶ and Khadija Ismayilova³⁰⁷ show. At a certain time, according to our sources, there were special charter flights from Baku to Prague and Karlovy Vary. Several people we interviewed pointed out that Azerbaijani officials and oligarchs keep their assets and real estate in the Czech Republic and have easy access to MPs and members of the Czech government.

The Czech Republic is one of the key locations where corrupt Azerbaijani officials keep their money in offshore banks, along with the Great Britain, Dubai, Malta, Switzerland, Turkey, and the US.³⁰⁸

In September 2015, a Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Czech Republic was signed in Baku.

The Czech Republic is on the 5th-6th place among Azerbaijani trade partners.

³⁰⁴ Authors' interviews with Polish experts, 2016.

³⁰⁵ Who Is Shushing State on Azerbaijan's Detention of Khadija Ismayilova? Till Bruckner, Huffington Post, 30 December 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/till-bruckner/who-is-shushing-state-on- b_6354866.html

³⁰⁶ Azeri Enclave in Czech Republic. Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 11.10.2012, <https://www.occrp.org/en/investigations/1666-azerbajians-czech-enclave>

³⁰⁷ The Reporting That Jailed Khadija. Charles Recknagel. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 01.09.2015, <http://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-corruption-investigator-khadija-ismayilova/27138496.html>

³⁰⁸ The Structure of Corruption: A Systemic Analysis Using Eurasian Cases. Sarah Chayes, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30.06.2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/structure-of-corruption-systemic-analysis-pub-63991>

Very active and influential Azerbaijani Ambassador in Prague, Tahir Taghizadeh, was recently promoted to an important position of the Ambassador in London. Very likely, his success in Prague can be attributed to his post of the trade representative in Prague in the Soviet times, which apparently allowed him to use his old connections and establish new ones. He was able to promote Azerbaijani-Czech business relations to a degree that the Czech government would never criticise Azerbaijan's human rights record. According to our interlocutors, a person behind this change in the Czech government position on Azerbaijan is **Petr Drulák**, Political Secretary of the MFA and the Director of the Minister's Cabinet, who is said to be close to ex-president Vaclav Klaus, a politician with dubious reputation in terms of his non-critical position regarding autocratic regimes.³⁰⁹

President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament **Jan Hamáček** is a key lobbyist for Azerbaijan in his country, according to our sources. In June 2015, he participated in the opening ceremony of the European Games in Baku. He has visited Baku a number of times as the head of parliamentary delegations and was received by Aliyev, including in April 2013³¹⁰ and March 2016.³¹¹

The Czech-Azerbaijan inter-parliamentary friendship group was established in the Chamber of Deputies, lower house of the Czech Parliament, on July 19, 2011. Jan Hamáček is the head of this Group. The Czech-Azerbaijan inter-parliamentary friendship group was also established in the Senate, the upper house of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, on 24 May 2012. The Azerbaijan-Czech working group on inter-parliamentary relations was also established in the Parliament of Azerbaijan on April 8, 2011. Valeh Alasgarov is the head of the Group.³¹²

In 2014, Taghizadeh and Hamáček organised a conference in Prague, entitled "Azerbaijan's security policy as a factor of peace and regional stability".³¹³

Czech MEP **Milan Cabrnoch** from the European Conservatives and Reformists group in the European Parliament went to Baku on the scandalous election observation trip in 2013.

Azerbaijan is also promoted through cultural events held by the embassy. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation has multiple real estate property in the Czech Republic.

The Czech Republic will be definitely opposed to any toughening of the EU policy regarding Azerbaijan.

³⁰⁹ Authors' interviews with Czech experts, 2016.

³¹⁰ Ilham Aliyev received a delegation led by the Deputy Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic. Website of President of Azerbaijan, 17.04.2013, <http://en.president.az/articles/7842/print>

³¹¹ Azerbaijani president receives delegation led by chairman of House of Deputies of Czech parliament. Son, 14.03.2016, <http://son.az/en/news/7170/azerbaijani-president-receives-delegation-led-by-chairman-of-house-of-deputies-of-czech-parliament>

³¹² Bilateral Relations. Official website of the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Czech Republic. <http://prague.mfa.gov.az/content/3>. Accessed on 15.11.2016.

³¹³ Azerbaijan's security policy discussed in Prague. AzerNews, 12.06.2014, <http://www.azernews.az/nation/67958.html>

POLITICAL PARTIES IN EUROPE

As underlined by numerous interlocutors, Azerbaijani lobbyists are working across the party spectrum, from the far right to the left. Conservatives, liberals, and social democrats from various national parliaments are found among frequent guests in Baku and zealous supporters of the Aliyev regime. In the UK, as the numbers above show, they donated both to Conservatives and Liberals.

MPs from liberal parties are probably the second largest Baku supporters group after EPP, both in PACE and in the EP. Our interlocutors explain that ALDE has lowered its standards for admitting new members to the group in order to maintain its numbers.

The critical resolution of the European Parliament on Azerbaijan³¹⁴ in 2015 was adopted by 365 votes in favour but faced a strong opposition, especially from the largest political group, the European People's Party, with 202 no votes and 72 abstentions. The general tendency was that the EPP and European Conservatives and Reformists voted against the resolution while MEPs from ALDE, Greens, and Socialists and Democrats, in general, supported the resolution.

In PACE, the EPP Group is known as a citadel of Azerbaijan regime defenders. In Bundestag, the main Aliyev sympathisers are also with CDU/CSU (part of the EPP).

Our Azerbaijani interlocutors confirm that the EPP is a special partner for Azerbaijan, and the ultimate goal of Aliyev would be his party joining the EPP. However, there are objections because of the poor human rights record of Azerbaijan where the New Azerbaijan, the candidate to the EPP membership, is a ruling party. We have been told that New Azerbaijan hopes to squeeze in through Centrist Democrats International, with help of friendly Romanians, Hungarians, Spaniards, etc. Press-clippings confirm this.^{315, 316}

Antonio López-Istúriz, Secretary General of the European People's Party (EPP) and the Centrist Democrats International, is a frequent and dear guest in Baku. During his visits, successful cooperation between Aliyev's New Azerbaijan Party (NAP) and the European People's Party (EPP) and the Centrist Democrats International is emphasized, and it is said that NAP and EPP always participate in each other's events. During López-Istúriz's visit in 2014 and his meeting with Aliyev, it was said openly that the NAP wants to join the EPP.

In 2012, EPP held a special conference for Azerbaijan in the European Parliament, called "Azerbaijan: New Horizons for the Partnership", sponsored by **Jerzy Buzek**, Polish MEP and former President of the European Parliament, Member of Foreign Affairs Committee, and **Monica Macovei**, Romanian MEP (still a member of the EP).³¹⁷ Special guests of the conference included Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister

³¹⁴ European Parliament resolution on Azerbaijan (2015/2840(RSP)), 10.09.2015, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2015-0316&language=EN&ring=P8-RC-2015-0856>

³¹⁵ Ruling party of Azerbaijan wants to join European People's Party. ABC.az, 08.07.2014, <http://abc.az/eng/news/82372.html>

³¹⁶ Azerbaijan, European People's Party to boost bilateral relations. Jamila Babayeva, AzerNews. 8 July 2014. <http://www.azernews.az/azerbaijan/68670.html>

³¹⁷ Azerbaijan: New horizons for the Partnership. Official website of the European People's Party in the European Parliament. 09.02.2012. <http://www.eppgroup.eu/press-release/Azerbaijan%3A-New-horizons-for-the-Partnership>

of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Philippe Lefort, EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, and Wilfred Martens, then President of the European People's Party. The first part of the conference, "How to further develop EU-Azerbaijan relations", was chaired by Jerzy Buzek. President of the EPP **Wilfred Martens** reminded the audience of the European dimension of Azerbaijan and highlighted Azerbaijan's rich history.³¹⁸ The late EPP President Wilfred Martens was a dear guest in Baku.

However, things may become different with relatively new EPP President **Joseph Doule**. As said above, Pedro Agramunt of PPE of Spain has turned the EPP group in PACE into a pro-Azerbaijani citadel. Not all of the EPP group members in PACE seem to be happy with this development. We were confidentially informed that in 2015 three of them wrote a letter to Doule, asking him to take measures on Agramunt's conduct. We were not able to obtain a copy of the letter, but one of the authors informed us confidentially that Doule was very concerned about the situation in PACE and was considering action. Good news is that in German Bundestag there are CDU/CSU members who are concerned about this situation: one of the authors of the letter comes from Germany.³¹⁹

However, being critical of Agramunt's and others' conduct, these dissenting voices are still very loyal to EPP as such and are not willing to disclose the details, while people outside the party are not very well informed about developments inside it.

INFLUENCE THROUGH CHARITABLE, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE PROJECTS

The Heydar Aliyev Foundation, run by the first lady Mehriban Aliyeva, is used as a tool to paint a positive image of Azerbaijan at the international level, allocate money for cultural and restoration projects in various countries, befriend public officials where these events are held and historical objects are located, and thus penetrate into various countries.

It is involved in whitewashing Heydar Aliyev's name and bringing his personality cult to other countries. There are parks in a number of countries in Europe named after Heydar Aliyev with his statues (all Balkan countries and Georgia).

The Heydar Aliyev Foundation's financial sources are not transparent. Reportedly, oligarchs and high-level bureaucrats have to pay to the Foundation an informal "tax" to do business and for their appointment. Businessmen are ordered to engage in 'charity' under the label of Heydar Aliyev Foundation.³²⁰

Besides running the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, Mehriban Aliyeva is a Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO since 2004. At the height of the human rights crackdown in 2015, international NGOs called on the UNESCO to dismiss Mehriban Aliyeva from this position, to no avail.³²¹ UNESCO Director, Irina Bokova from Bulgaria, is said to be a personal friend of Mehriban Aliyeva.³²² Bokova was a strong candidate for

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Author's interviews in PACE and Bundestag in 2016.

³²⁰ Author's interviews in 2015.

³²¹ UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador Mehriban Aliyeva must be dismissed immediately. European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, October 2015, <https://ecpmf.eu/ecpmf/call-for-action/unesco-goodwill-ambassador-mehriban-aliyeva-must-be-dismissed-immediately>

³²² Authors' interviews in 2015.

the position of UN Secretary General in 2016. Leyla Aliyeva, the daughter of Ilham and Mehriban, followed the steps of her mother by becoming a Goodwill Ambassador of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2015.³²³

Special efforts are made to present Azerbaijan as a model of religious and ethnic tolerance. Numerous conferences and presentations on this subject are held in Europe, including in the premises of the European Parliament.

Israeli and Jewish organizations in USA and Europe are particularly targeted. Azerbaijanis are using them actively by presenting Azerbaijan as a trusted Muslim partner of Israel and the Jewish people. This argument has been used in attempts to defeat the US Azerbaijan Democracy act. The argument of Azerbaijan being a good friend of Israel is frequently used by German and French lobbyists. Mariani would give the example of the Israel embassy in Baku that does not need high security measures.

“Our message is clear and consistent: Azerbaijan is an important strategic partner for the United States and the West, as well as a valued friend of Israel and the Jewish people,” American Jewish Committee (AJC) executive director **David Harris** said in a statement in February 2015, following a meeting in Baku with Ilham Aliyev.³²⁴ Speaking at a 30 January 2015 panel discussion in Washington, Samad Seyidov, chairman of the international and inter-parliamentary relations committee in the Azerbaijani parliament, swiftly pivoted to his country’s friendly record toward Judaism and other religions in response to a question about alleged human rights abuses committed by the government.³²⁵

U.S. Foreign Agent Registration Act filings show that the Podesta Group, a lobbying firm that Azerbaijan pays \$60,000 per month, contacted pro-Israel advocacy groups such as the America Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs in the second half of 2014.³²⁶

INFLUENCE ON PARLIAMENTARY BODIES: OSCE PA, PACE, AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

PACE, European Parliament, OSCE PA, and national parliaments are all targets for Azerbaijani lobbying and corruption. Services that are needed from different MPs are variable. The least complicated is voting in favour of Azerbaijan and participating in debates on the Azerbaijani side. Then there is an election observation, which became a lucrative business for some MPs. Furthermore, a number of MPs are former government officials and are well-connected. Therefore, they are capable of lobbying their governments or the EU institutions in Brussels. Of course, the most helpful are those who are able to get appointed to important positions, take charge over parliamentary structures, and control what is happening in terms of appointment of rapporteurs, adoption of reports and resolutions, etc.

³²³ Leyla Aliyeva elected as FAO goodwill ambassador. Ses Information Agency, 26.05.2015, <http://sia.az/en/news/social/479590-leyla-aliyeva-elected-as-fao-goodwill-ambassador>

³²⁴ U.S. Jewish Groups Back Azerbaijan Despite Rights Concerns. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 13.02.2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan-lobby-us-rights/26847192.html>

³²⁵ How I accidentally became a lobbyist for Azerbaijan. By Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, Foreign Policy, 01.04.2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/01/how-i-accidentally-became-a-lobbyist-for-azerbaijan-human-rights-religion-israel/>

³²⁶ U.S. Jewish Groups Back Azerbaijan Despite Rights Concerns. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 13.02.2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan-lobby-us-rights/26847192.html>

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

There is not much information available about lobbying and possible corruption by representatives of Azerbaijan in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. One possible reason for this is that OSCE PA is a relatively weak body with very limited power and influence, and almost non-existent tradition of appointing special rapporteurs, monitoring implementation of OSCE human rights commitments by individual OSCE participating states, or issuing reports and separate resolutions on country situations.

Another reason of possible limited interest of Azerbaijani lobbyists to OSCE PA is that the one useful thing this Assembly does, namely sending missions for election observation, is normally coordinated by OSCE PA closely with OSCE ODIHR, which is the leading election observation body of Europe and North America with an excellent reputation and a strong methodology based on long-term observation. Usually the two OSCE institutions issue a joint statement after election observation, largely based on ODIHR's methodology and conclusions.

Coordination has not always happened in the past, though. One relevant example of exceptions is that of scandalous observation of presidential elections in Azerbaijan in October 2013. French MP and OSCE PA member **Michel Voisin** was appointed a special OSCE coordinator for the election observation by the Ukrainian OSCE Chairmanship and headed the OSCE PA short-term observation mission. There were four election observation missions by major international organisations at the same time. OSCE ODIHR was the only international body that sent a long-term mission and issued a highly critical assessment, based on the absence of conditions for free and fair elections, namely massive violations of fundamental freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, and on numerous violations on the election day. Three other bodies conducted short-term observation. Missions of PACE and the European Parliament made quite positive statements and praised the conduct of elections.

Normally, observation missions of OSCE PA issue a joint statement with OSCE ODIHR. However, this time it was different. At a press-conference after the election day, Voisin first presented a statement by ODIHR which was highly critical of the elections but a few minutes later retracted his support and criticised ODIHR.³²⁷ Soon he issued his statement and held his own press-conference where said that "the election was transparent, free and fair", and in this respect "he fully supports the statements of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament".³²⁸

In unusually confrontational style, Voisin called the ODIHR statement "a unilateral document which does not reflect the positive feedback from the observers of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, PACE and the European Parliament" and insisted that it was not a joint product with OSCE PA.³²⁹ His press statement included such statements as "...this campaign has undeniably been a democratic advance by the number of candidates, an open for all television campaign, a remarkable participation in the elections of more than 72 percent, the good preliminary work and transparency in the way the central voting commission has organized these elections."³³⁰ Soon, at a session of OSCE PA, Voisin called

³²⁷ See, for example, Disgraced. Azerbaijan and the end of election monitoring as we know it. European Stability Initiative, 05.11.2013, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=156&document_ID=145, page 14.

³²⁸ OSCE mission head: Transparent, free and fair presidential elections held in Azerbaijan. Trend, 10.10.2013, <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2200228.html>

³²⁹ Michel Voisin: "OSCE/ODIHR observation mission's statement related to elections is one-sided document", Azerbaijani Television and Radio Broadcasting Company, 16.10.2013, <http://www.aztv.az/readnews.php?lang=en&id=1649>

³³⁰ Observation of the presidential election in Azerbaijan (9 October 2013). Election observation report, Rapporteur: Robert

presidential elections in Azerbaijan a major step closer to the standards of the Council of Europe and the OSCE. He reiterated his earlier words that the elections were transparent, free and fair, and advancement on the path to democracy.

His statements were supported by other OSCE PA observers such as vice-president of the Assembly **Giorgi Tsereteli** (Georgia) and former president of OSCE PA, Austrian deputy **Wolfgang Grossruck** who noted that ODIHR “every time in its observations most of all relies on prejudiced opinions and publications in the Western and European press, trying to highlight only the negative elements from there. And so it was this time... reviews and reports by ODIHR in its observations are never based on concrete facts. In general, this ambiguity in the OSCE election observation must be stopped and new methods should be worked out. And this does apply to elections in Azerbaijan only – organization’s general methodology should be changed. And most importantly, a new relationship should be designed based on new principles between the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the ODIHR.”³³¹ Heads of observation missions of PACE Robert Walter and of the European Parliament Pino Arlacchi strongly supported Voisin’s allegations in their reports.^{332, 333}

A number of other influential OSCE PA members have been actively working in Azerbaijani interests, such as **Thierry Mariani** (France), **Angelo Farrugia** (Malta), **Sergio Divina** (Italy), and **Wolfgang Grossruck** (Austria). They have been actively involved in a number of election observations in Azerbaijan, often on behalf of European Academy of Elections Observation or assorted groups of observers without formal affiliation, always positively assessing conduct and results of elections and contributing to legitimisation of the Aliyev regime. While they did not represent the OSCE PA on these missions, their OSCE PA membership is often referred to by Azerbaijani media, creating an impression of approval of elections by this inter-governmental parliamentary body.

This was also the case most recently during the controversial constitutional referendum in September 2016 when OSCE did not send an observation mission. This time, the “usual suspects” from among OSCE PA members such as Mariani, Farrugia, Divina, and Voisin, coming as part of the European Academy of Elections Observation mission and making very praising comments such as “the referendum is a big democratic step towards future”³³⁴ and “the voting in Azerbaijan was conducted in line with European standards”,³³⁵ were joined by no one else but **Kyriakos Kyriakou-Hadjjiyanni** from Cyprus, Rapporteur of OSCE PA’s Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions. One would assume that by the very nature of his mandate he should be critical of the

Walter, United Kingdom, EDG. Website of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 21.11.2013, <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=20259&lang=en>. Accessed on 15 December 2016.

³³¹ Michel Voisin: “OSCE/ODIHR observation mission’s statement related to elections is one-sided document”, Azerbaijani Television and Radio Broadcasting Company, 16.10.2013, <http://www.aztv.az/readnews.php?lang=en&id=1649>

³³² Observation of the presidential election in Azerbaijan (9 October 2013). Election observation report, Rapporteur: Robert Walter, United Kingdom, EDG. Website of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 21.11.2013, <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=20259&lang=en>. Accessed on 15 December 2016.

³³³ Election Observation Delegation to the Presidential Elections in Azerbaijan (9 October 2013). Report by Pino Arlacchi, Chair of the Delegation. Website of the European Parliament, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/election_observation/missions/2009-2014/2013_10_09_azerbaijan.pdf. Accessed on 15 December 2016.

³³⁴ Mişel Vuazen: “Referendum gələcək üçün atılmış böyük demokratik addımdır”. Metbuat, 26.09.2016, <http://metbuat.az/news/527989/misel-vuazen-referendum-gelecek-ucun-atilmis-boyuk-demokrati.html>

³³⁵ Italian MP: Voting in Azerbaijan was better organized than in Italy. AzerTac, 27.09.2016, <http://azertag.az/en/xeber/996155>

elections in the country where massive crackdown on fundamental freedoms does not allow for conduct of free and fair elections. Nevertheless, he made positive statements about the referendum and did not mention the problem of political prisoners, lack of freedom of expression, or other major human rights concerns.^{336, 337} As always in such cases, Kyriakou-Hadjjiyianni was referred to in publications in Azerbaijani media as the OSCE PA rapporteur, although he did not represent OSCE PA.

As the reputation and impartiality of PACE observers has considerably diminished in the last years because of the scandalous observations in 2013-2016, the role of observers from OSCE PA may become relatively more important. In any case, it is worth looking at potential Azerbaijani lobbying in OSCE PA more closely.

European Parliament

The European Parliament has tougher rules on members' conduct and disclosure requirements than PACE, which were adopted after the "cash-for-influence" scandal in 2011³³⁸ and the scandalous observation trip by MEPs to Baku in 2013. They are called the "Code of Conduct for Members of the European Parliament with respect to financial interests and conflicts of interest"³³⁹ and include, inter alia, such requirements as "act solely in the public interest and refrain from obtaining or seeking to obtain any direct or indirect financial benefit or other reward", "not enter into any agreement to act or vote in the interest of any other legal or natural person that would compromise their voting freedom", "not solicit, accept or receive any direct or indirect financial benefit or other reward in exchange for influencing, or voting on, legislation, motions for a resolution, written declarations or questions tabled in Parliament or any of its committees, and shall consciously seek to avoid any situation which might imply bribery or corruption".

According to the Code of Conduct, any kind of present, invitation to a football game, a show or a trip must be mentioned on the lawmaker's website if its price exceeds €150.³⁴⁰ The Code includes provisions on disclosure of conflict of interests, declaration of income, financial interests, gifts, and travel, as well as safeguards in the form of an Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members and Procedure in the event of possible breaches of the Code of Conduct. Our sources say that after adoption of the Code of Conduct and creation of the Advisory Committee, MEPs became more careful in their dealings; however, Azerbaijani lobbying has not disappeared.

Some MEPs still manage to abuse these rules. For example, Iveta Grigule (Latvia) often travels to authoritarian countries in her personal capacity, her visits being paid by the inviting side, and then, during the trips, she holds meetings with officials. Press in these countries reports about her meetings

³³⁶ OSCE PA rapporteur praises organization of referendum in Azerbaijan. APA news agency, 26.09.2016, <http://en.apa.az/azerbaijan-politics/domestic-news/osce-pa-rapporteur-praises.organization-of-referendum-in-azerbaijan.html>

³³⁷ "Proseduralar dəqiq həyata keçirilir" - ATƏT PA məruzəçisi. Lent.az, 26.09.2016, <http://news.lent.az/news/254719>

³³⁸ The 2011 cash for influence scandal. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_cash_for_influence_scandal

³³⁹ Code of Conduct for Members of the European Parliament with respect to financial interests and conflicts of interest. Official website of the European Parliament. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/meps/201206_Code_of_conduct_EN.pdf. Accessed on 01.02.2017.

³⁴⁰ Parliament probes MEPs over Azeri mission. Aline Robert. EurActiv, 11.02.2014, <http://www.euractiv.com/eu-elections-2014/european-parliament-examine-meps-news-533386>

and speeches as of a member of the Parliament in the official capacity.³⁴¹ This is prohibited by the EP rules; however, we have not succeeded in getting information about any disciplinary action about that.

Two separate groups of MEPs flew to Azerbaijan in October 2015 to monitor the elections. However, some of them “forgot” to tell the European Parliament that they had been invited by the Azerbaijani government and did not declare the trip on their website,³⁴² as required by the Code of Conduct.

We were told that Azerbaijani lobbyists are visiting the European Parliament on a weekly basis. While Azerbaijan is not an EU member state and therefore is not represented in the European Parliament, Azerbaijan is a member of Euronest – a parliamentary body of the Eastern Partnership project.

TEAS has been holding presentations and receptions in European Parliament on the European Games and other events in Azerbaijan and has managed to re-establish Friends of Azerbaijan group in European Parliament. We do not know the exact list of its members, but we were told that MEPs **Inese Vaidere, Monica Macovei, and Vytautas Landsbergis** were part of it, organising events on energy and geostrategic importance of Azerbaijan.³⁴³

MEPs and important staff members are receiving regular invitations to visit Baku – the latest were for the European Games in 2015 and Formula 1 in 2016. Suleymanov sent to MEPs invitations to come to Eurovision, with all expenses covered. At least one MEP from Austria, **Franz Obermayr**, a member of the EP from the Europe of Nations and Freedom Group, went to observe the 2015 elections and assessed them positively.

It is worth also to remember that notorious French politician and a very active ally of Azerbaijan, **Rachida Dati**, is also a MEP. For information on her, please read the chapter on France.

Two Latvian MEPs known for friendly relations with undemocratic regimes, **Andrejs Mamikins** and **Iveta Grigule**, went to Baku in 2016. Mamikins said that the EP should apologize for its critical resolution on Azerbaijan in September 2015.³⁴⁴ Grigule is known for her active interest in close relations with Kazakhstan³⁴⁵ and Turkmenistan, and it seems that now she is expanding her interests to Azerbaijan. She called the 2015 resolution of the European Parliament on Azerbaijan an incident: “Azerbaijan and the EU should continue to work, despite such incidents,” said Grigule. “Latvia is a small country, too, and we are sometimes also criticized by the EU. We understand how it hurts, because we are also doing our best, as well as Azerbaijan is.”³⁴⁶

³⁴¹ See, for example: Visit of the Deputy of the European Parliament to Turkmenistan. Turkmeninform, 22 April 2015, <http://www.turkmeninform.com/ru/news/20150422/09212.html>; A meeting with the deputy of the European Parliament was held in Turkmenistan’s Mejlis. Turkmenistan.ru, 22 April, 2015, <http://www.turkmenistan.ru/ru/articles/40710.html>; Along the road of developing inter-parliamentary relations. Turkmenistan Zolotoi Vek, 21 April 2015, <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?id=8671>.

³⁴² Parliament probes MEPs over Azeri mission. Aline Robert. EurActiv, 11.02.2014, <http://www.euractiv.com/eu-elections-2014/european-parliament-examine-meps-news-533386>

³⁴³ Authors’ interviews in 2015-2016.

³⁴⁴ European Parliament must apologize to Azerbaijan, says MEP. News.Az, 16.03.2016, <http://news.az/articles/politics/105885>

³⁴⁵ Kazakhstan – A real step towards democracy. Colin Stevens, EU Reporter, 27 March 2017, <https://www.eureporter.co/frontpage/2017/03/27/kazakhstan-a-real-step-towards-democracy/>

³⁴⁶ EP’s anti-Azerbaijani resolution mistake, Latvian MEP says. AzerNews, 12.02.2016,

Speaking of Latvia, it is also worth to quote Latvian Ambassador to Azerbaijan **Yuris Maklakovs**. He said that Latvian Embassy will continue to contribute to strengthening of relations not only between Azerbaijan and Latvia, but also between Azerbaijan and the EU. "Azerbaijan and Latvia have great prospects for cooperation, especially in light of the economic partnership, and we will continue to work intensively to achieve even greater results," said the diplomat.³⁴⁷

We were told by our interlocutors in the European Parliament that the mood regarding the September 2015 resolution is changing. MEPs are concerned by the possibility of Azerbaijan leaving Euronest. During an internal meeting on Euronest in EP, political coordinators of three groups openly regretted the resolution. One of them was **Norica Nicolai** (Romania, ALDE), who also wrote an article on how wrong the resolution was.³⁴⁸ **Jacek Saryusz-Wolski** (Poland, EPP) said that EP should apply double standards for geopolitical reasons and therefore should not criticize Baku. **Knut Flackenstein** (Germany, SPD) said that the resolution was "the right thing that should not have been done".³⁴⁹

Preparation of an Association Agreement with Azerbaijan, with Norica Nicolai as a rapporteur, was suspended in 2015, under consideration by the head of the Foreign Affairs Committee Elmar Brok that it would not gain a majority in the plenary. In 2016, Nicolai called for putting it back on the agenda.

For Elmar Brok, it was very important to get Leila Yunus out of Azerbaijan; he made public promises and it was a sort of a personal crusade for him. Many observers warned in 2015 that once the Yunuses are out of jail, he would give a green light to all Azerbaijan-positive initiatives in EP. Some observers claimed that he "does not care about any other political prisoner".

We were told that Azerbaijan feels confident that it can "control EEAS" because of gas and oil interests, and regards the European Parliament as unimportant in a sense that EEAS is in control of policies and decisions in Brussels, and if it comes to voting in the Parliament on agreements between the EU and Azerbaijan, there are enough supporters of Azerbaijan there for energy and geostrategic reasons.

The EPP delegation for observation of the constitutional referendum in Azerbaijan in September 2016 deserves special attention. It was comprised of members of the European Parliament, parliamentarians of several European countries and representatives of several international organisations led by Vice President of the Centrist Democrat International, Vice Chair of the European People's Party **Mario David**. The group was received by President Aliyev.³⁵⁰

However, the list of the delegation cannot be found at the EPP's official website, as well as any mention of the mission to Azerbaijan, and no traces of the delegation's very positive statement that was quoted by the Azerbaijani media.³⁵¹ While the EPP site did not fail to mention in its press-releases in September

<http://www.azernews.az/nation/92826.html>

³⁴⁷ Ambassador Juris Maklakovs: Latvia, Azerbaijan enjoy excellent political relations. AzerTag, 16.03.2016, http://azertag.az/en/xeber/Ambassador_Juris_Maklakovs_Latvia_Azerbaijan_enjoy_excellent_political_relations-936078

³⁴⁸ The European Parliament and diplomacy: the case of Azerbaijan. Norica Nikolai. EP Today, 12.10.2015. <http://eptoday.com/the-european-parliament-and-diplomacy-the-case-of-azerbaijan/>

³⁴⁹ Authors' interviews in 2015-2016.

³⁵⁰ Ilham Aliyev received delegation of European People's Party. Website of the President of Azerbaijan, 26 September 2016, <http://en.president.az/articles/21171>. Assessed on 20 January 2017.

³⁵¹ The statement reads: "Following the invitation of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan, a Delegation of the EPP - the European People's Party, the leading political family of Europe - came to Azerbaijan to observe

flaws in Belarusian elections and a number of other events, the observation in Baku and reception of the delegation by Azerbaijani president remained in shadows.³⁵²

The composition of the delegation can only be deduced from the media quotes and pictures from the media and official presidential website.³⁵³ In these pictures, for example, besides those specifically mentioned in the media, a MEP **Ramona Manescu** could be seen during the meeting with Aliyev and the press-conference. A week earlier she was on a EU-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee visit to Baku, where she could be seen posing next to Aliyev.³⁵⁴ One wonders whether between these two events Ms. Manescu enjoyed Azerbaijani hospitality in Baku for several days.

Besides Mario David (MEP at that time) and Ramona Manescu (still a MEP with EPP), the following persons have been identified in the delegation: a Greek MEP **Emmanouil Kefalogiannis** and European Parliament's Vice President **Ryszard Czarnecki**.³⁵⁵ Also, **Carmen Quintanilla** (Spain, EPP) and **María Concepción de Santa Ana** (Spain, EPP, PACE) can be seen on the photo from Aliyev's reception.³⁵⁶

EPP membership, as mentioned earlier, is a dream of NAP, Aliyev's party.³⁵⁷ However, due to the poor human rights record, it has remained unachieved.³⁵⁸ According to several sources, NAP is trying to use

the Constitutional Referendum of September 26th 2016. This Delegation is composed of 11 participants, including current and former members of the European Parliament and National Parliaments, former members of Governments of the European Union, representing 7 nationalities, all of them with experiences in other election observations... To sum up, it is the conviction of our Delegation that the process of the Referendum on the Constitution changes in the Republic of Azerbaijan of the 26th September 2016 has been conducted in a free, open and sound process, in accordance with the best international standards, and that it will definitively express the will of the People of the Republic of Azerbaijan". No signatures are shown. European People's Party Observation Delegation: "The Referendum on the Constitution changes has been conducted in accordance with the best international standards". Azerbaijan Press Agency, 26 September 2017, <http://en.apa.az/azerbaijan-politics/foreign-news/european-people-s-party-observation-delegation-release-statement-on-constitutional-referendum-updated.html>

³⁵² EPP press-releases in September 2016, official website of the European Peoples Part, <http://www.epp.eu/epp-news/press-releases/?filter=201609>. Assessed on 1 December 2016.

³⁵³ Ilham Aliyev received delegation of European People's Party. Website of the President of Azerbaijan, 26 September 2016, <http://en.president.az/articles/21171>. Assessed on 20 January 2017. European People's Party: Referendum fully reflects the will of Azerbaijani people. AzerTag, 26 September 2016, http://azertag.az/en/xeber/European_People_039s_Party_Referendum_fully_reflects_the_will_of_Azerbaijani_people-996110. Photographs: <http://static.president.az/media/W1siZiIsIjIwMTYvMDkvMjYvWt3a2FkejhyXzAxLmpwZyJdLFsicCIiInRodW1iIiwMjA0OHg5O Tk5Il1d?sha=e9294bdd78b76651>, <http://static.president.az/media/W1siZiIsIjIwMTYvMDkvMjYvOW95YmdobjBIOF8wMi5qcGciXSxbInAilCJOaHVtYiIsIjIwNDh4 OTk5OSJdXQ?sha=d7b946e5fce438c8>.

³⁵⁴ Ilham Aliyev received delegation of EU-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee. Website of the President of Azerbaijan, 20 September 2016, <http://en.president.az/articles/21114>. Assessed on 20 January 2017. Photograph: <http://static.president.az/media/W1siZiIsIjIwMTYvMDkvMjYvOW95YmdobjBIOF8wMi5qcGciXSxbInAilCJOaHVtYiIsIjIwNDh4 OTk5OSJdXQ?sha=8de9ec79dde05434>

³⁵⁵ Azerbaijan referendum result is 'ringing endorsement of Aliyev plans'. EU Reporter, 27 September 2016, <https://www.eureporter.co/frontpage/2016/09/27/azerbaijan-referendum-result-is-ringing-endorsement-of-aliyev-plans/>. Photograph: <http://static.president.az/media/W1siZiIsIjIwMTYvMDkvMjYvOW95YmdobjBIOF8wMi5qcGciXSxbInAilCJOaHVtYiIsIjIwNDh4 OTk5OSJdXQ?sha=d7b946e5fce438c8>

³⁵⁶ Fake Observation: 117 international observers monitored 26 September 2016 Referendum in Azerbaijan. European Platform for Democratic Elections, September 2016, http://www.epde.org/tl_files/EPDE/RESSOURCES/2016%20Azerbaijan%20Referendum/Fake%20observers_list.pdf

³⁵⁷ Ruling party of Azerbaijan wants to join European People's Party. ABC.az, 8 July 2014, <http://abc.az/eng/news/82372.html>

³⁵⁸ Luca Volonte and His Ties to Azerbaijan. Institute for Reporters Freedom and Safety, 4 February 2017,

a “back door” of the Centrist Democrats International (CDI). This assumption might be confirmed by at least two recent visits of high-level delegations of CDI to Baku, accepted by President Aliyev. Delegations included President of the CDI, former President of Colombia **Andres Pastrana**, CDI vice-president Mario David, and General Coordinator for Asia, Pacific and Latin America **Cesar Rossello**.³⁵⁹

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

The most exposed parliamentary body is PACE, which used to be the most vocal and consistent international parliamentary body in human rights and rule of law. PACE, just like the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, consists of members of national parliaments, so engaging with them also opens ways to lobbying in the national parliaments. Rules in different national parliaments vary, but in general MPs do not report there on what they are doing as members of PACE of OSCE PA.

At the same time, political groups in national parliaments can issue passes for lobbyists, giving them access to the building. Ex-members of PACE have access badges to PACE. The same situation is in the German Bundestag: groups can issue access passes, and ex-MPs have access to Bundestag. In practice, this means that lobbyists like Eduard Lintner may come in any time and freely approach any MP. Regarding trips, gifts and honoraria rules in different parliaments vary.

In 2012, PACE adopted Resolution 1903 (2012)³⁶⁰ where it wished to “introduce greater transparency in its activities and decision-making process” and expressed concern at the “pressure that some interest representatives, acting on behalf of private entities or States, have exercised on members, even within the Palais de l’Europe”. This Resolution adopted a Code of Conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, introducing, inter alia, the following requirements:

“Members shall avoid conflicts between any actual or potential economic, commercial, financial or other interests on a professional, personal or family level on the one hand, and the public interest in the work of the Assembly on the other, by resolving any conflict in favour of public interest; if the member is unable to avoid such a conflict of interests, it shall be disclosed.”

“No member shall act as a paid advocate in any work of the Assembly.”

“Members shall not request or accept any fee, compensation or reward intended to affect their conduct as members, particularly in their decision to support or oppose any motion, report, amendment, written declaration, recommendation, resolution or opinion. Members shall avoid any situation that could appear to be a conflict of interest or accept an inappropriate payment or gift.”³⁶¹

<https://www.irfs.org/news-feed/luca-volonte-and-his-ties-to-azerbaijan/>

³⁵⁹ Ilham Aliyev received delegation led by President of the Centrist Democrat International. Website of the President of Azerbaijan. 7 December 2016, <http://en.president.az/articles/21961>; Ilham Aliyev received Vice-President of Centrist Democrat International. Website of the President of Azerbaijan, 8 February 2017, <http://en.president.az/articles/22717>

³⁶⁰ Code of conduct of members of the Parliamentary Assembly: good practice or a core duty? Resolution 1903 (2012) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 04.10.2012, <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=19161&lang=en>

³⁶¹ Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe: Code of Conduct for members. Council of Europe, January 2015. <http://website-pace.net/documents/10643/375483/CodeOfConduct-EN.pdf/13dd3317-3819-457a-a536-a4898f57db67>

However, enforcement mechanisms and safeguards are virtually absent, and MPs currently do not declare anything when they receive fees, travel at the expense of the host, etc. It is assumed that they are accountable to their national parliaments where they were elected to by their constituencies but, as we know, MPs do not report to their parliaments on their PACE activities.³⁶² This is a vicious circle of non-transparency and lack of accountability.

In the Norwegian parliament, trips paid by any other source than the parliament are strictly prohibited. In the Estonian parliament, everything should be strictly declared. In the German Bundestag, trips should be in principle declared, but it is not strictly enforced. Gifts over 150 Euro should be given to Bundestag, honoraria are allowed. Paid trips and honoraria should be declared as income, but without breaking down by separate lines. However, if a paid trip is done in capacity of a PACE or OSCE PA member, it does not have to be declared as a trip (but should still be included as an income).³⁶³

As we can see, relaxed rules in PACE give many opportunities to turn PACE membership into a business. We were told that generosity of Heydarov in dispensing funds for lobbying is one of the keys to Azerbaijani success in PACE. Apparently, it works the following way: an offer is provided by Elkhan Suleymanov who is called by experts a “shadow-dealing proxy” of Kamaledin Heydarov. Apparently, Samad Seyidov, the head of the Azerbaijani delegation, is not involved in bribery or other dubious engagement methods and is in conflict with Suleymanov.

Some MPs in PACE are satisfied by luxury trips, gifts, and receptions. Some have business interests and receive business opportunities. Some have the Heydar Aliyev Foundation activities in their constituency. Some others get assistance in their political career – promotions inside PACE and funds for campaigning. All of them are bribed either by a gift or cash.

We were told by a trusted source that a price tag varies: it could be 50 thousand Euro for an active role in debates and voting, or it could be 200 thousand Euro for a political campaign to get elected to an influential position in PACE.

A leading Azerbaijani human rights defender Leyla Yunus testified in a recent interview that she received first-hand information that around as early as in 2010-2011, students from Azerbaijan studying in universities in Europe, were forced by Elkhan Suleymanov to carry cash on them to Strasbourg, and this money would then be used by Azerbaijani representatives for dubious lobbying purposes in Strasbourg to develop ties with PACE deputies.³⁶⁴

Gifts may include carpets (the one that was given to the Mayor of Cognac was worth 8000 Euro³⁶⁵), or it could be a spontaneous gift, like a present of a mink fur coat given to the wife of another high-level guest, a parliamentarian from France, who “felt chilly” during her visit to Baku.³⁶⁶

³⁶² Authors’ interviews in PACE and the Council of Europe 2016.

³⁶³ Authors’ interviews in 2016 with deputies and staff of Bundestag, parliament of Norway, and parliament of Estonia.

³⁶⁴ “Caviar diplomacy” will not stop the struggle for freedom of political prisoners! Interview by Leyla Yunus. TV Programme Azerbaijan Saati (in Russian), 07.02.2017, <https://www.azerbaycansaatı.tv/3428.html>

³⁶⁵ The European Swamp (Caviar Diplomacy Part 2) – Prosecutors, corruption and the Council of Europe. European Stability Initiative, 17.12.2016, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=de&id=156&document_ID=181

³⁶⁶ Authors’ interviews in 2015-2016.

Stays in luxury hotels (Kempinski and other high-class hotels belong to Heydarov) include spa procedures and other services. We may not exclude the possibility that everything that happens in the hotels is recorded and then the records might be made use of as a compromising material.

Travels are of different types, including mass events like independence celebration, to which a large number of MPs, MEPs and staff members could be invited, and then the selection is made of who could be approached for lobbying.

Arif Mammadov, a former Azerbaijani ambassador to the CoE and the EU but now a dissident, says his former employers are good at identifying PACE members who might be willing to support them: typically those closer to retirement age who are keen to do some late-career nest-feathering. They are lured with gifts and promises of five-star travel for them and their spouses.³⁶⁷

Lavish reception together with nice accommodation make impression on MPs that come from poorer countries or constituencies. These are the people who then would provide voting in favour of Azerbaijan. Sometimes, such persons approach Suleymanov, expressing their interest in “visiting beautiful country”. Once, a Bulgarian MP was seen doing that.³⁶⁸ In case of a debate and voting, these people are quickly mobilised. We were told that for Azerbaijan-related sessions there is always an unusually high turnout of those MPs who would not usually attend sessions.

In addition, there are special trips for more influential friends of Azerbaijan, those who can bring others, organise control of voting in parliaments, or lobby their governments. When important friends of Azerbaijan are coming with a larger group, like for election observation, they would often come earlier and leave later, would stay in better hotels and enjoy privileges, like government-provided limos.

Several sources told us that Pedro Agramunt during election observation by PACE in 2013 had a ready version of conclusions in professional English immediately after the elections. He presented it in five minutes after he was given a draft report prepared by the staff. Agramunt’s manipulation with texts related to Azerbaijan is described in detail in the ESI report “A Portrait of Deception. Monitoring Azerbaijan or why Pedro Agramunt should resign”.³⁶⁹

Numerous sources related to PACE told us that they were surprised by the impressive career of Agramunt, when his new steps strangely coincided with strengthening of his friendship with Azerbaijan. Agramunt subsequently received rapporteurship on Azerbaijan, became the head of the EPP group in PACE, and finally became the President of PACE in 2016.

Elkhan Suleymanov expressed profound satisfaction with that fact in his blog. His post on this occasion has been later removed but English translation is available on another website.³⁷⁰ Suleymanov’s diary

³⁶⁷ Heaping on the Caviar Diplomacy. Matthew Valencia, The Economist, October-November 2016, <https://www.1843magazine.com/features/heaping-on-the-caviar-diplomacy>

³⁶⁸ Authors’ interviews in 2015-2016.

³⁶⁹ A Portrait of Deception. Monitoring Azerbaijan or why Pedro Agramunt should resign. European Stability Initiative, 22.01.2013, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=156&document_ID=134

³⁷⁰ “Milli Majlis elections observation mission by PACE goes ahead despite huge foreign pressure trying to isolate Azerbaijan!” MP Suleymanov from Strasbourg. 1905.az, 01.10.2015, <http://1905.az/en/milli-majlis-elections-observation-mission-by-pace-goes-ahead-despite-huge-foreign-pressure-trying-to-isolate-azerbaijan-mp-suleymanov-from-strasbourg/>

is quite revealing: he celebrates the victory of Agramunt, calling it “tremendous”, as well the election of Michele Nicoletti from Italy as chair of the Socialist group. Suleymanov does not hide his contempt of their predecessors, well-known critics of Azerbaijani government’s human rights record in PACE, Anne Brasseur (France) and Andreas Gross (Switzerland).³⁷¹

In the year that preceded his nomination for PACE presidency, Agramunt was able to arrange hosting of an EPP meeting in Spain as well as to bring a large number of PACE members for “PACE dialogues” to his constituency, Valencia, famous for its resorts. Sources of funding for such expensive events are unknown.

Pedro Agramunt is an EPP Senator from Valencia and a business lawyer, involved with Valencian trade chamber. He has declared only one small textile business. He was under investigation in his own country for illegal funding of the PPE (EPP of Spain) and escaped a trial merely on procedural grounds.^{372, 373} Spanish prosecutors are currently investigating another major case of alleged corruption against PPE of Valencia.³⁷⁴ In general, the situation with numerous allegations of corruption in PPE in Spain is quite scandalous.³⁷⁵

Agramunt has been in PACE for a very long time, since 2000, when most likely he met Ilham Aliyev and made a useful connection. He is a true veteran among acting European politicians working with Azerbaijani government: the first time he went to observe elections in Azerbaijan was as early as in 2003, the year when Ilham Aliyev inherited the post of the President. We were told by several interlocutors that Azerbaijan was extremely supportive of his “campaign” for election to the position of PACE President and allocated the amount with a figure “with five zeros”, and one quite knowledgeable source said it was 200 thousand Euro.³⁷⁶

Other MPs reportedly have received chunks of money that could be used for travels to promote themselves for different positions that would allow them to control or influence resolutions in PACE.

³⁷¹ Ibid. Here are some important quotes from Suleymanov’s diary: “2) Election in EPP group of new PACE chairman 2016-2017. On June 30th this year it appeared that EPP-group is most important political group in PACE, giving them the right to present next PACE chairman. This was agreed between political group leaders. Mr. Agramunt, Chair of EPP group, was obvious candidate for this mandate. But some weeks ago he was unexpectedly challenged by Mr. Mignon (France), who was PACE chair before. Mr. Mignon made a big campaign, showing victorious attitude. But after voting in the EPP-group on Monday, results were crystal clear showing tremendous victory by 75 against 30 in favor of Mr. Agramunt. 3) Election of new chairman of Socialist group. After many years of monopolizing the chair of Socialist Group by Mr. Gross (Switzerland), finally there comes an end to his political career and a new leader needed to be appointed. It will make a huge difference to Azerbaijan not to have Mr. Gross anymore in the cockpit of PACE, as – same as Mme. Brasseur – he was continuously obsessed by Azerbaijan, using lie and slander to poison the debate and to attack the reputation of our country. Finally a new wind will blow in the meeting room of socialist group, now new chairman Mr. Nicoletti from Italy was appointed.”

³⁷² Quién es quién en el sumario del 'caso Naseiro' / y 2. El País, 12.05.1990, http://elpais.com/diario/1990/05/12/espana/642463205_850215.html

³⁷³ Las Cintas del Caso Nasiero. Investigation materials on Los Genoveses (an anti-corruption blog), 1990, <http://www.losgenoveses.net/Los%20Asuntillos/casonaseiro/cintasnaseiro.pdf>

³⁷⁴ See an overview of investigation of alleged cases of corruption in Valencia: Casos de corrupción en la Comunidad Valenciana. Principales condenados e imputados en fase de investigación o enjuiciamiento. El País, 11.02.2016, http://elpais.com/elpais/2016/02/10/media/1455122691_834120.html

³⁷⁵ See a collection of articles, photo- and video materials on numerous cases of alleged corruption in the PPE: Corrupción en el PP. Website of El Periodico, <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/temas/corrupcion-partido-popular-270>. Accessed on 01 March 2017.

³⁷⁶ Authors’ interviews 2016. Information needs verification.

When the public version of this report was finalised in April 2017, new important testimonies became available in a publication by The Guardian. Arif Mammadov, a former Azerbaijani diplomat turned dissident, alleged that a member of the country's delegation to PACE had 30 million Euro to spend on lobbying the Council of Europe institutions, including the Assembly. "Everyone" in the Azerbaijani delegation had heard of this number, although "it was never written down", he told the Guardian. "It was said this money was to bribe members of the delegations and PACE generally." Tobias Billström, a Swedish delegate to the Assembly and former justice minister, said "very credible members" had told him they had been offered bribes to vote in a certain way.³⁷⁷

In Strasbourg, we were told that almost all important committees and the Bureau of PACE are now taken over by friends of Azerbaijan from different political groups.³⁷⁸ According to the European Stability Initiative report, a plan to engage members of different political groups for key debates and voting on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan was originally devised by the head of the EPP group in PACE Luca Volonte in 2012.³⁷⁹

While the EPP (the most influential political group in PACE) is a pro-Azerbaijani stronghold, members of other groups are being approached too to provide stronger control over voting and rapporteurship. For example, a Socialist **Debono Grech** from Malta was used to defeat a candidacy for the rapporteur on Azerbaijan of another SPD member from Norway who had a critical view of the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. He would never show up at the SPD group meetings and appeared only when a new post of a rapporteur on Azerbaijan emerged. Then the whole Azerbaijani PACE control system was used to provide for his election, both in Strasbourg and Paris, through phone calls, receptions and letters. It was this case when a Finnish ex-attaché was mobilised for phoning Finnish MPs.³⁸⁰

The Azerbaijani government began actively lobbying on the matter of political prisoners more than 10 years ago, convincing PACE not to appoint a rapporteur in 2005, and then deflecting attention when a new special rapporteur, German MP Christoph Strässer, was eventually appointed in 2009, successfully drawing focus for several years on the need for a definition of political prisoners rather than examination of the situation within Azerbaijan itself.³⁸¹

A definition of political prisoner was adopted in a PACE resolution in October 2012, and yet the Azerbaijani government continued to refuse to cooperate with Strässer, preventing him from travelling to the country for a fact-finding visit in accordance with his mandate. Strässer proceeded with his report anyway, conducting research from abroad, producing a list of possible cases of political prisoners and an accompanying draft resolution. The issue came to a head in January 2013 when PACE voted on the draft resolution on "The follow up to the issue of political prisoners in Azerbaijan".³⁸² The

³⁷⁷ Fresh claims of Azerbaijan vote-rigging at European human rights body. Jennifer Rankin, The Guardian, 20 April 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2017/apr/20/council-of-europe-urged-to-investigate-azerbaijan-bribery-allegations>

³⁷⁸ Authors' interviews with PACE members, staff of the PACE Secretariat and staff of delegations to PACE in 2016.

³⁷⁹ The European Swamp (Caviar Diplomacy Part 2) – Prosecutors, corruption and the Council of Europe. European Stability Initiative, 17.12.2016, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=de&id=156&document_ID=181

³⁸⁰ Authors' interviews with PACE members and staff of the PACE Secretariat and staff of delegations to PACE in 2016.

³⁸¹ Rebecca Vincent, "The Council of Europe and Azerbaijan: A cautionary tale", in Institutionally blind? International organisations and human rights abuses in the former Soviet Union, edited by Adam Hug, Foreign Policy Centre, September 2016, <http://fpc.org.uk/publications/institutionallyblind>

³⁸² The follow-up to the issue of political prisoners in Azerbaijan. Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, December 2012, <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewPDF.asp?FileID=19217&lang=en>

resolution, which would have been crucial in the Council of Europe's efforts to hold Azerbaijan accountable for its obligations as a member state, was defeated in a vote of 125 to 79. The move was a major victory for Azerbaijan's lobbyists, and a blow to the human rights community.³⁸³

Consistently, in the last several years when Azerbaijan's lobbying activity has affected PACE the most, rapporteurs on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan (with a mandate from the Monitoring Committee) have been always chosen from among friends of Azerbaijan: first it was **Pedro Agramunt**, then, when he became the chair of the EPP, he was succeeded as a rapporteur by another Spaniard **Agustin Conde**. Their respective co-rapporteurs were Maltese **Debono Grech** and Polish **Tadeusz Iwinski** from Social Democrats, all of them active supporters and apologists of Azerbaijan. Conde and Iwinski lost elections in 2015 and are not in PACE anymore. This finally allowed electing in early 2016 a decent rapporteur from SPD, an Austrian MP **Stefan Schennach**, who, unfortunately, now has a company of well-known Azerbaijani apologist **Florin Preda** (Romania, EPP).

The two new monitoring co-rapporteurs, Schennach and Preda, travelled to Baku for a fact-finding visit from 15 to 17 June 2016. Meetings were held, among others, with President Aliyev, the speaker of Parliament, Prosecutor General, Justice Minister and head of the Central Election Commission, as well as the members of Azerbaijan's delegation to PACE. They also met with civil society representatives and visited some political prisoners.³⁸⁴

The monitoring rapporteurs were back to Baku in September 2016 to observe the referendum. Preda's comment on the observation speaks for itself: "The referendum was well-organised. I think the population ...was well aware of the referendum. My observations show this... We did not come here to look for flaws; there are shortcomings in all countries."³⁸⁵

The latest visit of the two co-rapporteurs in January 2017 was concluded with a controversial statement, criticised by civil society organisations who insist on continued focus on political prisoners remaining in custody or convicted in new acts of repression: "It is essential to give a renewed impetus to the reform processes and pursue dialogue with the authorities, in particular in the areas of the judiciary, media freedom and human rights, notably concerning the legislation on NGOs. We are ready to continue our co-operation with the Azerbaijani government and people to define and implement these reforms. While we considered specific ongoing cases of persons in detention during our visit, our discussions mainly focused on the reform of the justice system as a whole. It is important to address the root causes of the problem and to enhance confidence in, and the independence of, the justice system. We welcome the readiness expressed by the Azerbaijani authorities to closely co-operate with the Council of Europe on justice reform."³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Rebecca Vincent, "The Council of Europe and Azerbaijan: A cautionary tale", in *Institutionally blind? International organisations and human rights abuses in the former Soviet Union*, edited by Adam Hug, Foreign Policy Centre, September 2016, <http://fpc.org.uk/publications/institutionallyblind>

³⁸⁴ Azerbaijan monitors return to Baku. Website of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 13.06.2016. <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=6220&lang=2&cat=3>

³⁸⁵ "Hope this mistake will be withdrawn from PACE mission's final report on Azerbaijani referendum". APA Azerbaijani Press agency, 27.09.2016, <http://en.apa.az/azerbaijan-politics/foreign-news/hope-this-mistake-will-be-withdrawn-from-pace-mission-s-final-report-on-azerbaijani-referendum.html>

³⁸⁶ Statement by PACE monitors, ending visit to Azerbaijan. Website of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 19.01.2017, <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=6483&lang=2&cat=3>

The best-known and longest-serving Azerbaijani political prisoner, Ilgar Mammadov, asked PACE to remove Florian Preda from the position of rapporteur on human rights in Azerbaijan on ethical grounds in his appeal from prison published in early September 2016, a few days before the constitutional referendum.³⁸⁷

Parallel to the functioning of the regular mandate of co-rapporteurs on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan who are appointed by and report to the Monitoring Committee, there is continued struggle around another, extraordinary mandate related to political prisoners in Azerbaijan, based in the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

After a draft resolution based on Christof Strässer's report on political prisoners was voted down in January 2013, there were repeated calls for continuation of this mandate and appointment of a new rapporteur. These calls were resisted by friends of Azerbaijan in PACE who were pushing for abolishing this mandate, referring this matter to the Monitoring Committee and including the issue of political prisoners in the regular mandate of monitoring rapporteurs, whose positions they firmly controlled.³⁸⁸ After much debate, a year and a half later, at the beginning of Azerbaijan's chairmanship in the Council of Europe, a compromise was reached. On 25 June 2014, the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights created a mandate on the topic "Azerbaijan's Chairmanship of the Council of Europe: What follow-up on Respect for Human Rights?" which partially substituted the previous mandate on political prisoners in that country and would address this issue.³⁸⁹ The move could be viewed as a positive step in light of a sharp increase in politically motivated arrests in Azerbaijan following the defeat of Strässer's report. This mandate is valid until June 2017 and will have to be negotiated again at that time.

However, hopes were premature: the position was given to Pedro Agramunt, a leading apologist for the Aliyev regime in PACE who had successfully shielded Azerbaijan from criticism in his capacity of the

³⁸⁷ Address by Ilgar Mammadov, Imprisoned Director of the Baku School of Political Studies. Website of the Association of Schools of political studies of the Council of Europe, 09.09.2016, <http://www.schoolsofpoliticalstudies.eu/Address-Ilgar-Mammadov.aspx>. In the letter, Ilgar Mammadov says: "There is no need to describe in this appeal the whole range of difference I had with the new co-rapporteurs of the PACE Monitoring Committee at our meeting on 17 June 2016. Whereas Mr. Shennah was ready to discuss constructively and honestly the above scepticism, which I had managed to outline at the meeting, Mr. Caesar Florin Preda's attitude was much in the spirit of Azerbaijani GONGOs, always trying to provide the authorities with the fresh excuse for my continued imprisonment. ...official state newspapers [reported] on their meeting with the chairman of Azerbaijani parliament [and] quoted Mr. Florin Preda glorifying the Milli Majlis as "embodiment of democratic values". ...the co-rapporteur's assessment was in stark contrast with a number of OSCE/ODIHR election observation reports; with the annual US State Department reports, which say that the people of Azerbaijan are deprived of the right to change their government at free and fair elections; institutions operating in the fields of democracy and human rights call the Milli Majlis a rubber stamp office at service of the President and appointed by the President. To please the authorities even more, however, Mr. Florin Preda then went as far as speaking to them with delight about his and his family's attendance of the European Games in 2015 in Baku. Let me remind you that on political level, the democratic Europe boycotted the Games because the crackdown on democratic institutions in Azerbaijan was at another peak at the time. Only Mr. Erdogan and Mr. Putin were present at the opening ceremony and the former made even a sarcastic remark about absence of European leaders at the European Games. The bombastic propaganda event, called to demoralize political prisoners and overshadow the suffering of their families, not only was happily attended by Mr. Florin Preda, now the co-rapporteur: today he emphasizes his family's emotional connection to the scandalous celebration. Given the impropriety of Mr. Florin Preda's remarks, as quoted by the state-owned media in Azerbaijan, I hereby call on you, the PACE ethics body, to remove him, in cooperation with the Monitoring Committee, from the position of co-rapporteur on Azerbaijan."

³⁸⁸ See, for example, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Report on the 2014 Ordinary Session. Monday 23 June at 11:30 a.m. <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/Records/2014/E/1406231130E.htm>

³⁸⁹ Azerbaijan's Chairmanship of the Council of Europe: What follow-up on respect for human rights? Motion for a resolution, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 08.03.2016, <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=20722&lang=en>

rappporteur of the Monitoring Committee. For some time, he combined two mandates (until spring 2015 when he became the chair of the EPP and had to give the monitoring mandate to Agustin Conde). Critically-minded MPs reacted bitterly: “There can be no hope of a balanced report from Agramunt... It's sad that so many CoE delegates have been influenced by lobbying.”³⁹⁰ NGOs were also very critical of the decision to combine the two mandates in the hands of one person, pointing that “not designating a separate rapporteur raises questions about impartiality of the process... [and] adds to a worrying trend within PACE to avoid any critical discussion on human rights in Azerbaijan.”³⁹¹ Indeed, Agramunt did not produce any report during his term, providing only short information notes on his trips to Azerbaijan.

Soon after Agramunt became PACE President in January 2016, he had to give up his second mandate, the one of the rapporteur on the follow-up to the Azerbaijan’s Chairmanship. Naturally, a well-organised group of Azerbaijan’s friends would not allow this important mandate to get into the hands of critics of the Aliyev regime. Using their control of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, in March 2016, they appointed a liberal from Belgium **Alain Destexhe**, another leading apologist of the regime in Baku and an organiser of the notorious European Academy for Elections Observation, an international NGO whose activity has been assessed as “fake election observation” by reputable experts, including the European Platform for Democratic Elections.

Destexhe’s first trip to Baku in his new capacity happened in June 2016, parallel to the trip of the monitoring co-rapporteurs. He was received during this visit by Ilham Aliyev. Official report on the President Aliyev’s website covered the meeting in very positive terms: “Senator Alain Destexhe congratulated the head of state on the start of Formula 1 Grand Prix of Europe in Azerbaijan. Emphasizing the increasing interest in Formula 1 races around the world, Alain Destexhe said his country would also host the European Grand Prix. Saying Baku was a new country on the map of Formula 1, Aliyev expressed his confidence that the race would be interesting for visitors and create good opportunities for them to better familiarize themselves with the country and get more information about development processes in Azerbaijan. The sides exchanged views on prospects for cooperation between Azerbaijan and the Council of Europe.”³⁹² The cordial welcome to the PACE rapporteur on follow-up the Azerbaijan’s chairmanship in the Council of Europe looked very different from the hostile treatment by Baku of the rapporteur on political prisoners Christof Strässer in 2012 who was not even allowed to come to Azerbaijan during his term of the rapporteur.

We were warned by our sources in Azerbaijan in advance of the Formula 1 competition that this international event would be another excuse, like Eurovision and the European Games earlier, to “show Azerbaijani hospitality towards loyal friends from Europe.”³⁹³ Critics say Grands Prix is at best a vanity project, and at worst “sportswashing”, used for propaganda purposes at home and to launder the regime’s reputation abroad.³⁹⁴

³⁹⁰ British MP Who Challenged Aliyev Says 'The Reputation Of The Council Of Europe Is At Stake'. Rebecca Vincent, Azadliq, 07.07. 2014, <https://www.azadliq.org/a/25447437.html>

³⁹¹ PACE members should live up to their duty to protect and promote human rights. Statement by Amnesty International, 03.07.2014. http://www.amnesty.eu/content/assets/040714_Public_statement_PACE_stance_on_Azerbaijan_final.pdf

³⁹² President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has received Senator of the Kingdom of Belgium, chairperson of PACE Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur on human rights in Azerbaijan Alain Destexhe. Official website of the President of Azerbaijan, 17.06.2016, <http://en.president.az/articles/20303>

³⁹³ Authors’ interviews with Azerbaijani experts in 2015-2016.

³⁹⁴ Heaping on the Caviar Diplomacy. Matthew Valencia, The Economist, October-November 2016,

It is worth taking a closer look at **Alain Destexhe**. He is a well-known Belgian politician, currently a member of the Senate, and an international expert with an impressive career record, including writing authoritative books on international humanitarian law and holding positions of Secretary-General of Medicines sans Frontiers and President of the International Crisis Group (he is currently a member of the Advisory Board of the Group). He is also President of the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Despite these achievements and international recognition, it is Destexhe who led election observation missions to Azerbaijan in 2008, 2010 and 2013 (the latter two as a representative of EAEO), endorsing them as free, fair and democratic, and has emerged as one of the key figures protecting the Aliyev regime from criticism.

Destexhe has a very particular role in organising and leading an international election observation business, specifically developed to whitewash rigged elections in authoritarian regimes and counter conclusions of observers from the OSCE, a new, quickly developing and very troubling phenomenon. For more information on this, see the special section on “fake observers” in this report.

Destexhe paid numerous visits to Azerbaijan, which were connected, besides elections, to Nagorno-Karabakh. In 2012, he played a central role in the Azerbaijan energy event, hosted by the European Parliament and initiated by OCAZ, Suleymanov's outlet. In the same year, together with Suleymanov, he presented a book on Belgian-Azerbaijani relations in Belgian MFA. In 2013, he brought the 10th annual conference of the Parliamentary Network of the World Bank and the IMF to Baku. It was the first “east of Europe” destination of the conference, bringing the most important officials to Baku.

In January 2016 his career in PACE went upwards: was elected Chairperson of the PACE Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights and by default a member of the Bureau of PACE and the Standing Committee of PACE.³⁹⁵ These important positions, in addition to his rapporteurship on the follow-up to Azerbaijan's Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, give him ample opportunities to influence the PACE position on Azerbaijan.

Alain Destexhe's position on political prisoners in Azerbaijan and on his mandate as the rapporteur on Azerbaijan is quite clear from his recent statements. During his latest visit to Baku, Alain Destexhe met on 9 February 2017 with leading Azerbaijani independent journalist and former political prisoner Khadija Ismayilova, among other interlocutors. According to Ms. Ismayilova's account of the meeting, from the very beginning Alain Destexhe “said he did not want to get into the political prisoners issue because there are arguments on the number of those. He also said he does not want any examples as he has heard too many already”. Since Mr. Destexhe received the mandate of the rapporteur on Azerbaijan, “he visited the country to attend Formula 1 and to give positive assessment to the rigged referendum in 2016. He keeps saying that there are no proofs of elections being rigged. My understanding is that Azerbaijan needs special rapporteur on political prisoners, who will work with various lists and define PACE's position on the issue. Alain Destexhe is not going to address this issue,” concludes Ms. Ismayilova.³⁹⁶

<https://www.1843magazine.com/features/heaping-on-the-caviar-diplomacy>

³⁹⁵ Page of Alain Destexhe on PACE website, <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/AssemblyList/MP-Details-EN.asp?MemberID=7305>

³⁹⁶ Khadija Ismayilova Facebook post, 10.02.2017, <https://www.facebook.com/khadija.ismayil/posts/10206506510780092>

Destexhe's activity causes critique of local human rights defenders. Members of the Working Group for drawing up a single list of political prisoners appealed in January 2017 to PACE to appoint a new rapporteur on political prisoners in Azerbaijan. They pointed out that Alain Destexhe, appointed on 7 March, 2016 to assess the human rights situation in Azerbaijan, did not work on his mandate, shied away from cooperation with civil society representatives and human rights defenders, and did not come into the country in the framework of the mandate.³⁹⁷

Destexhe will have to produce a report and present it to the Committee by June 2017 when the term of this mandate ends. It will be quite a challenge for everyone concerned.

To the credit of PACE, a healthy cross-party coalition of MPs started to emerge in 2015 willing to take action against political corruption. They advocate for more accountability and transparency over what fees PACE members are paid in different countries, what trips they make under which conditions, and what gifts they receive. It was in the beginning of 2017 when this coalition has finally come to the forefront of struggle for the integrity of the Assembly.

A major scandal erupted in PACE after the release on 21 November 2016 of a documentary film by the Italian public broadcaster RAI 3, entitled "Caviar Democracy".³⁹⁸ The film presented documentary evidence from the investigation by prosecutors in Milan conducted since June 2014 on charges of corruption and money laundering against the former leader of the EPP in PACE, Luca Volonte. Equally importantly, Volonte admitted in an interview to the authors of the film in 2016 to have received almost 2.4 mln Euro from the key Azerbaijani lobbyist Elkhan Suleymanov via offshore companies in 2012-2014, prior to and after the voting on Strässer's report.

The release of this film as well as reports and appeals by NGOs, including the European Stability Initiative, Amnesty International and Transparency International,³⁹⁹ created a new dynamics in PACE. In addition, on 16 January 2017, 60 members of Azerbaijani civil society and 20 international NGOs addressed a letter to PACE in relation to the criminal proceedings launched against Luca Volonte, calling on PACE to take immediate actions, including an urgent debate and investigation into allegations of corruption in PACE, suspend the mandate of the Azerbaijani representatives implicated in the scandal, suspend the voting rights of the Azerbaijani delegation, appoint a special ethics commission, and appoint a reputable rapporteur on political prisoners in Azerbaijan.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁷ Why did Alain Destexhe arrive in Baku? Contact, 09.02.2017, <http://contact.az/docs/2017/Politics/020900182732en.htm#.WKnBa6Chqkp>

³⁹⁸ Caviar Democracy. Website of investigative TV programme "Report" of RAI 3 TV channel, 21.11.2016, <http://www.report.rai.it/dl/Report/puntata/ContentItem-3b829e27-145d-4141-b216-1bb41a4cc1bd.html#name>

³⁹⁹ The European Swamp (Caviar Diplomacy Part 2) – Prosecutors, corruption and the Council of Europe. European Stability Initiative, 17.12.2016. http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=156&document_ID=181; Allegations of suspicious money transfer and other violations of the Parliamentary Assembly's Code of Conduct in connection with its work on Azerbaijan: Letter by Amnesty International to PACE leadership, 24.01.2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/5556/2017/en/>; Responses to serious allegations of corruption in the Council of Europe: Letter by Transparency International to the leadership of the Council of Europe and PACE, 19.01.2017, <http://transparency.eu/coe-vote-buying/>.

⁴⁰⁰ Letter to the Members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Website of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, 16.01.2017, http://paulflynnmp.typepad.com/my_weblog/2017/02/allegations-in-council-of-europe-report-1.html

All this prompted 64 PACE members from five political groups and 25 countries to speak up strongly against corruption in the Assembly at the session in January 2017 and adopt a written declaration on the Parliamentary Assembly integrity, introduced by MPs Pieter Omtzigt (EPP, the Netherlands) and Frank Schwabe (Socialist Group, Germany), calling to “establish, without delay, an external, fully independent and impartial inquiry into all allegations of improper conduct or corruption that may have sought to influence the work of the Assembly in recent years, focusing in particular on allegations surrounding the vote on political prisoners in Azerbaijan in January 2013”.^{401, 402}

Media reports on this subject have dramatically increased in numbers lately and have pointed at possible involvement in improper conduct or corruption of not only Volonte but other PACE members such as Pedro Agramunt, Jordi Xuclà, Luigi Vitali, Tadeusz Iwinski, and Agustin Conde.⁴⁰³ In one interview, Volonte and Agramunt were named as heads of a lobbyist group and “friends for money”.⁴⁰⁴

Importantly, Spanish media publications refer to a likely important purpose of the conspiracy to whitewash Azerbaijani government’s electoral and human rights record and obscure the existence of political prisoners in this country. They claim that the goal was to secure loans to Azerbaijan from the World Bank for the construction of TANAP, a gas pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey which would then continue as TAP, or Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, bringing gas further to Europe. Indeed, a loan of 800 mln Euro was approved by the Council of the World Bank on 20 December 2016.⁴⁰⁵

In the wake of the scandal, Spanish MEPs from the Podemos party Miguel Urbán and Xabier Benito requested that Spanish Prosecutor General cooperate with Italian police working on the Volonte case and investigate dealings of Pedro Agramunt.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰¹ Parliamentary Assembly integrity: Written declaration No. 624. Doc. 14256. 25 January 2017.

<http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=23448&lang=en>. Full text of the declaration: “The integrity and effectiveness of the Parliamentary Assembly depend on the observance of the highest standards of conduct by its members. Recent, serious and credible allegations of grave misconduct by some of its members risk undermining public confidence in the Parliamentary Assembly’s integrity. We, the undersigned members of the Parliamentary Assembly believe that the Assembly must: 1. establish, without delay, an external, fully independent and impartial inquiry into all allegations of improper conduct or corruption that may have sought to influence the work of the Assembly in recent years, focusing in particular on allegations surrounding the vote on political prisoners in Azerbaijan in January 2013; the conclusions of the inquiry and its recommendations should be made public directly to the Assembly and the public at large; 2. ensure that the Assembly’s Code of Conduct is strengthened in accordance with international best practice and recommendations requested from GRECO; and that the strict observance of these standards is monitored and enforced by a permanent independent mechanism attached to the Assembly. We therefore call on all members from across political party groups to support our call for an independent investigation and for an integrity framework worthy of our institution.”

⁴⁰² Council of Europe urged to investigate Azerbaijan bribery allegations. Jennifer Rankin, The Guardian, 01.02.2017.

<https://www.theguardian.com/law/2017/feb/01/council-of-europe-urged-investigate-azerbaijan-bribery-allegations>

⁴⁰³ El senador del PP Pedro Agramunt minimizó la represión en Azerbaiyán y allanó la construcción del gasoducto. 26 December 2016. http://www.eldiario.es/politica/PP-Pedro-Agramunt-Azerbaiyan-construccion_0_595291055.html

⁴⁰⁴ Un nuevo escándalo de corrupción en Europa salpica a un miembro del PP. Mundiario. 7 December 2016.

<http://www.mundiario.com/articulo/politica/diputado-pp-habria-aceptado-jugosos-sobornos-azerbaiyan-turquia/20161227140008075059.html>

⁴⁰⁵ Una investigación sobre presiones para el gasoducto Azerbaiyán-Turquía salpica al senador del PP Pedro Agramunt. El Diario, 26.12.2016, http://www.eldiario.es/politica/investigacion-Azerbaiyan-Turquia-PP-Pedro-Agramunt_0_593540957.html

⁴⁰⁶ Un nuevo escándalo de corrupción en Europa salpica a un miembro del PP. Mundiario, 07.12.2016, <http://www.mundiario.com/articulo/politica/diputado-pp-habria-aceptado-jugosos-sobornos-azerbaiyan-turquia/20161227140008075059.html>

Outraged by very serious allegations of corruption at PACE, its Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs unanimously adopted a declaration in which it called for a review of the Assembly's procedures, as well as the principles and mechanisms established by the Code of Conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Finally, on 27 January, the PACE Bureau agreed with the declaration by the Rules Committee, on allegations of corruption and fostering of interests made against some members or former members of PACE, and unanimously supported a three-fold approach to dealing with the matter. The Bureau tasked PACE Secretary General Wojciech Sawicki to prepare terms of reference for an external investigation and submit it to the next meeting of the Bureau in March. The Bureau also committed to revising the Assembly's Code of Conduct and invited GRECO (the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption) to provide advice to the Rules Committee, charged with the investigation.

In the light of these developments, Agramunt, in his capacity of PACE President, had to agree to set up an independent investigation to "shed light on hidden practices that favour corruption," after initially resisting calls for the inquiry, blaming fellow parliamentarians for "a campaign to discredit political opponents by means of slurs, intimidation and coercion". Essentially, Agramunt made an abrupt U-turn on 27 January in favour of an investigation, after strongly-worded complaints from a dozen countries, including Switzerland, Belgium, the Baltic and Nordic states.⁴⁰⁷

Indeed, in the end Agramunt had to express his commitment against corruption and announced that he had ordered to open an investigation. However, there might be additional reasons for that: Spanish media claim that Agramunt made these statements after Spanish deputies from a regional coalition of parties in Valencia, called *Coalició Compromís*, announced that they had registered petitions for Agramunt's appearance in the Commission of European Affairs of the parliament of Valencia and in the Commission on Foreign Affairs of the Senate, to explain his "alleged implications" in the "murky cases" of the so-called "caviar diplomacy" of Azerbaijan.⁴⁰⁸

The autonomous deputy of *Compromís*, Mònica Àlvaro, and the territorial senator of the coalition, Carles Mulet, in their petition emphasised: "Now, it has been reported that the Italian police would have intercepted emails allegedly pointing directly to Agramunt". Likewise, a question from *Compromís* was addressed to the government of Spain to request that the publications would be transferred to the Attorney General of Spain to see if he can open an investigation on the matter.⁴⁰⁹

Earlier in December 2016, Senator Iñaki Bernal from the coalition of *Izquierda-Ezkerra* with the *Podemos* party in the Spanish province of Navarra, presented a series of parliamentary initiatives to request clarification of the alleged accusations that have been made about Pedro Agramunt. Bernal requested the appearance of Agramunt in the Senate Justice Commission to explain these alleged accusations. He also requested a written report by Agramunt to be submitted to the Government to

⁴⁰⁷ Council of Europe urged to investigate Azerbaijan bribery allegations. Jennifer Rankin, *The Guardian*, 01.02.2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2017/feb/01/council-of-europe-urged-investigate-azerbaijan-bribery-allegations>

⁴⁰⁸ Agramunt niega corrupción y ordena investigación en asamblea europea. *Las Provincias*, 14.02.2017, <http://www.lasprovincias.es/agencias/valencia/201702/14/agramunt-niega-corrupcion-ordena-890759.html>

⁴⁰⁹ *Compromís* pide que el senador Agramunt explique su implicación en la "diplomacia del caviar". *El Periódic*, 11.02.2017, http://www.elperiodic.com/noticias/488871_comprom%C3%ADs-pide-senador-agramunt-explique-implicaci%C3%B3n-%E2%80%9Cdiplomacia-caviar%E2%80%9D.html

clarify the situation in which he is allegedly being linked to corruption allegations, and has submitted a question to the government to answer if it is going to take initiatives on this issue.⁴¹⁰

Reacting to the ESI report, Agramunt commented that the case for corruption against Luca Volonte had been filed by a judge in Milan and that what is now investigated is whether there was a tax offense, implicitly suggesting that allegations of corruption against Volonte do not have prospects of further investigation and judicial review. More importantly, he emphasised that as the president of PACE, he had ordered an "all-pervasive internal investigation" on parliamentarians, lobbies and NGOs to know the financing system of each of these actors.⁴¹¹

Two things are particularly worrying in this statement. First, it is the term "internal". Many critics, including NGOs and PACE members who signed the Omtzigt-Schwabe Declaration in January 2017, demand truly independent and external investigation. Indeed, there are many reasons to believe that if an investigation is internal, treated as only an internal matter of PACE, it will be not impartial and thorough, given that many MPs in key positions in the Assembly have been either allegedly involved in lobbying on behalf of Azerbaijan or at least are well-known apologists of the government in Baku.

Secondly, Agramunt said that the investigation should target, among others, NGOs, "to know financing systems of each of these actors". By pointing at NGOs, the PACE President is diverting attention from the essence of the allegations of corruption by the Azerbaijani representatives and implies that NGOs are the real culprits, reiterating Xuclà's, Fischer's, and Suleymanov's claims. Xuclà's response to ESI on Luca Volonte's alleged bribery was quite revealing: "We are politicians. We are not here simply to look at this matter from a legal angle; we need to talk about this organisation's reputation and image, so let us fight defamation."⁴¹² Suleymanov, in his turn, called NGOs and critical MPs "slanderers".⁴¹³

The key question now is what terms of reference of the investigation will be adopted before the April session of PACE and whether they will ensure that it is a serious and impartial investigation, conducted by truly independent external experts with experience and expertise in such matters.

Involvement of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe is seen as necessary by many observers to ensure that investigation is not controlled by the same group of Azerbaijan apologists in PACE and that the situation is not treated as an internal matter of the Assembly. Given that in December 2015 Secretary General Jagland launched an investigation into Azerbaijan's compliance with its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, a procedure applied for the first time ever in the history of the Council of Europe, he might well be seen as legitimately interfering in this unprecedented situation in PACE.

⁴¹⁰ El Senador de I-E pide explicaciones a Agramunt (PP) por supuestos "sobornos y corrupción". Navarra Informacion, 27.12.2016, <http://www.navarrainformacion.es/2016/12/27/senador-i-e-pide-explicaciones-agramunt-pp-supuestos-sobornos-corrupcion/>

⁴¹¹ Agramunt niega corrupción y ordena investigación en asamblea europea. Las Provincias, 14.02.2017, <http://www.lasprovincias.es/agencias/valencia/201702/14/agramunt-niega-corrupcion-ordena-890759.html>

⁴¹² Three days that shook Strasbourg – human rights and corruption. European Stability Initiative, 27.01.2017, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=yu&id=236&newsletter_ID=111#6

⁴¹³ Elkhan Suleymanov: "Networked slanderers exposed!", Website of Elkhan Suleymanov, 14.02.2017, <http://elkhan-suleymanov.az/en/2017/02/14/elkhan-suleymanov-networked-slanderers-exposed/>. Accessed on 05.03.2017.

A BOURGEONING BUSINESS OF FAKE INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION IN FAVOUR OF AUTOCRATS

In the last several years, a host of new type of organisations has emerged specialising in giving positive assessment of fraudulent elections in autocratic countries. They bring together current and former members of national parliaments of European countries and the US, PACE, OSCE PA, European Parliament. They normally come for a short-term visit and conduct quite superficial observation with no proper methodology which contradicts international principles of election observation. They give numerous interviews to the media, sometimes issue a statement but never publish normal election observation reports. Often, they are received by high-level government officials or even leaders of the host country. In most instances, these visits are covered by representatives of the host country, most often via an NGO in this country or an NGO in one of the European countries, acting as a lobbyist of the government of the country in question.

Quotes from the “fake observers” speak for themselves, as illustrated from observation of the September 2016 constitutional referendum in Azerbaijan: “To sum up, it is the conviction of our delegation that the process of the referendum...has been conducted in a free, open and sound process, in accordance with the best international standards, and that it will definitively express the will of the people of Azerbaijan.” “We have monitored elections in many countries as observers of the European Union and OSCE. I have observed elections in Azerbaijan before. The voting in Azerbaijan was conducted in line with European standards,” “To tell the truth, we know without observing that everything is all right”.⁴¹⁴

Motivations of autocratic rulers in engaging with “fake observers” are quite obvious: they crave international legitimacy in order to be accepted as respected partners. A stamp of legitimacy is very important for signing various cooperation treaties, including in the economic and trade areas, receive loans and other forms of funding from international financial institutions, and private investments that often follow money from IFIs. However, it is increasingly difficult to “sell” rigged elections in autocracies as free and fair and in line with international standards. The longer autocrats occupy their thrones and the more times they are re-elected, the more difficult it is to pretend their rule is legitimate. Thanks to reports by local and international NGOs, information about repression and absence of fundamental freedoms which are a prerequisite of free and fair elections, is widely available at the international level. Results of election observation by local NGOs and international NGO coalitions such as the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE) testify to massive fraud. Most importantly, negative conclusions by OSCE ODIHR whose election observation work is accepted as the state of the art, make it almost impossible to imitate free and fair elections which are necessary for the legitimacy of the ruling regimes.

Therefore, the establishment and growth of the “fake election observation” business is in the vital interests of autocrats across the world and in particular in the post-Soviet region. Their highly positive assessments are widely used by the autocratic regimes in their propaganda at home and internationally to counter the OSCE ODIHR’s and NGO reports and whitewash deeply flawed elections. All this is very relevant for Azerbaijan who has used the services of “fake observers” extensively in the last decade.

⁴¹⁴ International “election observers” whitewash fraudulent referendum in Azerbaijan. European Platform for Democratic Elections, September 2016, <http://www.epde.org/en/newsreader/items/international-election-observers-whitewash-fraudulent-referendum-in-azerbaijan.html>

Unfortunately, the number of former and current members of parliaments from democratic countries as well as from international parliamentary bodies who are engaged in this shameful business is growing. It can be counted in the hundreds now. Their motivations are clear: it is sheer corruption. The number of specialised non-governmental organisations posing as genuine election observers is increasing as well. We have reasons to believe that leaders of these organisations and heads of observation missions of “fake observers” receive very good compensation for their work from Azerbaijan as well as from other autocracies through institutional grants and personal contracts via think-tanks and NGOs such as GEFDAB in Germany. Rank-and-file members are probably satisfied with business class flights, luxury hotels, and gifts.

This new phenomenon of “fake observers” needs studying, including on schemes of financing of these organisations and observation missions. In the context of Azerbaijani lobbying, two organisations of this kind stand out.

French NGO Eurasia New Horizons is one example. Articles of this “election observatory” were filed in February 2008 by Thierry Mariani, French MP, member of PACE and OSCE PA and the most active pro-Azerbaijani lobbyist in Europe, and Michel de Guillenchmidt, a lawyer and a specialist in Russian law, who became treasurer of the organisation. According to its statutes, the association shall be the place of exchange between political actors, academics, and societies.⁴¹⁵ The domain name of the website was filed in December 2009 by Stratinvest, a company based in Moscow and founded by Emmanuel Gout, an advisor on Russia and France of the former Prime-Minister of Italy and a former official of the media giant Vivendi.^{416, 417}

In 2009-2010, Thierry Mariani acted as president of Eurasia New Horizons. In April 2010, he went to Baku for an international conference on parliamentary elections which were due in November. The organisers were the Association for Civil Society Development in Azerbaijan (ACSDA, once headed by the key Azerbaijani lobbyist Elkhan Suleymanov) and Eurasia New Horizons. Mariani claimed that he resigned from the presidency of Eurasia New Horizons shortly before taking the government post in 2010; however, he never declared this organisation while taking the government position.⁴¹⁸

A delegation of observers of one of Mariani's client organisations, the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center (ESISC), also observed Azerbaijani elections in 2015 and assessed them positively. ESISC describes its mission as defending “the complex or delicate operations of states or companies through our modern and effective lobbying practice”.⁴¹⁹ Since long ago, ESISC has been praising

⁴¹⁵ Lobbying: les aventures de Thierry Mariani au pays des Soviets. Francois Krug. L'Obs, 05.06.2012, <http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/rue89-politique/2012/06/05/lobbying-les-aventures-de-thierry-mariani-au-pays-des-soviets-232726>

⁴¹⁶ Web page of the Farayand Group (Process). <http://www.artprocessor21.com/MEMBERS%205.html>. Accessed on 9 February 2017.

⁴¹⁷ Lobbying: les aventures de Thierry Mariani au pays des Soviets. Francois Krug. L'Obs, 05.06.2012, <http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/rue89-politique/2012/06/05/lobbying-les-aventures-de-thierry-mariani-au-pays-des-soviets-232726>

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Description of lobbying activities on the website of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center <http://www.esisc.org/our-services/lobbying>. Assessed on 7 March 2017.

Azerbaijan' as a "model for good governance".⁴²⁰ After 2013 elections in Azerbaijan, they attacked the ODIHR monitoring mission findings; this statement can still be found on their website.⁴²¹

Most recently, on 6 March 2017, ESISC published a new scandalous report called "The Armenian Connection" where it veraciously attacked human rights NGOs and research organisations criticising human rights violations and corruption in Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Russia, accused them in destabilising Azerbaijan and trying to establish control over the Council of Europe in the interests of George Soros and Armenia.⁴²² It also alleges connection with Armenia and George Soros of several key members of PACE who have taken principled position on the human rights record of Azerbaijan and demand independent investigation of the corruption allegations. The report is written in the worst traditions of authoritarian propaganda, makes absurd claims, and is clearly aimed at deflecting the wave of criticism against cover-up of unethical lobbying and corruption in PACE and demands for change in the Assembly.

In July 2010, Eurasia New Horizons became a co-founder of an international Brussels-based NGO, the European Academy for Elections Observation, which has emerged since then as a key instrument in the new business of election observation aimed at whitewashing rigged elections and referenda under autocratic regimes. EAEO was set up in Brussels and brings together a number of pro-Azerbaijani MPs from different European countries.⁴²³

EAEO is registered in Belgium as an "international association with not-for-profit purpose".⁴²⁴ The page on the Company Tracker contains four documents: the founding document (including statute) plus a notice of re-appointment of board members and two changes of address. Nothing else is available, including financial reports but this is not uncommon in Belgium. The statute indicates as aims to engage in training on election observation, training for official election oversight committees, and to send observer missions. The first (and continuing) board members are Stef Goris (in the document called Emiel Goris, after his first name) and Alain Destexhe, both reconfirmed in 2015. Both are well-known Belgian politicians and Azerbaijan's best friends. Current address of EAEO is at Stef Goris' home address who serves as President of EAEO. Alain Destexhe is the secretary of the Academy.⁴²⁵ He currently serves as PACE rapporteur on the follow-up to Azerbaijan's Chairmanship in the Council of Europe and is the Chairperson of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

⁴²⁰ The Republic of Azerbaijan: A model of good governance. William Racimora, The European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, 9 September 2013, <http://www.esisc.org/publications/analyses/the-republic-of-azerbaijan-a-model-of-good-governance>

⁴²¹ Remarks on the second interim report of the OSCE/ODIHR. Claude Moniquet, CEO and William Racimora, Vice-CEO. Website of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Centre, 05.10.2013, <http://www.esisc.org/publications/analyses/remarks-on-the-second-interim-report-of-the-osceodihr>

⁴²² The Armenian Connection: How a secret caucus of MPs and NGOs, since 2012, created a network within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to hide violations of international law. Part 1. The European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, 6 March 2017, <http://www.esisc.org/publications/analyses/11791>

⁴²³ Disgraced. Azerbaijan and the end of election monitoring as we know it. European Stability Initiative, 05.11.2013, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=de&id=156&document_ID=145

⁴²⁴ Company Tracker: European Academy for Elections Observation. <https://www.companytracker.be/nl/biz/european-academy-elections-observation>. Accessed on 15.02.2017.

⁴²⁵ Vajglova diplomatska misija odpira vrsto vprašanj Opazovalci volitev ali diplomacija v senci lobijev? Odločitev o morebitni kršitve še do marca. Anže Božič, Peter Žerjavič, Anuška Delić, Klara Škrinjar. Delo, 19.02.2014, <http://www.delo.si/novice/politika/vajglova-diplomatska-misija-odpira-vrsto-vprasanj.html>

The EAEO website mentions three member organisations. Eurasia New Horizons from France is one of them, while another is a Belgian NGO established and run by Destexhe and Goris, Société pour la protection de l'État de droit/ Vereniging voor de Bescherming van de Rechtsstaat (Association for Protection of the Rule of Law). It has the same two board members as EAEO (Goris and Destexhe) and the same date of establishment, 15 July 2010. The statute has a number of goals, including cooperating, studying and training on rule of law and participation in missions abroad for election observation. Address is in an office building on the outskirts of Brussels; it is not clear whether this is an actual active office.⁴²⁶ No information can be found on the third member organisation of EAEO, a Spanish NGO "Valores Democraticos" ("Democratic Values"). Public registers are not very well developed in Spain; more research on it is needed.

EAEO was set up by political entrepreneurs like Mariani, Goris and Destexhe, and was propped up by the Azerbaijani demand, though used to serve other regimes too. We found evidence that in different years EAEO served interests of regimes in Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Mariani was a head of the EAEO observation mission to Ukraine in 2012 under president Yanukovich who was ousted several months later by protesters on Maidan.⁴²⁷

EAEO claims on its website: "together with several other European NGOs and several dozen parliamentarians and former parliamentarians, all from the European Union, we are committed to the preparation and monitoring of the observation of elections. All our colleagues have extensive experience in these matters. Most of them are active or former member of the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe."⁴²⁸ The rather outdated website calendar of EAEO claims it had observed elections in Azerbaijan in 2010 and 2013.⁴²⁹ Old versions of the website can be found through the web archive, <https://archive.org/web/>. From the year of its establishment in 2010, EAEO has observed all elections in Azerbaijan. First, in November 2010, EAEO reportedly sent 163 parliamentarians, paid by SOCAR through a German lobbying organisation GEFDAB, to observe the elections and concluded that the voting procedures were held "in line with international standards" and that the vote count was "open and transparent."⁴³⁰

Alain Destexhe headed the EAOA 2013 observation mission to Azerbaijan, reportedly consisting of 160 observers and again paid by SOCAR through GEFDAB, headed by a former Bundestag member and GEFDAB Director Eduard Lintner.⁴³¹ All of them – Mariani, Destexhe and Lintner – were PACE members in different times.

⁴²⁶ Company Tracker: Vereniging voor de Bescherming van de Rechtsstaat, <https://www.companytracker.be/nl/biz/vereniging-voor-de-bescherming-van-de-rechtsstaat>. Accessed on 15.02.2017.

⁴²⁷ Ukraine's Parliamentary Elections Broadly in Line With Democratic Standards, According to International Observers. PR Newswire, 29.10.2012, <http://www.prnewswire.co.uk/news-releases/ukraines-parliamentary-elections-broadly-in-line-with-democratic-standards-according-to-international-observers-176235571.html>

⁴²⁸ Website of the European Academy for Elections Observation (EAEO). <http://www.eaao.eu/english/wordpress/>. Accessed on 9 February 2017.

⁴²⁹ Calendar of activities at the website of the European Academy for Elections Observation (EAEO). http://www.eaao.eu/english/wordpress/?page_id=16. Accessed on 9 February 2017.

⁴³⁰ Disgraced. Azerbaijan and the end of election monitoring as we know it. European Stability Initiative., 05.11.2013, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=de&id=156&document_ID=145

⁴³¹ Vajglova diplomatska misija odpira vrsto vprašanj Opazovalci volitev ali diplomacija v senci lobijev? Odločitev o morebitni kršitve še do marca. Delo, 19.02.2014, <http://www.delo.si/novice/politika/vajglova-diplomatska-misija-odpira-vrsto-vprasani.html>

Central Electoral Commission of Azerbaijan officially announced EAEO as an observer of the elections in 2015.⁴³² During the election observation in 2015, Mariani was called by the Azerbaijani press a “member of the EAEO observation mission”.⁴³³ Immediately after the 2015 elections, former OSCE PA president and member of the European Academy of Election Observation, an Austrian politician Wolfgang Grossruck said the EAEO observation mission had found no interference with the electoral process or problems with the identification of voters, adding: “I want to stress that in general, the election was held at a high level.” “The votes were counted transparently and there were no problems,” Grossruck told the media in Baku. “We felt that overall, this was a good result.”⁴³⁴

EAEO delegation also observed the infamous constitutional referendum in September 2016⁴³⁵ and was even received by Ilham Aliyev. Angelo Farrugia, speaker of the Maltese Parliament, headed the mission. Stefan Goris also figured prominently, and Thierry Mariani can be seen on the photo. Aliyev was clearly pleased and highlighted the importance of EAEO, as reported in the Azerbaijani media: “The head of state hailed the importance of the fact that Stef Goris, who represents an important organization such as the European Academy for Elections Observation, visits Azerbaijan accompanied by a large delegation to monitor the referendum. Saying a number of observers from more than 30 countries as well as important international organizations came to monitor the referendum, President Ilham Aliyev hailed the significance of their observing the voting.”⁴³⁶ Fully in line with the goals of EAEO, Farrugia said that EAEO delegation observed “a peaceful and organised voting at polling stations”, adding that “the voters had a careful approach to every issue put to referendum”.⁴³⁷

The Academy involves both former and current members of national parliaments and international parliamentary bodies as participants of its election observation missions, as its website explains and practice shows. However, it looks like that a line is sometimes blurred: on certain occasions, even members of official missions of inter-governmental bodies appear to work hand in hand with members of EAEO unofficial missions. For example, former PACE co-rapporteur on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan Tadeusz Iwinski travelled to observe the referendum in Azerbaijan in September 2016 as a member of the EAEO unofficial mission and acknowledged, in essence, that the official PACE mission worked together with it. In an interview, he said that he “arrived with a group of observers to monitor the referendum” and “the group includes members of the mission of the European Academy for Elections Observation and PACE”. “No shortcomings have been observed at the polling stations we visited,” added Iwinski.⁴³⁸

⁴³² 465 int'l observers to monitor parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan. AzerNews, 26.10.2015, <http://www.azernews.az/nation/89079.html>

⁴³³ Thierry Mariani: "Je soutiens l'Azerbaïdjan dans le règlement du conflit de Haut Karabakh". Vision Azerbaïdjanaise, 11.11.2015, <http://fr.azvision.az/news.php?id=2521>

⁴³⁴ European Observers Find Parliamentary Elections in Azerbaijan "Transparent and Democratic". PR Newswire, 02.11.2015, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/european-observers-find-parliamentary-elections-in-azerbaijan-transparent-and-democratic-539283511.html>

⁴³⁵ Azerbaijani referendum meets international standards, European Academy for Elections Observation. AzerTag, 27.09.2016, <http://azertag.az/en/xeber/996349>

⁴³⁶ President Ilham Aliyev received European Academy for Elections Observation mission. AzerTag, 28.09.2016, [http://azertag.az/en/xeber/President Ilham Aliyev received European Academy for Elections Observation mission VID EO-995787](http://azertag.az/en/xeber/President%20Ilham%20Aliyev%20received%20European%20Academy%20for%20Elections%20Observation%20mission%20VID%20EO-995787)

⁴³⁷ Ilham Aliyev: All necessary measures taken to excellently organize referendum. APA Azeri Press Agency, 26.09.2016, <http://en.apa.az/print/249628>

⁴³⁸ Former PACE co-rapporteur: No shortcomings recorded during Azerbaijan's constitutional referendum. APA News Agency, 26.09.2016, <http://en.apa.az/azerbaijan-politics/foreign-news/former-pace-co-rapporteur-no-shortcomings-recorded->

Therefore, not only in the Azerbaijani media members of EAEO missions are presented as coming to observe elections on behalf of official bodies; this blurring happens in the heads of observers themselves. Members of EAEO missions may influence opinions of members of official missions if they work together during election observation, especially since many of them know each other very well and have worked together in the same assemblies in the past.

All EAEO conclusions on Azerbaijani elections have been positive. However, they were limited to oral quotes for the media: no real observation reports are available on their website or elsewhere. It is not surprising, because all their observations are short-term and are not based on any trustworthy methodology, very different from long-term observation missions by OSCE ODIHR, working on the basis of thorough, transparent, and well-tested methodology.

Like Thierry Mariani, EAEO President Stef Goris has been supporting various post-Soviet autocracies. For example, he observed recently not only elections in Azerbaijan, but in Uzbekistan too;⁴³⁹ he lent his authority to the celebration of 25 years of Kazakhstan's independence,⁴⁴⁰ and congratulated ailing Uzbekistani dictator Islam Karimov with his re-election in 2015.⁴⁴¹

Domestic and international NGOs have criticised "fake observers" in strongest terms. Recently EPDE, the leading international NGO coalition on election observation, issued a statement criticising international observers from EAEO as well as from PACE, European Parliament and national parliaments of several European countries, who observed the notorious constitutional referendum in September 2016, 117 people in total.⁴⁴² The EPDE statement says, in particular: "EPDE is highly critical to statements made by international election observers, which stand in sharp contrast to the critical assessment made by local independent citizens' election observers. EPDE sees the statements as attempts at whitewashing an undemocratic and fraudulent referendum. Their assessment raises doubts over the impartiality, professionalism and honesty of the international observers. By that they damage the reputation of the institutions and parliaments that they represent."⁴⁴³

[during-azerbaijan-s-constitutional-referendum.html](#)

⁴³⁹ "Round table" at the International Institute of Administrative Sciences. Website of the Embassy of Uzbekistan in the United States, 15.04.2015, <http://www.uzbekistan.org/presidential-elections-2015/archive/3346/?print=1>

⁴⁴⁰ #Kazakhstan: Celebrating 25 years of independence. EU Reporter, 04.05.2016, <https://www.eureporter.co/frontpage/2016/05/04/republicofkazakhstan-celebrating-25-years-of-independence/>

⁴⁴¹ Congratulatory Letters to Islam Karimov on His Election as President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Website of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 11.04.2015, http://elections.uz/en/events/news/5640/?sphrase_id=280715

⁴⁴² Fake Observation: 117 international observers monitored 26 September 2016 Referendum in Azerbaijan. European Platform for Democratic Elections, September 2016, http://www.epde.org/tl_files/EPDE/RESSOURCES/2016%20Azerbaijan%20Referendum/Fake%20observers_list.pdf

⁴⁴³ International "election observers" whitewash fraudulent referendum in Azerbaijan. European Platform for Democratic Elections, September 2016, <http://www.epde.org/en/newsreader/items/international-election-observers-whitewash-fraudulent-referendum-in-azerbaijan.html>

CONCLUSIONS: HOW THE AZERBAIJANI MACHINE OF INTERNATIONAL LOBBYING AND CORRUPTION HAS WORKED AND SUCCEEDED

Observers and human rights experts have repeatedly referred to the phenomenon of Azerbaijan as a lack of strong position from the West regarding human rights situation in that country. These double standards were explained by the so-called “caviar diplomacy” – a picturesque, yet not entirely accurate term to describe the influence that Azerbaijan has gained over European politics and politicians. Bits and pieces of that influence can be found on the surface; however, down under there is a whole sophisticated system of connections that the Azerbaijani web of influence is built of.

This web allows building a certain narrative about Azerbaijan, which consists of arguments of young democracy, geostrategic considerations, energy security and a role model of ethnic and religious tolerance. This narrative also portrays Azerbaijan as a victim of aggression that, due to the occupation of part of its territory, has to overcome additional difficulties of development.

Azerbaijan does not want to be treated like other Eastern Partnership countries, but rather as a strategic partner of the EU. Azerbaijan and its apologists emphasise the countries' aspirations for strategic partnership with the EU, though its governing model is far from what is considered democratic by any standards.

Through a series of interviews with different actors, we have made an effort to understand the structures of the web of influence and the way it is managed.

The highest level of impact is influencing state policies – directly, if their economies are weak enough or hydrocarbon-dependent, and/or indirectly through big businesses and politicians of these countries. We were told that on a number of occasions, oil contracts with countries are conditioned by political support at the expense of human rights.

Cultural and charitable initiatives, like restoration projects, also help to buy influence. For example, huge investments into Vatican restoration have resulted in special relations with the Holy See.

In other cases, contacts established from Soviet times are helping: ex-president of Romania Băseșcu was said to have such relations with Azerbaijan. More cases are described in the countries' section. In a number of cases, like with Romania, it is the capitals telling their MEPs and MPs how to act, and influence from a capital to another capital is employed.

Ilham Aliyev and his wife Mehriban are active players in this game. As said above, they want to be accepted in Europe as equals, and not as some exotic guests. Aliyev was educated in the prestigious Moscow State Institute of International Relations. Before succeeding his father, he was leading the Azerbaijani delegation in PACE for three years. Contacts from that time are still working for him.

Ilham Aliyev is said to have a final say on all key decisions; however, strategies are said to be developed by several people under him. Head of Presidential Administration foreign department Novruz Mammadov was named by our interlocutors as an important person in managing this system of “special cooperation with friends of Azerbaijan”. He is close to the powerful oligarch Kamaledin Heydarov and is said to decide who serves where in embassies, and has a strong role in developing a strategy.

A structure in Azerbaijan which is responsible for doing some strategic analysis, the Strategic Resource Center under the President, headed by Farhad Mammadov (not related to Ziya Mammadov), does policy papers, conferences, and visibility. Part of its work is pure lobbying. It also produces internal reports for the president, sometimes they are read and taken into account, sometimes ignored.

A relatively new structure, the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, is run by Hafiz Pashaev, the first lady's uncle. It is engaged in institutionalised lobbying through diplomats, scholars, professors, student exchanges and cooperation with think tanks.

We could not get any definite answer to the question on whether there is a single person who has all the information from all lobbying branches and whether there is a service in any department that is gathering data and dossiers on contacts and lobbying resources. We assume that there could be such a department in the security service or elsewhere, as some cases indicate. We guess that such a department might exist under Kamaledin Heydarov's auspices. He is an oligarch number one and is said to have his own private "army". It also seems that in the most cases invited guests are being put in the hotels owned by Heydarov, where it is easy to observe them and obtain additional information.

Resources for lobbying are coming from SOCAR and its affiliates, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, embassies of Azerbaijan, and personally from Kamaledin Heydarov, who is in charge of lobbying in Europe.

Until recently, another oligarch, Ziya Mammadov and his son were in charge of lobbying in the USA. However, Ziya Mammadov lost his influence and positions in the latest purges. This does not mean, however, that Azerbaijani lobbying in the USA has stopped.

Heydarov's lobbying has two major hands: a "clean", "political", "expert" hand that is managed by TEAS, and a "dirty" one – direct benefit distribution, which is done in Strasbourg through an influential member of the Azerbaijani delegation to PACE and his assistant, also a PACE member, and in Brussels by OCAZ, also run by them.

TEAS is involved in what can be considered more or less acceptable and legal – political and cultural events, expert discussions, organization of trips that could be declared by politicians, donations to political parties that could be declared, paid press-tours, trips to roundtables and conferences, including Dubai resort hotels, fees for key-note speakers and high per diems.

According to our sources, while traveling to Baku, people are often put in the hotels belonging to Heydarov the elder. Of course, even if the trip is declared, then still there are multiple niceties like luxury spa, dinners etc. that are usually not declared. TEAS pretends to be a respectable society, pretending that they have membership fees and different funding sources; however, the true source is money of Taleh Heydarov's father, Kamaledin.

This allowed TEAS to hire to their London office such communication "sharks" like senior PR professional **Lionel Zetter** for the Global Director position or **Leon Cook**, formerly with a major PR firm Burson-Marsteller, as communications director.

TEAS is working to engage with high-ranking politicians, and that is why they aim to hire well-connected persons, like Belgian ex-minister and ex-senator Marc Verwilghen (director of TEAS Brussels office). As one of our interlocutors noted, persons like him are able to open almost any door in the government or parliament.

Roman Huna, ex-director of TEAS–Belgium and former Program Advisor of the Council of Europe’s Directorate General of Legal Affairs, Slovak by origin, was aiming to become Slovak ambassador to Baku after his tenure at TEAS. However, he was asked to stay as a consultant to TEAS in Brussels because of his friendship with Vice-President of the European Commission for Energy Maroš Šefčovič which means that TEAS has direct access to him.⁴⁴⁴ One can only guess what was the real reason behind the exception that was made for Azerbaijan regarding the Third Energy Package of the EU.

In the European Parliament, TEAS has established the Friends of Azerbaijan Group; in France it revived the Association of Friends of Azerbaijan; in Berlin it is active with the German-Azerbaijani Forum.

TEAS is also working to co-opt experts and think-tanks who would promote the Azerbaijani agenda. TEAS has offices in London (head), Paris, Berlin, Baku and Istanbul.

The less discreet operations are believed to be performed by Elkhan Suleymanov, an Azerbaijani MP in PACE and in Euronest. According to our sources, he is close to Heydarov the elder and is trusted by him. Suleymanov is tasked with parliamentary “engagement”, which consists of inviting potential friends of Azerbaijan to Baku and distributing all sorts of “gifts”. Assisting in election observation by friendly MPs is also his duty. The price tag for services by MPs is said to vary from a carpet and a luxury trip to cash ranging 50–200 thousand Euro. It is the job of Suleymanov and his people to organise favourable voting, to see that the right people are appointed as rapporteurs, and influence the reports.

Suleymanov's outlet in relations with European Parliament is OCAZ, which was run by his assistant Muslum Mammadov. He was described to us and also to ESI as an “envelope carrier”. Since 2016, he is a full member of PACE. That may be the answer why the stationary phone in OCAZ never works properly: it is not meant for public access.

State oil giant SOCAR comes into play where there is a necessity to back an energy or cultural conference (like SOCAR – Germany), hire an expert as a consultant — for example, this is the case of US–Israeli expert Brenda Schaffer, or pay for an observation mission trip through a proxy, like in the case of 2013 election observation by EAEO, sponsored by GEFDAB. Sometimes SOCAR sponsors a trip of an MP, like the trip of Karen Strenz in 2014.

According to our sources, embassies in important cities are aimed at creating good relations, supporting and holding events, giving relatively innocent presents, but are not involved in cash distribution. There are sometimes conflicts between embassies and TEAS, and especially between embassies and Suleymanov because of his non-diplomatic behaviour. He allows himself to send quite rude letters to the highest levels politicians in case things are not going the way Azerbaijan wants. He also makes attempts to interfere with the embassies’ work.

⁴⁴⁴ Authors’ interview in 2016.

Western embassies in Baku are subject to influence and engagement. It is known that the EU and its member states are shaping their policies towards a country largely based on recommendations of the embassies on the ground, and preparation of official visits strongly depends on them. In countries like Azerbaijan, embassies tend to be rather cautious, but in a number of cases it is more than caution.

There are well-known cases of two USA ambassadors, who during their term were good friends of the ruling regime and after leaving their post started to operate their businesses in Baku.⁴⁴⁵ We were also informed that at least two former ambassadors, Polish and Italian, were friends of Aliyev and had their business interests in Baku.⁴⁴⁶ Information on the ambassadors is worth further checking.

Ambassadors and embassy staff are obviously a subject for seduction Azerbaijani-style, and these connections are used even after diplomats have left their post in the country. For example, the former Finnish military attaché in Baku was used to defeat a candidacy for rapporteurship in PACE of a Norwegian MP. He was asked to call Finnish MPs and request not to support her candidacy.

This case, together with some other cases, makes us assume that inside the Azerbaijani lobbying system there is a unit that maintains dossiers of all human and institutional resources that could be mobilised. It may have different kinds of information. For example, we were told that one of the MPs who was on a trip to Baku and put in one of Heydarov's hotels, had two undressed women banging on his door while he was in his room.⁴⁴⁷

There is one pattern that is worth noticing: almost all main lobbyists of Azerbaijan like Mariani, Strenz (and now it appears that Iveta Grigule from Latvia is interested too) also work for Kazakhstan, just like the German PR Firm Consultum Communications. Our sources tell us that Kazakhstani's ruling elites of the younger generation maintain friendly relations with the Turkmenistanis and the Azerbaijanis and pass along their trusted Western lobbyists who have proved to be useful.

Demand causes offer. A number of organisations, like the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center (ESISC) which observed elections in 2015 and in 2013, specialised in attacking OSCE ODIHR's monitoring mission findings, were in search of new clients, and Azerbaijani generous PR spendings were more than attractive for them.⁴⁴⁸ The same goes for many other organisations and individuals. Other organizations like GEFDAB were set up by particularly useful MPs with financial assistance of Azerbaijanis both out of gratitude for past services and with the aim of a further use. GEFDAB is headed by the former German MP Eduard Lintner, who was most useful for Azerbaijan regime while he was in PACE. We were told that not only 2013 election observation was sponsored by (or through) GEFDAB, but recent election observation too, in a more disguised manner. We were told that GEFDAB in general is used for covering all kinds of lobbying expenses.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁵ Who Is Shushing State on Azerbaijan's Detention of Khadija Ismayilova? Till Bruckner, Huffington Post, 30 December 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/till-bruckner/who-is-shushing-state-on- b_6354866.html

⁴⁴⁶ Authors' interview in 2016.

⁴⁴⁷ Authors' interview in 2016.

⁴⁴⁸ Baku Smooths Over Its Rights Record With A Thick Layer Of Caviar. By Robert Coalson, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. 8 November 2013. <http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/25162410.html>

⁴⁴⁹ Authors' interview in 2016.

Most importantly, it is not only economic and geopolitical interests of various democratic states or the greed and cynicism of individual politicians but the weaknesses of Western democratic institutions such as national parliaments and inter-governmental organisations, with PACE being in the lead, which is successfully used by the autocratic regime of Azerbaijan to exert influence on policies, manipulate decisions, co-opt and buy politicians, and eventually capture whole states and international organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Suggested recommendations are in line with a number of recommendations presented in the recent weeks by international and Azerbaijani civil society organisations.

1. Bureau of PACE, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe should discuss, without delay, allegations of corruption and misconduct in PACE and appoint a team of external independent investigators with experience in such matters to do a serious investigation into all allegations of improper conduct, undeclared interests and corruption of PACE members from any country and political group that have or may have sought to influence the Assembly's reports and resolutions on Azerbaijan, including but not limited to the circumstances surrounding the PACE vote on the draft resolution on political prisoners in Azerbaijan in January 2013, and specifically into the behaviour of members of the Azerbaijani delegation prior to and during the vote and since then, in particular the roles of Elkhan Suleymanov and Muslum Mammadov. It is very important that this investigation addressing very serious allegations of misconduct and corruption by some PACE members and possible cover-up by others is indeed conducted by external investigators and not left for PACE to conduct as its internal matter.
2. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjorn Jagland, should make a very strong statement to affirm that there will be no tolerance of any corruption, including bribery, trading in influence or taking up of roles that imply a conflict of interest, in PACE.
3. Prior to the April 2017 session, as many PACE members as possible should join the January 2017 Declaration on integrity, supporting the demand for an external investigation of allegations of corruption and a reform of the Code of Conduct.
4. PACE should immediately suspend the two Azerbaijani members, Elkhan Suleymanov and Muslum Mammadov, alleged of bribing other members, pending a full investigation.
5. PACE should suspend the voting rights of the entire Azerbaijani delegation until such time as it is clear that corruption practices have ceased.
6. PACE should review its Code of Conduct to ensure introducing strongest safeguards against corruption and unethical behaviour and effective mechanisms for their enforcement.
7. Along with that, PACE should consider establishing a special integrity framework in line with best international standards and based on GRECO recommendations, to ensure adherence to high ethical standards by its members. A special integrity framework should include an independent

ethics office with investigators answering to an independent board. Such investigators should have the authority to look into any instances where there is a substantial reason to believe that a violation of the Code of Conduct occurred. The proposed ethics office should inform both the Bureau of the Assembly and the public of the results of such investigations.

8. Prosecutors in France, Spain, Germany and other countries should contact their Italian colleagues and cooperate in investigating suspicious behaviour of PACE members in their countries during the period when alleged corruption took place in PACE.
9. PACE should appoint a credible rapporteur on political prisoners in Azerbaijan who would be guided by and apply the definition of political prisoners adopted by PACE in October 2012 and consider appointing a prominent external human rights expert as co-rapporteur who can ensure the integrity of the process.
10. PACE should consistently address the issue of political prisoners in its member states, based on its October 2012 definition of political prisoners, by examining cases of alleged political imprisonment, appointing special rapporteurs, and, where confirmed, using all powers in its disposal to demand their release under threat of consequences in cases of non-compliance.
11. The European Parliament should review its Code of Conduct to ensure introducing strongest safeguards against corruption and unethical behaviour and effective mechanisms for their enforcement, with assistance of the European Anti Fraud Office (OLAF) if necessary.
12. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly should review its Code of Conduct to ensure introducing strongest safeguards against corruption and unethical behaviour and effective mechanisms for their enforcement.
13. National parliaments of member states of the Council of Europe and the OSCE should review their Codes of Conduct to ensure introducing strongest safeguards against corruption and unethical behaviour, and adopt oversight and disclosure requirements for their members while serving in PACE and OSCE PA and/or travelling to abroad.
14. PACE, the European Parliament, OSCE PA, and national parliaments should review their rules and procedures for participation of their members in international election observation missions. Special attention should be paid to the situations when their members undermine the work of longer-term observers such as the OSCE/ODIHR. In cases when their individual members outside or in the absence of an official observation mission claim to represent these parliaments as election observers and/or do not publicly refute such allegations by public officials or the media of the country where the elections are held, PACE, the European Parliament, OSCE PA, and national parliaments should review every such case and assess whether activities of these members are in line with the ethical standards and codes of conduct of these parliaments.
15. Activities and financial sources of the European Academy of Elections Observation, whose missions systematically give a highly positive assessment of elections and referenda in authoritarian states and contradict conclusions of OSCE ODIHR observation missions and

independent local civil society observers, should be a subject of scrutiny by national and international investigation, as well as those of its member organisations.

16. The European Parliament, the European Commission and governments of the European Union member states should apply anti-corruption and human rights conditionality regarding adoption of a Partnership Agreement with Azerbaijan, develop strong anti-corruption and human rights benchmarks as a condition for signing and ratifying the Agreement, and make implementation of the Agreement conditional on compliance with the benchmarks, measured against concrete criteria. These benchmarks should include, as a minimum, immediate release of all political prisoners, ending of persecution of human rights defenders, independent journalists and bloggers, youth activists, and political opposition members, and ending restrictions on civil society organisations.
17. The same conditionality approach with the use of strong anti-corruption and human rights benchmarks should be applied by international financial institutions when discussing, developing, and negotiating economic and financial assistance programmes in Azerbaijan.

ANNEX

Excerpts from the declarations by members of the UK Parliament regarding payments received from and trips covered by Azerbaijani organisations and government bodies in 2014-2016

HOUSE OF COMMONS

2016-2017⁴⁵⁰

Blackman, Bob (Harrow East, Chair of All Parliamentary Group on Azerbaijan)

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijan Society**

Two tickets to attend the Special Royal Windsor Horse Show and Queen's 90th Birthday Celebrations, total value £620 (£310 per ticket) Date received: 13 May 2016 Date accepted: 13 May 2016

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijan Society**

For MP and one member of staff, flights, accommodation with a total value of £4,110 (£2,055pp) Destination of visit: Baku, Azerbaijan Date of visit: 26 July - 31 July 2016 Purpose of visit: to meet with political and parliamentary figures, HM Ambassador, business representatives and IDP/Refugee camp of displaced people from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Godsiff, Mr Roger (Birmingham, Hall Green)

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijan Society**

Amount of donation (or estimate of the probable value): £2,055 comprising £1,455 for flights and £600 for 5 nights at a hotel in Baku Destination of visit: Baku Date of visit: 26 – 31 July 2016 Purpose of visit: to meet with political and parliamentary figures, HM Ambassador, business representatives and IDP/Refugee camp of displaced people from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Menzies, Mark (Fylde)

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijan Society**

Amount of donation: flights and hotel accommodation with a value of £2,055. Destination of visit: Baku. Date of visit: 26-31 July 2016. Purpose of visit: to meet with political and parliamentary figures, HM Ambassador, business representatives and IDP/Refugee camp of displaced people from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Morris, David (Morecambe and Lunesdale)

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijan Society**

Amount of donation (or estimate of the probable value): flights and accommodation with a value of £1,815 Destination of visit: Baku Date of visit: 26-30 July 2016 Purpose of visit: to meet with political and parliamentary figures, HM Ambassador, business representatives and IDP/Refugee camp of displaced people from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

⁴⁵⁰ Register of Members' Financial Interests, House of Commons, <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmregmem/170220/170220.pdf>

Name of donor: **Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

Estimate of the probable value: Flights and accommodation with a value of £2,007. Destination: Baku, Azerbaijan Dates: 24-29 September 2016. Purpose of visit: To observe an election (Referendum).

Offord, Dr Matthew (Hendon)

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijan Society**

tickets for MP, MP wife and two others for the Royal Windsor Horse Show evening event and dinner, total value £1,240 Date accepted: 12 May 2016

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijan Society**

Amount of donation: flights £1,455; accommodation £600; total value £2,055 Destination of visit: Baku, Azerbaijan Date of visit: 26-31 July 2016 Purpose of visit: to meet with political and parliamentary figures, HM Ambassador, business representatives and IDP/Refugee camp of displaced people from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Robertson, Mr Laurence (Tewkesbury)

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijan Society**

Hospitality provided to my wife and me at the Royal Windsor Horse Show, approx. value £620. Date accepted: 13 May 2016

Vickers, Martin (Cleethorpes)

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijan Society**

Amount of donation (or estimate of the probable value): total value £2,055, comprising £1,455 for flights and £600 for 5 nights at a hotel in Baku Destination of visit: Baku Date of visit: 26 July – 31 July 2016 Purpose of visit: to meet with political and parliamentary figures, HM Ambassador, business representatives and IDP/Refugee camp of displaced people from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. (Registered 06 September 2016)

2015-2016⁴⁵¹

Godsiff, Mr Roger (Birmingham, Hall Green)

Name of donor: The State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR)

Amount of donation (or estimate of the probable value): airfares, accommodation, transportation and meals; approx. £2,500 Destination of visit: Azerbaijan Date of visit: 12-15 November 2015 Purpose of visit: to look at energy issues. (Registered 23 November 2015)

2014-2015⁴⁵²

AMESS, Sir David (Southend West)

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijan Society**

Amount of donation: £1,943 for flights and £600 for 5 nights at a hotel; total **£2,543** Destination of visit: Baku, Shaki and Gabala, Azerbaijan Date of visit: 26 May – 31 May 2014 Purpose of visit: to meet

⁴⁵¹ Register of Members' Financial Interests, House of Commons, <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmregmem/160516/160516.pdf>

⁴⁵² Register of Members' Financial Interests, House of Commons, <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmregmem/150330/150330.pdf>

with political and parliamentary figures including the President of the Republic, ministers, the British Ambassador, local public service centres, representatives of international organisations, human rights groups and IDP/Refugee camp of displaced people from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

BALDRY, Rt Hon Sir Tony (Banbury)

£15,000, plus travel and accommodation expenses of approximately £1,700 (including costs of visit to Baku 17-18 September) received from **Trend News Agency, Azerbaijan**, for advice and discussions on matters relating to parliamentary relations and business, academic and educational links between the UK and Azerbaijan and discussions of two international conferences. Hours: approx 4 working days.

BLACKMAN, Bob (Harrow East)

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijan Society**

Amount of donation (or estimate of the probable value): £4,486, comprising £3,886 for flights and £600 for 5 nights at a hotel for 2 persons Destination of visit: Baku, Shaki and Gabala, Azerbaijan Date of visit: 26 May – 31 May 2014 Purpose of visit: to meet with political and parliamentary figures including the President of the Republic, ministers, the British Ambassador, local public service centres, representatives of international organisations, human rights groups and IDP/Refugee camp of displaced people from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

BRUCE, Rt Hon Sir Malcolm (Gordon)

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijan Society**

Amount of donation (or estimate of the probable value): £2,423, comprising £1,943 for flights and £480 for 4 nights at a hotel Destination of visit: Baku, Azerbaijan Date of visit: 26 May to 29 May 2014 Purpose of visit: to meet with political and parliamentary figures including the President of the Republic, ministers, the British Ambassador, local public service centres, representatives of international organisations and human rights groups.

FOX, Rt Hon Dr Liam (North Somerset)

Contract with **The European Azerbaijan Society** for translation rights of my book.

28th April 2014, advance of **£5,700** on signature of contract.

1 October 2014, advance of **£5,700** for paperback publication.

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijani Society**

Amount of donation (or estimate of the probable value): flights £2,320.40 and accommodation 1,259.54 for me and a member of staff; total £3,579.94 Destination of visit: Istanbul, Turkey Date of visit: 1-4 February 2015 Purpose of visit: to attend the release of my book 'Rising Tides' translation into Turkish.

HOWARTH, Sir Gerald (Aldershot)

Name of donor: **The State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR)**

Amount of donation (or estimate of the probable value): £3,000 including flights, internal travel and notional costs. Destination of visit: Baku, Azerbaijan Date of visit: 6-8 October 2014 Purpose of visit: a delegation to discuss relations between the UK and Azerbaijan and meetings with political and business representatives.

LUFF, Sir Peter (Mid Worcestershire)

£15,000, plus travel and accommodation expenses of approximately £1,700 (including costs of visit to Baku 17-18 September) received from **Trend News Agency**, Azerbaijan, for advice and discussions on matters relating to parliamentary relations and business, academic and educational links between the UK and Azerbaijan and discussions of two international conferences. Hour: approx 4 working days.

MENZIES, Mark (Fylde)

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijan Society**

Amount of donation (or estimate of the probable value): £2,543, comprising £1,943 for flights and £600 for 5 nights at a hotel Destination of visit: Baku, Shaki and Gabala, Azerbaijan Date of visit: 26-31 May 2014

MORRIS, David (Morecambe and Lunesdale)

Name of donor: **The State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR)**

Amount of donation (or estimate of the probable value): £3,500 including flights, internal travel and notional costs. Destination of visit: Baku, Azerbaijan Date of visit: 6-9 October 2014 Purpose of visit: a delegation to discuss relations between the UK and Azerbaijan, including attendance at a business forum and meetings with political and business representatives.

PINCHER, Chris (Tamworth)

Name of donor: **The European Azerbaijan Society**

Amount of donation (or estimate of the probable value): £2,543, comprising £1,943 for flights and £600 for 5 nights at a hotel Destination of visit: Baku, Shaki and Gabala, Azerbaijan Date of visit: 26 May – 31 May 2014 Purpose of visit: to meet with political and parliamentary figures including the President of the Republic, ministers, the British Ambassador, local public service centres, representatives of international organisations (EU), human rights groups and IDP/refugee camp of displaced people from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

WHARTON, James (Stockton South)

Name of donor: **The State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR)**

Amount of donation (or estimate of the probable value): £3,500 including flights, internal travel and notional costs. Destination of visit: Baku, Azerbaijan Date of visit: 6-9 October 2014 Purpose of visit: a delegation to discuss relations between the UK and Azerbaijan, including attendance at a business forum and meetings with political and business representatives.

HOUSE OF LORDS INTERESTS

2015-2016⁴⁵³

ADDINGTON, LORD

Visit to Azerbaijan, 24-30 July 2016, as guest of **the European Azerbaijan Society**; costs of visit including travel and accommodation paid for by the Society.

⁴⁵³ Register of Members' Financial Interests, House of Lords, <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/publications-records/House-of-Lords-Publications/Records-activities-and-membership/Register-of-Lords-Interests/Register120916.pdf>

DE MAULEY, LORD

Invitation to attend with wife at Royal Windsor Horse Show, 15 May 2016, as guests of **the European Azerbaijan Society** (one of the event's main sponsors) for dinner and viewing of the Queen's 90th birthday celebrations.

EVANS OF WATFORD, LORD (*praised elections as transparent and free*)

Visit to Azerbaijan, 31 October - 2 November 2015, as member of APPG on Azerbaijan and to act as election observer; hospitality provided locally; cost of air fares and hotel met by **Azerbaijan London embassy**

GERMAN, LORD

Non-financial interests (e)

Co-Chair, **Anglo-Azerbaijani Society**

HOLMES OF RICHMOND, LORD

Guest of **Azerbaijan Society** at Windsor Horse Show, 15 May 2016

HUSSAIN, LORD

Visit to Baku, Azerbaijan, 26-31 July 2016, as part of parliamentary delegation to meet political and parliamentary figures including ministers, local Mps (Government and opposition), the British ambassador, public service centres, business representatives and IDP/Refugee camp of displaced people from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh; flights, hotel accommodation and food paid by **European Azerbaijan Society**

KILCLOONEY, LORD

Remunerated employment, office, profession etc.

Member, Advisory Board, **European Azerbaijan Society**

Visit to Azerbaijan, 24-30 July 2016, as guest of **European Azerbaijan Society**; travel and accommodation paid for by the society.

MANZOOR, BARONESS

Visit to Baku, Azerbaijan, 26-31 July 2016, as part of parliamentary delegation to meet political and parliamentary figures including ministers, local Mps (Government and opposition), the British ambassador, public service centres, business representatives and IDP/Refugee camp of displaced people from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh; flights, hotel accommodation and food paid by **European Azerbaijan Society**.

O'CATHAIN, BARONESS (*praised elections as transparent and free*)

Visit to Azerbaijan, 31 October - 2 November 2015, as member of APPG on Azerbaijan and to act as election observer; hospitality provided locally; cost of air fares and hotel met by **Azerbaijan London embassy**.

RISBY, LORD

Visit to Azerbaijan, 12-15 November 2015, as guest of **SOCAR (Azerbaijan's state energy company)** to look at energy issues and export promotion; cost of visit met by SOCAR.

SYMONS OF VERNHAM DEAN, BARONESS

Chairman, **Britain Azerbaijan Business Council**

2014-2015⁴⁵⁴

GERMAN, LORD

Co-Chair, **Anglo-Azerbaijani Society**

Visit with wife to Azerbaijan, 15-21 February 2015, to undertake work on behalf of the **Anglo-Azerbaijani Society**; travel and accommodation costs paid by the Society

KILCLOONEY, LORD

Remunerated employment, office, profession etc.: Member, Advisory Board, **European Azerbaijan Society**

NICHOLSON OF WINTERBOURNE, BARONESS

Directorships: Chairman and Non-executive Board Member, Supervisory Board, **Joint Leasing Company, Azerbaijan** (equipment leasing) (interest ceased 1 April 2015, awaiting formal notification of acceptance of resignation)

TRENCHARD, VISCOUNT

Visit to Azerbaijan, 11 - 14 June 2015, as guest of **SOCAR (Azerbaijan's state energy company)**, to attend opening ceremony of Baku 2015 European Games; cost of visit met by SOCAR.

Visit to Azerbaijan, 6-9 October 2014, as guest of **SOCAR (Azerbaijan's state energy company)** to look at energy security and regional issues; cost of visit met by SOCAR*.

2014⁴⁵⁵

FLIGHT, LORD

Visit to Azerbaijan, 26 May–31 May 2014, as part of a Parliamentary Group to meet with political and parliamentary figures including the President of the Republic, ministers, the British Ambassador, local public service centres, representatives of international organisations, human rights groups and IDP/Refugee camp of displaced people from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh; cost of flights and five nights' hotel accommodation met by **The European Azerbaijan Society**

KILCLOONEY, LORD

Remunerated employment, office, profession etc.: Member, Advisory Board, **European Azerbaijan Society**

⁴⁵⁴ Register of Members' Financial Interests, House of Lords, <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/publications-records/House-of-Lords-Publications/Records-activities-and-membership/Register-of-Lords-Interests/Register150416.pdf>

⁴⁵⁵ Register of Members' Financial Interests, House of Lords, <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/publications-records/House-of-Lords-Publications/Records-activities-and-membership/Register-of-Lords-Interests/Register200215.pdf>

Visit to Baku, Azerbaijan, 26-31 May 2014, to promote improved UK/Azerbaijan relations and experience to freedom of religion by visiting Christian community in Kabala; travel and accommodation paid by **European Azerbaijan Society**.

NICHOLSON OF WINTERBOURNE, BARONESS

Directorships: Chairman and Non-executive Board Member, Supervisory Board, **Joint Leasing Company, Azerbaijan** (equipment leasing).

RISBY, LORD

Visit to Azerbaijan, 6-9 October 2014, as guest of **SOCAR (Azerbaijan's state energy company)** to look at energy security and regional issues; cost of visit met by SOCAR.

SYMONS OF VERNHAM DEAN, BARONESS

Visit to Azerbaijan, 24-26 April 2014, as Chairman of **British Azerbaijan Business Council**; costs of visit met by **Azerbaijan Business Council**.

TRENCHARD, VISCOUNT

Visit to Azerbaijan, 6-9 October 2014, as guest of **SOCAR (Azerbaijan's state energy company)** to look at energy security and regional issues; cost of visit met by SOCAR*.

2013⁴⁵⁶

ADDINGTON, LORD

Visit to Azerbaijan, 30 May - 3 June 2013, to meet ministers and other political leaders, NGOs and business figures; cost of visit met by **European Azerbaijan Society**

GERMAN, LORD

Chairman, **Anglo-Azerbaijani Society**

Visit to Azerbaijan, 8-12 October 2013, to observe Presidential Elections; flights, accommodation and subsistence paid by IPU Branch, **Parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan**.

⁴⁵⁶ Register of Members' Financial Interests, House of Lords, <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/publications-records/House-of-Lords-Publications/Records-activities-and-membership/Register-of-Lords-Interests/Register080514.pdf>

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