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Institute for a Community  
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## **Two Decades of Leadership: President Ilham Aliyev's Policies and Achievements**



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On October 15, 2003, President Ilham Aliyev was elected President of the Republic of Azerbaijan for his term. In two decades, Azerbaijan has stood as a symbol of stability, having restored its territorial integrity and sovereignty and having managed to restore the country's unity, craft, and execute a comprehensive, long-term development plan.



Two decades prior, President Ilham Aliyev demonstrated foresight and set priorities, emphasizing the need for a robust economy, a professional army, and a global presence. This visionary approach became the only path for Azerbaijan to achieve regional leadership and prominence in global politics.

Under President Ilham Aliyev's dynamic leadership, Azerbaijan has achieved numerous milestones in national development, liberation of occupied territories, and national integration over the last two decades. In a historic event on October 15, 2023, President Ilham Aliyev raised the national flag of Azerbaijan in Khankendi, a city in Karabakh that had been under illegal occupation for decades prior to the September 2023 local antiterror measures taken by the brave servicemen of Azerbaijan. President Ilham Aliyev holds profound historical importance and global statesmanship. As the commander-in-chief of a triumphant military that freed the country from occupation, he is responsible for building



a highly advanced army, reinstating the state's territorial integrity, showcasing the resilience of the Azerbaijani people, enhancing the nation's reputation, and bolstering the self-esteem of Azerbaijani society.

### **Visionary Economic and Development Policies**

President Ilham Aliyev's leadership brought about significant achievements, including the initiation of the first State Regional Development Program in 2004, which laid the foundation for the growth of the national economy and marked substantial political decisions in Azerbaijan's history. From 2003 to 2022, Azerbaijan's GDP increased from \$7.3 billion to \$78.7 billion, with state budget expenditures rising from \$705.8 million to \$21.5 billion. In 2003, the average wage was a mere \$45, but by 2022, it had surged to nearly \$500, showcasing unprecedented economic growth.

Several state programs for socio-economic development were initiated, with the objective of diversifying and effectively integrating the country's economy into the global economic system. The elaboration of a new program aimed at achieving these goals, emphasizing the improvement of infrastructure and public services at the same time. The new two initiatives, such as Azerbaijan's Vision 2030 and the Socio-Economic Development Strategy for 2022–2026, are also leading and reshaping Azerbaijan into a thriving, diversified, and resilient economy.

The historical significance of Ilham Aliyev's military-political strategy culminated in the restoration of the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty, notably through the victory in the second Karabakh war in 2020. President's resolution of the long-standing issue in Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur has allowed thousands of displaced individuals and their descendants to return to the newly liberated regions. The "Great Return state program



for the years 2022–2026 is actively restoring numerous settlements, with lands for 52 of these settlements already developed. President Ilham Aliyev personally oversees the revitalization of 29 towns and villages.

Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur are experiencing a remarkable transformation, with rapid progress evident in the construction of airports, the establishment of extensive road networks, and the advancement of railway projects. The region's economic recovery has been greatly accelerated through the commissioning of 12 new power stations and the successful restoration of essential infrastructure.



## **Balanced Foreign Policy**

President Ilham Aliyev's balanced state policy established equitable bilateral and partnership-based relations with all countries. Relations with Russia are grounded in a robust mutual understanding and friendship, experiencing rapid development through mutual state visits that significantly enhance cooperation. A solid platform for interaction in all areas has been achieved through the political will and joint efforts between both nations.



Azerbaijan is also the most reliable dialogue partner of regional organizations, is the guarantor of Europe's energy security, and serves as an island of stability where diverse peoples live in peace. President Ilham Aliyev's role in historic agreements with leading oil companies, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan main export oil pipeline, played a crucial part in integrating Azerbaijan into the world market.

The Zangezur Corridor is expected to promote both regional and national economic development and trade. Functional international airports, the ongoing construction of Lachin Airport, and Azerbaijan's commitment to regional connectivity showcase the country's dedication to maintaining stability and progress in the Caucasus. The implementation of the Zangezur Corridor project, creating direct rail and road links





between Turkey and Azerbaijan, is a crucial step for all countries along the Middle Corridor. The Kars-Nakhchivan railway project, within the framework of this corridor, will connect regional countries.

President Ilham Aliyev's noteworthy chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement from 2019 to 2022, followed by a unanimous extension, demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the fundamental principles and values that navigated the movement through unprecedented challenges, showcasing a proactive and responsible approach to addressing global as well as regional issues.

The upcoming presidential elections in Azerbaijan, scheduled for February 7, 2024, are very significant as the people of Azerbaijan will choose their perspective on leadership. It is hoped that massive numbers of people will turn out to vote to elect leader. Azerbaijan is heading towards a glorious future built on the principles of openness, fairness, and inclusive governance. The upcoming extraordinary presidential election is a transformative moment for the country and the region.

Azerbaijan enriches and develops with continuous social reform packages, with personnel reforms serving as an exceptional complementary factor in making the adopted course highly effective. The effective diplomacy and political will demonstrated by President Ilham Aliyev contribute to the realization of the Zangazur corridor, making it a tangible reality.