



ADA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

MASTER OF ARTS IN DIPLOMACY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

CAPSTONE PROJECT

**Enhancing the role of “Soft Power” in Promoting Azerbaijani Realities through
“Azerbaijani State Diaspora” Organization**

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

We have read ADA University's policy on plagiarism and academic integrity, and hereby certify that, to the best of our knowledge, the content of this capstone project, entitled *Enhancing the Role of "Soft Power" in Promoting Azerbaijani Realities through the "Azerbaijani State Diaspora" Organization*, is entirely our own work and does not contain any unacknowledged material from other sources.

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyze the potential of the Azerbaijani diaspora as a soft power instrument within the contemporary international system. Despite Azerbaijan's ongoing involvement in numerous global initiatives, its soft power strategy remains limited due to institutional fragmentation, dispersed budget priorities, and the continued reliance on outdated programs. Grounded in Joseph Nye's theoretical model of soft power, this research employs qualitative methods—including semi-structured expert interviews and comparative analysis of relevant international practices—to identify systemic shortcomings and formulate actionable policy solutions. The proposed alternatives focus on strategic institutional reforms, financial innovation, and modernization of diaspora engagement mechanisms to enhance Azerbaijan's global influence.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary international relations, the concept of "soft power" is one of the key tools for strengthening a state's position both regionally and globally. In the context of multipolarity and globalization, countries find themselves in a state of interdependence, which expands their opportunities to assert themselves and actively participate in international processes.

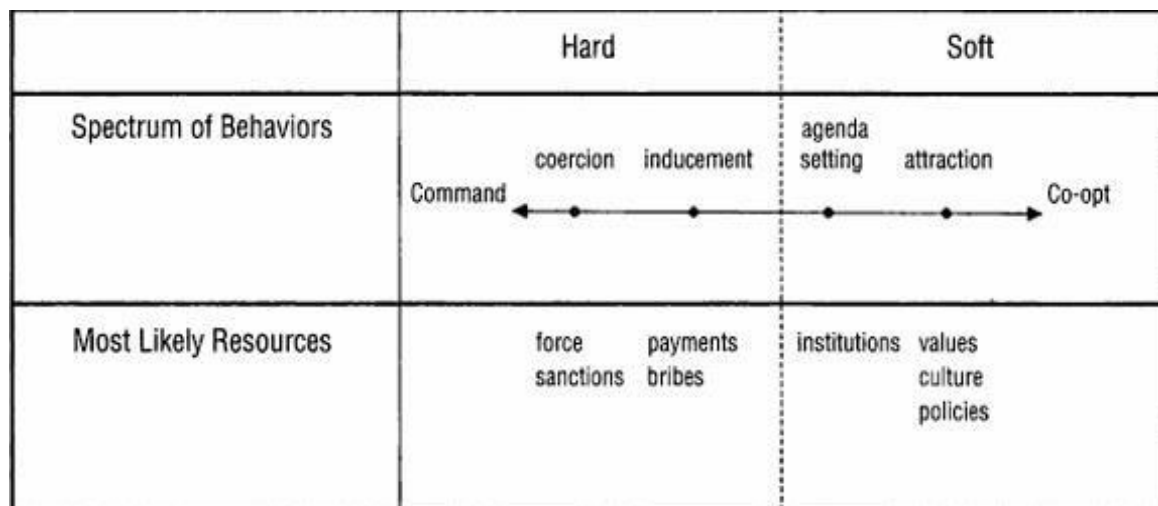
The concept of "soft power" was formulated by Joseph Nye, who defined it as the ability to influence others and achieve desired outcomes through attraction and persuasion, rather than coercion or payment, as in the case of "hard power" (Nye, 2004). Although this term was introduced into academic discourse in 1990, historically, empires such as the Roman and Greek empires already utilized elements of "soft power" by spreading their influence through culture and architecture. Similar examples can be observed in China's policy of establishing Confucius Institutes worldwide, the United States with its concept of the "American Dream," and the United Kingdom, which promotes the English language and educational institutions such as Cambridge and Oxford, attracting students from around the globe.

Joseph Nye identified three key resources for promoting a state's image through "soft power": culture, political values and ideology, and foreign policy. Culture and traditions play a significant role in shaping a state's identity, demonstrating its values and way of life (Nye, 2004). According to Nye, political institutions can also attract other countries if they are based on democratic principles, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights. However, this thesis is not always justified, as countries that do not conform to Western democratic standards, such as China, South Korea, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, effectively apply the concept of "soft power" to expand their influence. For example, while the United States promotes democratic values, it faces the challenge of a

discrepancy between its stated principles and its actual foreign policy practices, which negatively impacts its international image (e.g., the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan).

The third resource — foreign policy — also plays a crucial role. A state’s priorities and strategies in international relations determine how it is perceived abroad. For instance, Russia’s foreign policy following the start of the war in Ukraine is viewed as aggressive (Rumer, 2023), whereas Switzerland is traditionally perceived as a neutral mediator (Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

Figure 1.



Source: Nye, J. S., Jr. (2004). Soft power: The means to success in world politics. Public Affairs.

Since gaining independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has actively developed its "soft power" strategy on the international stage. Due to its geopolitical position, the country seeks to strengthen its status as a "bridge" between East and West, as well as a center of tolerance and innovation (Qafarlı, 2020). The use of "soft power" tools allows Azerbaijan to overcome stereotypes associated with regional conflicts, particularly the Karabakh issue, and to shape a positive international image.

Azerbaijan places particular emphasis on developing "soft power" in the fields of education, culture, and the organization of international events. Examples of such initiatives include hosting the Eurovision Song Contest (2012), the European Games (2015), the Islamic Solidarity Games (2017), and the upcoming chairmanship of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP29). Additionally, educational programs such as Erasmus+ and state-sponsored initiatives promote academic exchange. Notably, ADA University attracts international students, contributing to the country's integration into the global educational space.

As a young nation, Azerbaijan continues to use cultural tools to overcome existing stereotypes. Among the most common perceptions are the view of the country solely as an energy exporter, the focus on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and the image of Azerbaijan as an "exotic Eastern" country with traditions of carpet weaving, mugham music, and tea culture. Such clichés limit opportunities for international cooperation. However, modern architecture in Baku, technological development, and the country's active participation in global initiatives contribute to the formation of a new image of Azerbaijan as a dynamically developing state with an independent foreign policy and integration into European structures.

In the 21st century, "soft power" tools have significantly expanded due to technological advancements, social media, and mass communication, providing new momentum to public diplomacy. The term "public diplomacy" itself implies international interaction in which civilians of one country use lawful means to engage with civilians of another country (University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy, n.d). In this context, diaspora communities, which primarily consist of civilians, also play an important role in advancing a state's interests abroad through public diplomacy.

The Azerbaijani diaspora serves as a vital bridge between Azerbaijan and the world, fostering cultural exchange and strengthening international ties. According to various estimates, the Azerbaijani diaspora outside Azerbaijan numbers between 30 and 50 million people (State Committee on Work with Diaspora of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2025). Significant communities are in Russia, Turkey, Iran, the United States, Germany, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Canada, and other CIS countries. Theoretically, such many Azerbaijanis, which exceeds the population of the republic itself, should serve as a primary agent of public diplomacy, acting as a key instrument of soft power to promote Azerbaijan's interests within the societies where they have settled. Undoubtedly, there have been notable successes in this regard, such as the promotion of Azerbaijani culture, history, and traditions through festivals, exhibitions, concerts, and other events. Members of the diaspora also frequently act as intermediaries for investments and business projects between Azerbaijan and their host countries. The diaspora in Europe and the United States has contributed to the promotion of Azerbaijani products (e.g., wine, tea, carpets) in international markets. For instance, Azerbaijani wines are exported to Russia, Europe, and the United States with the support of the diaspora. Lobbying for Azerbaijan's interests is also a key priority for the diaspora. Diaspora members participate in the political life of their host countries, advocating for Azerbaijan's interests at both local and national government levels. Azerbaijani organizations, such as the Assembly of Azerbaijani Americans (AAA), have actively lobbied for the adoption of resolutions at the state level. They have organized meetings with legislators, conducted educational campaigns, and drawn attention to significant events through media channels. As a result, the Khojaly genocide has been recognized and condemned by 24 U.S. states (President of Azerbaijan, 2022).

However, despite these significant achievements, systemic challenges persist in the activities of the diaspora, which underscore the relevance of this research. In other words, when examining public diplomacy and analyzing the perception of Azerbaijani realities in the public consciousness of foreign citizens, certain "blind spots" become apparent. Unfortunately, some tenets of Azerbaijan's foreign policy face stereotypical and biased interpretations by foreign powers. This pressure is compounded by the ongoing activism of the Armenian diaspora, which seeks to distort Azerbaijan's key narratives through its well-established and influential network of public organizations. This situation is a distinctive feature of the Azerbaijani diaspora, which operates in a highly adversarial environment where every interest must be defended and communicated to its audience under significant pressure. Therefore, when examining each variable of this research, we encounter resistance that hinders the intended direction.

Returning to Joseph Nye's theory, which identifies three key dimensions of soft power, it is worth noting that, from a methodological perspective, the national diaspora needs to reform and refine each of these dimensions. There are significant obstacles that slow the promotion of the country's image in cultural, value-based, and foreign policy dimensions.

First, the work of the diaspora is often fragmented, which reduces its effectiveness. There is a lack of coordination between various organizations and across different countries (Kocaman & Uslu, 2013). The absence of a unified body that could serve as a hub for disparate organizations negatively impacts the development of a cohesive strategy and the coordination of actions in the face of global challenges. There are examples of diasporas that have successfully overcome the issue of fragmentation and established effective coordination mechanisms. One of the most notable examples is the Jewish diaspora, which has built a powerful and well-coordinated system of interaction

between various organizations and countries. The Jewish diaspora has several key organizations that coordinate the activities of communities worldwide. For instance, the World Jewish Congress (WJC) unites Jewish communities in over 100 countries (World Jewish Congress, 2025). The Jewish diaspora has developed common goals, such as supporting Israel, combating anti-Semitism, and preserving Jewish identity. These goals unite communities across the globe. The Jewish diaspora demonstrates that even in the context of global fragmentation, it is possible to create an effective coordination system.

Second, many diaspora organizations face a lack of funding and resources to implement large-scale projects. Lobbying comes at a cost, and while Azerbaijani lobbyists successfully promote their interests at the highest levels of the establishment, funding at lower levels is often limited (Freeman & DerSimonian, 2023). The influence of public opinion among ordinary citizens should not be underestimated, as it is primarily through this that a country's public image is formed. Politicians may make decisions in favor of the republic's interests, but the benefits ultimately remain at the level of high politics. Typically, society remains apolitical on these issues, and soft power must fill this vacuum.

Finally, the next problem stems from the second issue: due to limited funding, the diaspora lags in the use of digital technologies. The diaspora does not always effectively utilize social media and digital platforms to promote its initiatives. Digital technologies are crucial for diasporas, as they help overcome geographical dispersion, strengthen ties with the homeland, and preserve cultural identity. Through social media, online events, and educational projects, young people can learn about the culture, traditions, and history of their ancestral homeland, broadening their horizons and fostering tolerance. In certain segments, the Azerbaijani diaspora falls behind global trends, thereby losing a potential advantage.

1.2. Methodology

The objectives of this research are addressed as follows: 1) identify the factors contributing to the inefficiency of the diaspora in implementing soft power policies 2) provide policy alternatives to enhance the effectiveness of diaspora organizations.

The project gathered primary data through qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Three field experts were interviewed to provide insights for developing the project's policy alternatives. These interviews served as the primary data source. Three experts related to the field were interviewed in order 11 to gain insight into the formulation of this project's policy alternatives. These interviews served as the project's primary data. Interviews were conducted in person and online via Zoom after obtaining their verbal consent. All interviews were conducted in English with an average time duration of 60 minutes. They were audio-recorded and transcribed for coding and analysis. For interviews wherein the interviewee declined to be audio recorded, a note taker was assigned. The project employed a content analysis. All interviewees were asked the following questions:

1. What are the key factors limiting the effectiveness of the Azerbaijani diaspora, including in public diplomacy? What is the systemic flaw behind all this?
2. In which countries should the Azerbaijani state, through its diaspora, strengthen its effectiveness in the field of public diplomacy, where it is currently weak or almost nonexistent?
3. How can the attractiveness of Azerbaijani educational programs for foreign students be improved? What steps are necessary to compensate for the loss of Erasmus+ programs?
4. Which areas of activity require increased funding to achieve greater effectiveness?

5. How do you assess the effectiveness of the Azerbaijani diaspora's participation in promoting national interests through modern media platforms? Can this tool be considered key to overcoming the stereotypical perception of Azerbaijan as a "post-Soviet country" and to forming a more multifaceted image of the state?

Reliability and Validity Assessment

To ensure face validity, the interview questions were reviewed by the project's academic supervisor. A pre-test was also conducted with representatives of the Diaspora to assess whether the questions accurately addressed the identified issues. The use of a semi-structured questionnaire, where the questions were administered in a specific manner, ensured interviewer reliability. Inter-rater reliability was achieved through the degree of agreement among the project team members during the data coding process. This was done to prevent data falsification and fabrication, biased reporting, and data omission.

The interview participants were experts in the field of international relations. One of them is an academic specializing in public administration. Another is a Member of the Milli Majlis (National Assembly) of the Republic of Azerbaijan and a member of the Center for Analysis of International Relations. The third expert is also a Member of the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Vice-Rector of the Diplomatic Academy.

Secondary data was obtained through a review of existing literature related to the project. Another approach involves analyzing case studies of other diaspora organizations and countries that effectively utilize elements of soft power abroad, thereby advancing their national interests. This approach will help identify the methods and strategies that have led to the success of other diasporas, which could ultimately be adapted to the Azerbaijani context.

The paper comprises five chapters addressing different facets of the policy problems. Chapter 1 presents a theoretical and conceptual background to the problem

along with a description of the outline of the policy paper. Chapter 2 goes into problem description, details of the identified causes of the problem, analysis of current and/or past policy measures. Chapter 3 provides policy alternatives that address the causes as identified in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 is an evaluation of the policy alternatives and Chapter 5 brings together the findings of the paper along with policy recommendations. The conclusion part includes selecting the policy that is deemed suitable for addressing the policy problem.

CHAPTER 2. PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

This chapter examines the limitations in Azerbaijan's soft power strategy, specifically focusing on two interconnected pillars: education and cultural diplomacy. While the country has achieved commendable progress in its military and infrastructural development, its capacity to influence international perception through ideational means remains underdeveloped. Educational exchange and cultural representation- recognized globally as vital soft power instruments- remain inconsistently implemented and underfunded. The following sections analyze structural shortcomings in these domains and propose areas for strategic reinforcement.

2.1. Gaps in Higher Education and Cultural Diplomacy: A Dual Deficit

As Nye (2004) asserts, cultural and educational programs represent key domains through which soft power is exercised. This aligns with Althusser's (2001) conceptualization of the ideological state apparatus, which disseminates state power not through coercion and violence, but predominantly through ideology embedded in social artifacts. This subsection contends that despite Azerbaijan having attained substantial superiority in military capabilities in recent years, significant gaps remain in the implementation of fundamental soft power mechanisms. In other words, various organizations lack a coordinated and well-structured strategy to promote Azerbaijan effectively among foreign audiences.

2.1.1. Structural Deficits in the Higher Education Sector

Higher education plays a central role in fostering people- to- people connectivity and projecting a nation's intellectual capital abroad. Gauttam et al. (2023) identify several facets through which education contributes to soft power: internationalizing universities, leveraging prestigious institutions and quality programs, promoting cross border student mobility, aligning educational initiatives with foreign policy goals, and

ensuring positive experience for foreign students. However, Azerbaijan's educational outreach remains limited in scope and depth.

One major gap is the inadequate international appeal of Azerbaijan's universities. Although the 'Study in Azerbaijan' portal reports that there are currently 9,500 international students from 110 countries enrolled in Azerbaijani institutions (Study in Azerbaijan, 2025), this figure lags significantly behind regional peers. For example, Georgia hosted 25,000 international students in 2023, nearly double the number from two years prior (Waruru, 2023). This disparity cannot be attributed to education quality alone. Lower living costs, a more secular and culturally diverse environment, and a wider range of scholarships also likely influence Georgia's attractiveness. These confounding factors underscore the need for a multidimensional strategy.

In this regard, one of the key areas that Azerbaijan should prioritize is education, particularly the promotion of study programs in Azerbaijan. Importantly, the global prominence and influence of the Armenian and Jewish diasporas highlight how education can serve as a foundational mechanism for national image-building and long-term soft power. In both Armenia and Israel, education has historically been intertwined with national resilience, cultural preservation, and diaspora engagement. The strength of the Jewish diaspora, for instance, is closely linked to Israel's investment in elite educational institutions, global academic partnerships, and the cultivation of a knowledge-based economy. Similarly, Armenia, despite its limited geopolitical power, maintains strong diaspora ties through cultural and educational exchanges, academic mobility, and identity-building programs such as diaspora youth summer schools and scholarships. These examples suggest that education is not merely a domestic policy issue but a key channel through which diasporas remain connected and actively engaged in state development and international advocacy. Azerbaijan, by contrast, has yet to fully mobilize its diaspora or

elevate its academic institutions to similar levels of influence. By strengthening its educational system and making it more internationally attractive, Azerbaijan can create a virtuous cycle of global academic engagement, diaspora involvement, and positive image projection.

Yasushi and McConnell (2008) argue that one of the primary drivers of the profound transformation in East Asia over recent decades has been the strategic utilization of education as an instrument of soft power. Countries such as South Korea and Singapore deliberately leveraged their educational institutions as instruments of international influence, integrating education into foreign policy. Azerbaijan can adopt a similar strategy by linking educational outreach outreach to soft power objectives, thus positioning itself as a hub for cultural exchange and academic diplomacy in the region.

Furthermore, Azerbaijan is anticipating the termination of Erasmus+ exchange programs, which have played a crucial role in promoting the country by facilitating both incoming and outgoing student exchanges (Razmadze, 2025). Given the lack of newly registered projects and the suspension of active ones, Azerbaijan risks losing a significant portion of its human capital that could have contributed to the country's international image. In addition to the discontinuation of pivotal international programs, another challenge pertains to the language of instruction. Specifically, there are a limited number of higher education programs in Azerbaijan delivered in English, with the majority being taught in Azerbaijani, which deters prospective international students. Although the 'Study in Azerbaijan' portal mentions the existence of twenty dual-degree programs in collaboration with leading universities, offered in four languages across fifty public and private higher education institutions, it does not specify the exact number of programs conducted in English.

Education offers Azerbaijan a promising avenue for soft power development- it can build lasting people- to – people bond and enhance the country’s image abroad. Educational initiatives have power to put the country on map for foreign students but has yet to match the scale of neighboring competitors due to fewer programs and incentives. The closure of Erasmus plus cooperation with the EU is a serious setback that diminishes academic exchange and international visibility.

To strengthen its soft power through education, Azerbaijan will need to address these challenges by investing in internationalization- for instance, reinstating exchange programs, offering courses in globally spoken languages, and raising university standards. As Gauttam et al. (2023) note, harnessing education as a soft power resource requires certain essential conditions. It will support Azerbaijan to better leverage its youth and academia to project influence. Without such improvements, its educational diplomacy will remain under- realized, yielding only a fraction of its potential benefit to the country’s international standing.

2.1.2. Institutional Limitations in the Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy the exchange of ideas, art, heritage, and values- is another cornerstone of Azerbaijan’s soft power strategy. In the past decade, Azerbaijan has made notable efforts to showcase its culture globally, from hosting large scale events (Eurovision Song Contest 2012, European Games Baku2015, Islamic Solidarity Games 2017) to sponsoring cultural exhibitions and festival abroad. The country’s rich heritage, including Mugham music and carpet weaving, has been leveraged as a means to brand Azerbaijan as a unique bridge between East and West. Another essential initiative for enhancing Azerbaijan’s soft power is the execution of cultural programs. Indeed, data indicate that over the past decade, funding for social and cultural activities has exhibited an increasing trend. According to information from the State Statistics Committee, the

Azerbaijani government's expenditure on social and cultural activities amounted to 10,866.990 AZN in 2024, reflecting an increase from 10,591.820 AZN in 2023 (Azerbaijan Government Expenditure, 2023). However, a comparative analysis with Georgia reveals that local authorities there allocate approximately 30% of total state expenditure to cultural programs (Gunia-Kucnetsova, 2022). Given that a significant proportion of Azerbaijan's budget is dedicated to military and security expenses, it would be prudent to allocate greater resources to cultural initiatives.

Cultural programs implemented abroad also suffer from inadequate coordination and infrequent execution. While it is challenging to provide precise numerical data on this matter, an analysis of cultural reports in leading magazines and newspapers suggests that Azerbaijani artists participate in fewer than ten global cultural performances annually. Although Azerbaijani cultural days are organized internationally, they are limited in geographic scope, and for Azerbaijan to increase global awareness, these geographical constraints should be eliminated. Furthermore, the absence of a dedicated institutional framework for cultural diplomacy, coupled with a lack of systematic state-led efforts, constitutes a major challenge in leveraging Azerbaijan's soft power.

One measure of a nation's commitment to cultural diplomacy is its funding for cultural institutes, cultural centres. By comparison, the British Council has established a global cultural network over the past ninety years, maintaining more than 200 offices in over 100 countries. It systematically promotes the international dissemination of British culture by integrating artists into global festivals, exhibitions, and educational initiatives. Moreover, the British Council ensures that British cultural content is widely accessible on streaming services, digital libraries, and international cultural platforms (British Council, n.d.). In contrast, Azerbaijani culture remains largely underrepresented on global digital platforms, restricting the ability of the diaspora to effectively promote national cultural

assets. Cultural projects often rely on one-off allocations or sponsorship (for instance, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation sponsoring exhibitions in Europe), rather than a stable state-funded program. This means Azerbaijan's cultural diplomacy can appear sporadic – high-profile events are organized (often lavishly), but long-term engagement (through cultural centres, language institutes, regular tours) is lacking. The result is that neighbours like Turkey clearly outspend and out-organize Azerbaijan in this domain, leading to a more pervasive influence of Turkish culture (TV series, music, cuisine) in many parts of the world than that of Azerbaijani culture. In summary, Azerbaijan's financial commitment to cultural diplomacy, while not negligible, is not on par with regional peers who view cultural outreach as a strategic priority. Without increasing and steadying its investment – for example, by endowing a Cultural Diplomacy fund or establishing Azerbaijani cultural institutes in key countries- Baku may find its soft power overshadowed by others in the region. The Creative Economy and Cultural Soft Power- in navigating the future of cultural diplomacy, Azerbaijan may find strategic value in embracing the concept of the creative economy. The creative economy refers to the sector of economy that trades in creative, artistic, and cultural goods and services- from film and music to design, digital content, and the arts. It's increasingly seen as not just an economic driver but as a soft power asset, as creative industries often carry a country's culture and values across borders. British expert John Newbiggin (2020), one of the pioneers of this concept, emphasizes that creativity is to the 21st century what oil was to the 20th- a crucial engine of growth, except that creativity is a renewable resource that actually increases with use (this perspective suggests that investing in its cultural and creative industries could pay dividends in influence). Azerbaijan has initiated steps in this direction, participating in UNESCO's Creative Creative Cities Network (with Sheki recognized for its crafts and folk art) and hosting creative economy conferences (UNESCO, 2023). Learning from

John Newbiggin's insights, Azerbaijan could formulate policies to train creative talent, encourage cultural start-ups, and protect intellectual property – all of which can stimulate production of cultural content for export.

Interestingly, to enhance global awareness of Azerbaijani culture, the State Tourism Agency has recently launched a strategy that involves organizing familiarization trips for foreign journalists, bloggers, and tourism companies (Caig, Newbiggin, & Zeff, 2021). Although this initiative has facilitated visits by 212 individuals from nine countries, an examination of participant demographics reveals that most journalists originate from a limited post-Soviet sphere, primarily Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus. Consequently, broadening the geographical diversity of such initiatives would be advisable for strengthening Azerbaijan's cultural outreach and global visibility. In sum, Azerbaijan's soft power projection is impeded by significant shortcomings in its educational and cultural diplomacy. The country has demonstrated the potential to compete regionally, yet its current efforts are fragmented, underfunded, and inadequately institutionalized. To address this, Azerbaijan must invest strategically in both higher education and cultural infrastructure. By expanding its investments, building institutional capacity (perhaps a dedicated cultural diplomacy agency), embracing digital outreach, and fostering its creative industries, Azerbaijan can more effectively translate its rich culture into lasting soft power. As with education, the cultural sphere shows that soft power must be earned and maintained through consistent, genuine engagement- a lesson Azerbaijan is gradually internalizing as it seeks to enhance its influence on the global stage.

2.2 Causes of Budgetary constraints in State and Private Funding.

As noted in the previous section, the significance of the diaspora as an instrument of soft power in public diplomacy should not be underestimated. A well-organized diaspora, supported by sufficient funding, can effectively promote the national interests of the state while also contributing to the formation of a positive international image. Given the historically strong and influential Armenian diaspora, it is particularly important for Azerbaijan to maintain an active and engaged diaspora that, with adequate financial resources, can successfully fulfill its objectives. Based on the analysis of annual reports detailing the activities of the Committee for Work with the Diaspora, as well as the organization's annual budget data, it can be concluded that financial investments in diaspora-related activities contribute to the consolidation and expansion of media presence, thereby positively influencing the attainment of strategic objectives.

A notable example of a state effectively leveraging its diaspora for foreign policy purposes is Israel, which allocates substantial financial resources to strengthen its ties with expatriates. The Israeli diaspora serves as a powerful lobbying tool, shaping favorable policies for the state (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006). For instance, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the largest Israeli association in the United States, plays a key role in influencing U.S. policy decisions in support of Israel (AIPAC, n. d.). To further strengthen connections with the homeland, the Israeli government co-finances various grant programs, such as Birthright Israel, which fosters a sense of unity among the diaspora. In 2024, approximately \$3.6 million was allocated to support Jewish communities in North America (JCC Association, 2024).

From an economic perspective, financial investments in diaspora engagement and the establishment of strong connections with expatriates can yield significant economic benefits. Remittances and diaspora investments contribute to national economic growth.

India, which has the world's largest diaspora of 28 million people, receives substantial financial inflows from its overseas population, providing a boost to its economy. According to the World Bank, remittance flows to India amounted to \$69 billion in 2015, and in recent years, this figure has increased to \$100 billion (Shamsu, 2023). Additionally, both Israel and India have issued diaspora bonds, attracting over \$35 billion in investments from their respective diasporas. (Ketkar, 2010)

Remittances also play a vital role in Azerbaijan's economy, influencing household incomes and financial inclusion. Over the past few years, the share of remittances in Azerbaijan's GDP has grown significantly. In 2021, remittances accounted for 2.8% of the country's GDP, amounting to approximately \$1.5 billion. By 2022, this figure had risen to 4.5–6%, reaching \$3.5–3.9 billion. This surge was primarily driven by increased transfers from Russia following the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, positioning Azerbaijan as one of the leading recipients of remittances in the region. The main sources of remittance inflows to Azerbaijan include Russia (which accounted for 57% of total transfers in 2021), the United States, Turkey, and various European countries (International Organization of Migration, 2022).

The funding of the State Committee for Work with the Diaspora is primarily derived from two sources: the state budget and the Fund for Support of the Azerbaijani Diaspora (Regulation on the State Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan for Work with the Diaspora, 2009, Article 5., ADSF). Financing diaspora-related initiatives is a strategically important effort that strengthens economic ties, preserves national identity, and advances Azerbaijan's international interests. Supporting diaspora organizations, cultural institutions, and educational programs not only fosters unity among Azerbaijanis abroad but also leverages their potential for national development.

2.2.1. State-Funded initiatives for Diaspora Engagement

The activities of the State Committee for Work with the Diaspora are primarily financed through the state budget, as reflected in the regulatory provisions of this institution. Despite a significantly limited budget, the State Committee implements a wide range of initiatives aimed at enhancing and developing interaction with the Azerbaijani diaspora abroad. The primary objectives of these initiatives are the consolidation of the Azerbaijani diaspora and the improvement of practices for engaging with its representatives residing in various countries (State Committee on Work with Diaspora, n. d.).

A notable example of such initiatives is the World Congress of Azerbaijanis, held in 2022 in the city of Shusha. This event gained particular symbolic and practical significance due to its location and scale, attracting approximately 400 diaspora representatives from 65 countries. Following Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Karabakh War, the event was named the "Victory Congress". (State Committee on Work with Diaspora, 2022)

The State Committee places special emphasis on youth engagement, organizing annual youth camps since 2018. The fifth such youth camp was held in 2023 under the slogan "Youth for Green World," gathering 115 young participants, including compatriots from abroad and representatives of friendly nations (State Committee on Work with Diaspora, 2023). This interaction format is comparable to internationally recognized programs such as Armenia's "Ari Tun" and Israel's "Birthright," designed to familiarize young generations of compatriots abroad with the culture and history of their ancestral homeland. However, Azerbaijan's financial investments in similar activities are notably more modest.

Additionally, annual commemorative events dedicated to tragic historical dates, such as the "20th of January" and the "Khojaly Genocide," are regularly organized. Following the Second Karabakh War, there has been a significant increase in events aimed at preserving historical memory and promoting the country's historical achievements. Furthermore, the network of Azerbaijani cultural centers and houses is actively expanding in the Baltic states, the Netherlands, and several other countries. Specialized educational forums and meetings of Azerbaijani specialists living abroad are also organized regularly.

Nevertheless, despite these efforts, the current level of funding appears substantially disproportionate relative to the total size of the Azerbaijani diaspora, estimated at 30-50 million people.

Between 2020 and 2023, the total budget of the Committee amounted to 14.5 million azn (8.5 million USD). In 2020, 2.8 million azn were allocated for its activities, and by 2023, this amount increased to 4.8 million azn ("On the State Budget of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2020," "On the State Budget of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2023", 2019, 2022). According to the state budget for 2025, funding for the organization will reach 4.9 million azn ("On the State Budget of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2025", 2024). Despite the twofold increase in budget allocations between 2020 and 2023, this growth has not resulted in a proportional expansion of events or the number of participants reached. Considering the estimated size of the Azerbaijani diaspora — ranging from 30 to 50 million people — the budget of 2.8 million USD appears inadequate for implementing an effective engagement policy with compatriots abroad.

For a comparative perspective, it is useful to examine countries that actively utilize their diaspora as a tool of public diplomacy. For instance, Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs receives an annual budget of 250 million shekels (approximately 70

million USD) (Klein, 2023). This funding enables the implementation of large-scale programs such as Birthright Israel, which provides Jewish youth with the opportunity to visit their historical homeland. Additionally, Israel supports educational initiatives abroad, invests in combating anti-Semitism, and develops other strategic projects (Birthright Israel, n. d.). Similarly, Turkey's Directorate for Turks Abroad allocates tens of millions of dollars to diaspora-related activities, including grants for establishing cultural centers and supporting youth exchange programs (Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, 2022).

Although official statements, such as the "State Program on Work with the Azerbaijani Diaspora (2021–2025)," emphasize the importance of diaspora engagement, in practice, this area receives relatively limited funding compared to core strategic sectors like defense. Given the geopolitical context of Azerbaijan, where security concerns are paramount, the prioritization of defense spending over diaspora initiatives can be considered a normal and rational aspect of state policy. Unlike Israel and Armenia, where diaspora engagement plays a central role in diplomacy, Azerbaijan's approach remains constrained.

Another major issue is the absence of a long-term financing strategy for diaspora-related initiatives. While Israel implements large-scale, multi-year programs like Birthright Israel, which ensure the sustainable development of diaspora relations, Azerbaijan primarily relies on one-time initiatives. This approach does not provide a stable foundation for increasing funding or improving the overall effectiveness of diaspora engagement.

Therefore, to enhance the effectiveness of the state's diaspora policy, it is essential to develop a long-term strategy that includes systematic funding and the implementation of large-scale programs aimed at strengthening ties with Azerbaijanis abroad.

It would also be important to use Data envelope analysis to check the effectiveness of using the budget allocated for work with the diaspora. The Data Envelope Analysis (DEA) method allows you to evaluate the effectiveness of the Committee’s work by analyzing how budget changes relate to performance. For this purpose, budget allocations and the number of events held in recent years have been reviewed:

Figure 2. Budget Allocations and Number of Diaspora Events (2020–2023)

Budget Allocations and Number of Diaspora Events (2020–2023)

Year	Budget (million manat)	Number of events
2020	2.8	650
2021	2.9	630
2022	3.9	266
2023	4.8	213

(Source: Annual reports of the State Committee for Work with the Diaspora, 2020-2023)

Based on the above data, it can be concluded that with a small budget, a huge number of events were carried out in 2020-2021. In 2022-2023, despite the budget increase, the number of events has more than doubled. The calculation of efficiency (the number of events per 1 million manat) shows that the maximum efficiency was in 2020:

$$\text{Efficiency}_i = \frac{\left(\frac{\text{Output}_i}{\text{Input}_i} \right)}{\max_j \left(\frac{\text{Output}_j}{\text{Input}_j} \right)}$$

In DEA, efficiency (Efa) of a specific decision-making unit (DMUa) under analysis is defined as the ratio between a weighted sum of its s outputs Yra and a

weighted sum of its m inputs Xia, a natural extension of the concept of efficiency used in the fields of physics and engineering (Jorge Santos, Rosario Negas, and Cavique Santos, n. d.).

2020: 232.14 events per 1 million manat (100%)

2021: 224.14 (97%)

2022: 68.20 (29%)

2023: 44.38 (19%)

Thus, the efficiency of budget spending has decreased by more than 5 times compared to 2020.

Compared to countries such as Israel and Turkey, where diaspora engagement is a central element of state policy with substantial financial backing, Azerbaijan's budget remains insufficient to develop long-term sustainable programs. The lack of strategic financial planning limited external investment, and insufficient lobbying efforts within the country further constrain the Committee's ability to effectively engage with the diaspora.

2.2.2. Constraints on Private Investment in the Azerbaijani Diaspora Support Fund

Since 2018, by order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijani Diaspora Support Fund (ADSF) has begun its operations (ADSF, 2018). The objectives set for the Fund cover a wide range of tasks, including protecting the rights of Azerbaijanis living abroad, preserving national and cultural values, and developing lobbying activities (ADSF, 2018). In its initial years, the Fund actively implemented various programs in educational, humanitarian, cultural, and legal fields. Specifically, the ADSF supported the publication of books and journals, the production of documentaries about Azerbaijan, and the organization of events aimed at popularizing Azerbaijani music internationally. Such projects contribute significantly to consolidating Azerbaijanis and

strengthening ties with compatriots living abroad. Additionally, the ADSF actively provided humanitarian assistance to Azerbaijanis affected by the earthquake in Turkey and facilitated the repatriation of the remains of 21 Azerbaijanis (Hasanli, 2024).

The primary funding sources for the ADSF are government funds and private investments. In 2023, the Fund's revenue totaled 2.4 million manats, with expenditures of 2.06 million manats, nearly double the figures of 2022. Revenue growth of 120% and expenditure growth of 91.5% indicate an expansion of the Fund's activities. As of January 1, 2024, the financial assets of the ADSF reached 3.9 million manats, liabilities amounted to 500,000 manats, and equity totaled 3.4 million manats (Sadiqov, 2024). These figures reflect a relatively stable economic position; however, the current budget is clearly insufficient for effective interaction with a diaspora numbering between 30 to 50 million Azerbaijanis residing outside their historical homeland.

According to Fuad Mammadov, Chairman of the State Committee on Work with the Diaspora, the Fund annually finances between 50 and 80 diaspora organization projects across various fields, with average funding per project ranging from 25,000 to 40,000 azn (Hasanli, 2024). Despite the absence of critical budget issues (the deficit in 2022 was only 7,000 manats, and a slight surplus occurred in 2023), the limited budget restricts opportunities for extensive and long-term support of diaspora initiatives. Consequently, many promising projects either receive minimal grants or remain entirely unfunded.

The threefold increase in the Fund's liabilities in 2023 indicates potential risks related to meeting financial obligations in a timely manner. Compared to international counterparts, the ADSF budget is significantly smaller. For instance, Russia's "Compatriots" Fund has a budget of 365 million rubles, while the JCC Association of

North America, collaborating with Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, manages assets of approximately 7 million dollars. (JCC Association of North America, 2024)

Therefore, the primary challenge facing the Azerbaijani Diaspora Support Fund is its limited budget, significantly impacting the effectiveness of its operations and constraining its ability to support substantial, long-term diaspora initiatives.

2.3. Barriers to the Use of Media Tools in the Implementation of “Public Diplomacy”

In the era of digital communications and globalization, traditional media and social media have become critical to advancing national interests on the global stage. Today, states are actively involving their diasporas in the processes of public diplomacy, using their potential to create a positive image and defend their own positions. It is through the media and digital platforms that diasporas can quickly communicate alternative narratives, establish a dialogue with an international audience, and effectively influence public opinion abroad (McClory, 2019). Thus, the competent and active use of media tools becomes a key factor in the implementation of the country's foreign policy objectives, allowing the diaspora to play the role of not only a cultural mediator, but also a significant player in the global information space.

2.3.1. Printed Media

The topics covered in the diaspora print media cover the history and culture of Azerbaijan, national traditions, achievements in art and science, as well as current socio-political issues. A special place is occupied by materials devoted to tragic pages and heroic episodes of history, for example, the events of the Karabakh conflict. Diasporic publications strive to "spread truthful information" about the country and its people, countering distortions. Thus, the materials often explain Azerbaijan's position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, tell the truth about the Khojaly tragedy, and publish articles

about tolerance and cultural diversity in Azerbaijan (State Committee on Work with Diaspora, 2023). Such appeals and press releases of the Diaspora to foreign officials are an important way to convey the Azerbaijani point of view through traditional channels.

The Azerbaijani diaspora has created a wide range of print media abroad, from newspapers to magazines. For example, in the USA there is the newspaper “Azerbaijani Review” (founded in New York in 2007), which continuously publishes materials about Azerbaijan and the life of Azerbaijanis in America (AzerTac, 2007). The authoritative English–language publication is Azerbaijan International, an independent social and literary magazine founded back in 1993. and it comes out about four times a year. This magazine publishes ~100-page issues in English (partly in Azerbaijani) and is aimed at an international audience in business circles, diplomacy and science (Azerbaijan International., n.d.). In addition, with the support of diasporan structures, high-quality magazines for foreign audiences were produced, such as “Visions of Azerbaijan”, which was distributed in Europe and published articles on the history, culture and foreign policy of Azerbaijan. (Visions of Azerbaijan, n.d.)

The Azerbaijani diaspora is trying to publish materials in the languages of their countries of residence in order to increase coverage. Depending on the audience, the content is published not only in Azerbaijani, but also in English, Russian, French and other languages. However, the distribution of printed products is often limited by resources. The circulation of Diaspora newspapers is relatively small and is distributed mainly among the Azerbaijani communities themselves or through embassies. In some cases, publications are sent by subscription to interested parties (scientists, politicians, libraries). Russian Russian coverage problems are also related to the language barrier: for example, many Azerbaijani newspapers are published in Russia, but the younger generation of migrants who do not speak Russian well do not read them. These new

"waves" of the Diaspora prefer materials in Azerbaijani, but the latter, in turn, do not always pay enough attention to their integration problems. In addition, some diasporic media faced difficulties – a number of community information sites stopped updating. It is noted that some official websites of the diaspora abroad have not been updated for 5-10 years due to technical and financial reasons, which negatively affected the audience. Thus, the main print audience is active members of middle – and older-generation communities, for whom a newspaper in their native language or in the language of their country of residence remains a familiar source of news.

From the point of view of influencing the international information environment, the traditional print channels of the diaspora work more as local mouthpieces than as mass media. Their effectiveness on a global scale is limited: foreign newspapers of the diaspora are read mainly by Azerbaijanis themselves and a narrow circle of interested people.

2.3.2 Digital Media (Social and Blog Channels)

In the contemporary digital era, the Azerbaijani diaspora and relevant governmental bodies actively leverage social media platforms to strengthen community ties and promote national interests globally. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube represent essential channels, particularly within the post-Soviet region, where Instagram maintains significant popularity. The State Committee on Work with Diaspora systematically manages official accounts on these platforms and frequently publishes news updates on the integrated portal Diaspor.gov.az, providing direct links to Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, and LinkedIn. (State Committee on Work with Diaspora., n.d.)

Diaspora organizations independently operate online communities, utilizing platforms strategically. Notably, organizations like the Azerbaijan House in the UK and

the Union of Azerbaijanis in Sweden employ Facebook and Twitter extensively to advertise events and disseminate information. Such entities actively incorporate interactive digital components, including forums, news highlights, and direct social media integration on their websites, indicating a sophisticated understanding of digital communication dynamics.

Twitter's strategic use, especially during critical geopolitical events such as the escalation around Karabakh, underscores its efficacy in rapid information dissemination and global advocacy. Pro-Azerbaijani campaigns employing hashtags such as #stoparmenianoccupation have demonstrated the capacity for digital mobilization, effectively reaching international media and audiences.

Facebook continues to dominate among the older segments of the Azerbaijani diaspora, providing a platform for communal discourse, event documentation, and fundraising. A notable initiative exemplifying this is the "Justice for Khojaly" campaign, initiated in 2008 with support from the Heydar Aliyev Foundation (Justice for Khojaly, 2008). This campaign strategically utilized Facebook to raise awareness about the 1992 Khojaly tragedy, successfully organizing global events, flash mobs, and cultural engagements, significantly enhancing international awareness and engagement.

Parallel efforts have seen Instagram's development, targeting younger demographics through visually appealing content focused on Azerbaijani culture, cuisine, and natural heritage, amassing over 15.7 thousand subscribers (Diasporaaz, n.d.). The Committee also actively utilizes YouTube, with a subscriber base of 20.5 thousand and total channel views exceeding two million, to disseminate diverse content, including news and diaspora-focused interviews under the project "In Unity is Strength." (AZ Diaspora, n.d.). Additionally, Telegram channels have become vital for rapid communications,

notably utilized by Azerbaijani embassies and diaspora activists to convey urgent updates and announcements.

Bloggers and influencers further argument Azerbaijan's digital presence, positively shaping its international image. Influencers like Maryam Novruzi, whose Instagram account reaches an English-speaking audience of approximately 450 thousand followers, regularly promote Azerbaijani heritage and contemporary life. Additionally, YouTube channels such as WILDENESS COOKING and COUNTRIES LIFE VLOG significantly contribute to global cultural promotion, consistently drawing millions of views. However, while the first mentioned channel includes references indicating that the content was filmed in Azerbaijan and showcases the culture and traditions of the national cuisine, the second channel lacks such cultural identification and is only occasionally mentioned in local news outlets.

Despite these positive initiatives, several critical challenges limit the effectiveness of diaspora social media strategies. Primarily, the absence of a unified content strategy and coherent information policy results in fragmented actions, reducing overall efficiency. Moreover, diaspora groups rarely engage influential international bloggers and opinion leaders effectively, missing critical opportunities for broader message dissemination and enhanced image-building. Additionally, insufficient financial and technical resources frequently restrict the diaspora's ability to produce professional-quality content, including advanced graphics, targeted advertising, and high-caliber video production, consequently impairing global competitiveness and diminishing the potential impact of their communications.

These issues are further compounded by the lack of a clearly formulated soft power concept. Rather than developing a consistent and recognizable cultural "product," efforts often remain sporadic activities are still limited to concerts, business forums and

exhibitions. However, soft power is not about temporary events, but about structure and sustainability. (From personal communication with SPIA Faculty member, April 15, 2025). Diaspora must develop a narrative that the world starts recognizing as Azerbaijan's signature. What is needed is "a model that combines elements of our identity, history, arts, education, and presents it in a modern, digestible format," allowing the international audience to associate Azerbaijan with a stable and appealing image (From personal communication with SPIA Faculty member, April 15, 2025).

These systemic inefficiencies hinder Azerbaijan's soft power potential. Furthermore, the reliance on isolated, event-based initiatives rather than sustained programs undermines the diaspora's ability to foster lasting international influence. Addressing these challenges requires increased financial commitments, strategic coordination, and the development of institutional mechanisms to harness the diaspora's full potential. Without these reforms, Azerbaijan's diaspora policy will remain underutilized, unable to fully capitalize on Azerbaijan's cultural richness or geopolitical significance.

CHAPTER 3. POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The following policy alternatives were formulated based on interviews with three experts as primary data and the use of successful practices from diaspora organizations around the world as secondary data. Based on the analysis, examples were provided that are considered the most applicable and relevant to the current realities of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Building upon the deficiencies outlined in the previous chapter, this chapter proposes a set of strategic policy alternatives aimed at strengthening Azerbaijan's soft power, particularly through enhancements in educational diplomacy and cultural outreach. Soft power, as conceptualised by Nye (2004), refers to the capacity to influence others through attraction rather than coercion or economic incentives, relying fundamentally upon the appeal of national culture, values, and educational systems. The policy recommendations presented herein are designed specifically to address gaps identified in Chapter 2 concerning the internationalisation of higher education and the effectiveness of Azerbaijan's cultural diplomacy.

3.1. Educational Advocacy: Enhancement of Azerbaijani Academic Exchange Initiatives

A prominent policy alternative proposed is the enhancement and expansion of the Azerbaijani Academic Exchange Initiative, envisioned as a comprehensive programmed aimed at internationalizing Azerbaijan's higher education sector and fostering sustainable global academic partnerships. This initiative is positioned as both a successor and an upgrade to the previously robust, yet now significantly curtailed, Erasmus+ exchange programmers. It will include extensive scholarship provision and facilitate bilateral

academic exchanges, promoting educational reciprocity and mutual cultural understanding.

The fundamental objective of this initiative is for the Azerbaijani government to systematically facilitate and fund bilateral exchanges: sending Azerbaijani students and scholars abroad for educational enrichment and to serve as informal cultural ambassadors, whilst concurrently inviting international students and academics to Azerbaijani institutions. According to Fariz Ismayilzade, Vice-Rector of ADA University, "Generally, universities have been actively striving to increase internationalization over the past several years. There is even a governmental programme aimed explicitly at strengthening the internationalization of Azerbaijani universities, supporting dual degree programmes, international research collaboration, student recruitment, and student mobility. Currently, ADA University hosts approximately 260 international students, with clear ambitions to significantly increase this number in the near future" (Ismayilzade, 2025).

This Azerbaijani Academic Exchange Initiative could effectively model itself on established international scholarship programmes such as Kazakhstan's Bolashak Scholarship (Bolashak Center, 2023) which has substantially contributed to national capacity-building through foreign education, and Turkey's Mevlana Exchange Programme, enabling students to undertake funded study semesters at over fifty Turkish higher education institutions (Council of Higher Education of Turkey, 2023). Nevertheless, the Azerbaijani programme would be carefully tailored to meet specific national educational objectives and demographic considerations. Specifically, the policy initiative would entail:

Scholarships and Grants: The establishment of a robust state-funded scholarship framework enabling Azerbaijani students to pursue postgraduate and doctoral studies at prestigious international universities, with explicit obligations for recipients to return to

Azerbaijan and utilise their acquired expertise domestically. Concurrently, international students would be encouraged to study in Azerbaijan through competitive scholarships, particularly within programmes delivered in English.

Curriculum Internationalisation: Strategic investment to significantly expand the availability of English-language courses and internationally accredited curricula within Azerbaijani higher education institutions. Currently, the scarcity of English-taught programmes represents a substantial impediment to international enrolment (European Commission, 2021). By prioritising the creation of joint and double degree programmes in partnership with reputable European and Asian universities, Azerbaijan can enhance its educational offerings' global attractiveness. As SPIA faculty member asserts, "such educational exchanges and programmes would be extremely helpful and genuinely valuable for the country's youth and international integration".

By systematically implementing the proposed Azerbaijani Academic Exchange Initiative, the country can effectively address existing deficiencies in higher education internationalization and enhance the global appeal of its universities. The resultant influx of international students and scholars would significantly enrich the academic environment, thereby improving institutional global rankings and overall academic quality. Furthermore, Azerbaijani students educated abroad will form professional and intellectual networks, fostering long-term, beneficial ties to the international community. Consequently, this comprehensive initiative would cultivate a robust global alumni network with strong positive affiliations towards Azerbaijan, substantially augmenting the nation's soft power through sustained educational diplomacy.

3.1.2 Establishment of Azerbaijani Cultural Centres Abroad

A significant policy alternative involves the establishment of Azerbaijani Cultural Centres in major international cities, serving as dedicated hubs for cultural diplomacy.

Such centres would function comparably to renowned institutions such as the British Council (UK), Goethe-Institut (Germany), Yunus Emre Institute (Turkey), and Institut Français (France). Presently, Azerbaijan’s international cultural outreach predominantly consists of sporadic embassy-organised events or activities facilitated by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, which lack consistent on-the-ground presence. Azerbaijan notably trails behind countries like Turkey, which has effectively utilised a well-funded global network of cultural institutes, markedly enhancing its international cultural influence (From personal communication with Member of the Milli Majilis, April 20, 2025).

Establishing official Azerbaijani Cultural Centres would directly address these structural deficiencies by providing permanent venues to showcase Azerbaijani culture, language, and heritage internationally.

Each Azerbaijani Cultural Centre would offer comprehensive language instruction, host regular cultural exhibitions, performances, and celebrate Azerbaijani national holidays and festivals, serving as critical hubs for sustained cultural exchange. Crucially, these centres would employ dedicated cultural experts and diplomats, facilitating consistent engagement with local communities. The Yunus Emre Institute, for instance, operates nearly 60 centres globally, significantly amplifying Turkey’s cultural visibility internationally—an exemplary model for Azerbaijan to adapt effectively (Yunus Emre Institute, 2022).

The British Council serves as another pertinent case study, demonstrating an exemplary model of cultural diplomacy. The British Council strategically promotes British culture internationally by providing substantial support to British artists, fostering global artistic networks, and championing culture as an influential tool for societal development and change (British Council, 2023). Scott McDonald, CEO of the British Council, emphasized the critical role of cultural diplomacy as a soft power instrument,

articulating that "the British Council significantly contributes to the UK's international influence by fostering cultural understanding and connections worldwide" (McDonald, personal communication, 2025).

To implement this initiative effectively, the Azerbaijani Ministry of Culture, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, should strategically select initial locations such as London, Paris, Istanbul, Moscow, New York, and Beijing- prioritising regions with significant diaspora communities and notable potential for cultural impact. An initial pilot programme could establish a limited number of centres, allowing for comprehensive assessment of effectiveness before broader implementation. Collaborative engagements with local universities and museums would further integrate Azerbaijani culture into international cultural ecosystems.

3.1.3 Investing in Creative Industries for Cultural Export

Another strategic policy alternative is significant investment in Azerbaijan's creative industries to enhance cultural exports. Creative industries sectors- including advertising, architecture, design, music and performing arts, publishing (books and media), software, games and digital media, visual arts (fine arts and crafts) are constituting potent channels for soft power, capable of influencing broad audiences and shaping international perceptions considerably. Azerbaijan possesses substantial untapped cultural assets, ranging from traditional mugham music and intricate carpet weaving to its rich culinary heritage, yet these remain largely underutilized internationally. Strategically formulated policies supporting local creators and promoting their output globally could substantially bolster both cultural diplomacy and economic development (UNESCO, 2019).

This policy acknowledges the competitive dynamics of the global creative economy, underscoring proactive governmental interventions to ensure international

visibility of Azerbaijani cultural outputs. Recommended initiatives include increased funding, professional development, and international marketing strategies for the arts and media sectors. Establishing targeted grants for filmmakers, musicians, writers, and artists exhibiting export potential constitutes a critical step. John Newbigin's strategic development of the UK's creative economy exemplifies how targeted investments significantly boost national GDP contributions from creative industries, highlighting economic viability alongside soft power potential (UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2022).

The "Korean Wave" serves as an additional illustrative case, demonstrating substantial economic and soft power benefits through strategic cultural exports, notably in K-pop and television dramas, which reportedly generate over \$12 billion annually for South Korea (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Korea, 2023). Similarly, Central Asia has recently adopted a "Green Paper" roadmap, supported by John Newbigin, to strategically develop the creative economy across Turkic nations, presenting Azerbaijan with a viable regional cooperation model to cultivate its cultural economy (Newbigin, 2022).

To enhance international competitiveness effectively, Azerbaijan must address domestic barriers, such as restricted access to essential digital financial services like PayPal, significantly hindering cross-border transactions for creative entrepreneurs (World Bank, 2023). Regionally, Georgia's significantly reduced taxation rates for creative entrepreneurs- as low as 1% demonstrate effective fiscal incentives for stimulating cultural industries (Enterprise Georgia, 2022).

3.1.4 Strengthening Diaspora Ties for strategic cultural diplomacy

A further critical policy alternative involves strengthening Azerbaijani diaspora networks by engaging diaspora communities as strategic partners in educational and

cultural diplomacy. The Azerbaijani diaspora, present across Turkey, Russia, Europe, North America, and beyond, remains an underleveraged asset for soft power. Diaspora communities often retain strong cultural identities, effectively serving as informal ambassadors, promoting Azerbaijani culture, correcting misconceptions, and fostering international relations.

Effective diaspora engagement requires structured support for diaspora organizations, culturally enriching programmes targeting diaspora youth, and initiatives promoting stronger connections to Azerbaijan. Establishing dedicated Azerbaijani Cultural and Education Centres within diaspora-rich regions could significantly bolster these links, providing language classes, cultural and artistic workshops, and historical education to maintain diaspora engagement across generations.

According to SPIA Faculty member current diaspora engagement limitations, stating: "Our diaspora organizations often lack autonomy, innovation, and, unfortunately, sometimes, the capacity to execute complex long-term initiatives. They function more as political communication tools rather than cultural or social bridges, rarely employing modern marketing strategies or partnerships with universities, think tanks, or creative industries abroad" (From personal communication with SPIA Faculty member, April 15, 2025).

Organizing high-profile annual diaspora festivals or international cultural conferences, possibly under the State Committee on Work with Diaspora, could significantly enhance Azerbaijan's international cultural visibility. Furthermore, incorporating diaspora professionals into Azerbaijani educational institutions as guest lecturers or researchers, alongside offering targeted scholarships for diaspora students to study in Azerbaijan, would foster lasting academic and cultural exchanges.

3.2 Financing Strategies to Amplify Azerbaijan’s Soft Power

The issue of insufficient funding allocated to Azerbaijan’s State Committee on Work with the Diaspora and the Azerbaijani Diaspora Support Fund significantly restricts the country's capacity to implement effective diaspora engagement programs aimed at advancing national interests and strengthening its "soft power." Despite ongoing efforts and various activities organized by these entities, the current budget does not adequately reflect the scale and scope of the Azerbaijani diaspora, which is estimated to number between 30 and 50 million individuals worldwide. In comparison to other countries such as Israel and Turkey, Azerbaijan’s initiatives clearly suffer from the absence of a comprehensive, long-term, and strategically oriented financial approach.

To effectively address these budgetary constraints and to enhance diaspora engagement as a core component of Azerbaijan’s soft power strategy, the following policy options are proposed:

3.2.1 A Hybrid Financial Strategy for Azerbaijani Diaspora Engagement

To address this financial constraint, a hybrid policy model is proposed that combines the issuance of diaspora bonds with a structured grant funding mechanism for international initiatives promoting Azerbaijan’s image. This approach is informed by international best practices. For instance, since 1951, Israel has leveraged the Israel Bonds program to secure substantial investment from its global Jewish diaspora (Woodman & Robin, 2024; ICPMD, 2024). These funds have supported both domestic infrastructure development and humanitarian programs, fostering unity and resilience. Similarly, India successfully launched Resurgent India Bonds (1998) and India Millennium Deposits

(2000), mobilizing capital from non-resident Indians during periods of economic uncertainty. (Ketkar & Ratha, 2010; ICPMD, 2024)

Parallel to this, Georgia offers a compelling example of institutionalized grant-based diaspora engagement. Since 2019, under the “Support for Diaspora Initiatives” program, the Georgian government has annually funded dozens of projects—ranging from cultural and educational initiatives to media platforms (European Union Global Diaspora Facility 2023). With a transparent selection process and rigorous oversight, the Georgian model has increased diaspora activism and integrated it into the country’s broader public diplomacy strategy.

In the Azerbaijani context, this combined model could be implemented through the establishment of "Azerbaijan Diaspora Bonds." Jointly issued by the Ministry of Finance and the State Committee on Work with the Diaspora, these bonds would carry denominations between \$500 and \$5,000, offering yields of 3–5% annually. They would be marketed via Azerbaijani diplomatic missions and diaspora organizations, with a strong emphasis on patriotic and voluntary participation. All proceeds would be pooled into a specialized fund—the "Grant Fund for Supporting Diaspora Initiatives"—managed by a supervisory board composed of state officials and prominent diaspora representatives.

The deployment mechanism of this fund would focus exclusively on projects that enhance Azerbaijan’s international visibility and image. First and foremost, it would finance media campaigns designed to build a more nuanced and favorable narrative about Azerbaijan abroad. This includes developing English-language digital platforms, engaging with international bloggers and journalists, and producing multimedia content showcasing the country’s cultural and historical heritage.

Second, the fund would support a wide array of cultural diplomacy efforts, such as organizing festivals, art exhibitions, and performances by Azerbaijani artists in key international cities. These events aim to foster deeper cultural understanding and generate positive associations with Azerbaijan among foreign publics, effectively acting as cultural bridges between Azerbaijan and host countries.

Finally, particular emphasis would be placed on establishing Azerbaijani studies departments and research centers at leading global universities. Following the example of the Armenian diaspora, which has successfully promoted the creation of Armenian studies programs at institutions such as UCLA and the University of Michigan, the Azerbaijani diaspora—backed by state support—could initiate similar academic efforts. These centers would serve as intellectual outposts for Azerbaijan, generating scholarly work, reinforcing cultural identity, and expanding international academic cooperation. (From personal communication with SPIA Faculty member, April 15, 2025)

By uniting diaspora bond issuance with a strategic grant distribution system, Azerbaijan would not only mobilize previously untapped financial resources but also ensure their targeted and impactful use. The active participation of the diaspora—as both investor and partner in program implementation—would foster mutual accountability and trust. This approach offers a durable framework for expanding Azerbaijan’s soft power, where each dollar invested contributes directly to crafting a positive global image of the country. In doing so, the diaspora evolves from being a passive stakeholder to a strategic actor in the pursuit of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy goals.

3.2.2 Matching Fund Programs with Diaspora Communities

The Mexican government's "3x1" initiative provides a successful international benchmark for state-diaspora co-financing mechanisms, which actively incentivize diaspora participation (ICPMD., 2024). Through this program, every dollar contributed by

Mexican migrants for local community projects is matched by three additional dollars from various government levels, thereby tripling the initial investment and enhancing project feasibility (ICPMD., 2024).

Azerbaijan could establish an analogous matching fund initiative, employing a ratio of government contributions of either 1:1 or 1:2 to diaspora-generated funds. For instance, if a diaspora community raises \$100,000 for a community development or educational project, the Azerbaijani government would add an additional \$100,000-\$200,000 to the funding. This model requires the establishment of a dedicated funding mechanism managed under the Azerbaijani Diaspora Support Fund, where project proposals could be submitted annually by diaspora organizations and evaluated transparently through a competitive grant process involving representatives from both diaspora communities and Azerbaijani state institutions.

Such a co-financing arrangement would actively engage diaspora communities, foster accountability, and transparency in financial allocations, and substantially amplify Azerbaijan's international visibility by funding impactful cultural, educational, and social initiatives globally. Over time, this will lead to strengthened diaspora networks, increased community cohesion, and enhanced soft power outreach.

Thus, the proposed policy measures, grounded in successful international experiences, will allow Azerbaijan not only to effectively overcome existing financial constraints but also to significantly enhance the diaspora's potential as a strategic resource for soft power. The issuance of diaspora bonds will ensure the attraction of stable financial resources while simultaneously strengthening both emotional and economic connections between overseas Azerbaijanis and their homeland. Matching-fund programs will provide a strong incentive for diaspora representatives to actively engage in collaborative initiatives, assured of the state's reliable partnership and financial support

for their endeavors. Additionally, establishing a systematic framework of grant support for diaspora-driven initiatives will enable the implementation of numerous significant projects at the local level, thereby directly enhancing Azerbaijan's visibility, credibility, and influence abroad.

The comprehensive implementation of these policies will foster the sustainability and long-term continuity of financial support, while also establishing a robust infrastructure necessary for the effective execution of cultural, educational, and informational programs. As a result, the Azerbaijani diaspora will not only become better equipped to confront contemporary challenges and compete internationally with other influential diasporas but will also proactively shape a positive narrative of Azerbaijan in foreign societies. Furthermore, the systematic and strategic engagement of the diaspora will serve to strengthen Azerbaijan's international relationships, stimulate foreign direct investments, and substantially enhance the country's appeal as both a business hub and a cultural partner on the global stage.

3.3 Progressive use of media resources according to modern standards

In the context of intensifying global competition for the attention of international audiences, particularly in the media sphere, the effective use of digital platforms—especially by leveraging national civic resources abroad—has gained increasing importance for promoting public diplomacy and enhancing the image of the state. The Azerbaijani diaspora abroad can play a key role in shaping a positive international perception of the country. However, as noted in the chapter on media-related issues, the current media activity of the diaspora, despite several promising initiatives, remains fragmented, insufficiently targeted at the modern foreign user, and often limited to an internal audience. The image of Azerbaijan frequently emerges in the context of geopolitical conflict and is largely associated with the Karabakh issue in media spaces

(for instance, the most popular hashtag when searching “Azerbaijan” is #KarabakhIsAzerbaijan), while the information field is dominated by messages of military rhetoric. In this context, the implementation of a systematic, large-scale, and locally oriented project aimed at reshaping this image appears to be a timely and strategically important task.

Analyzing the challenges, one of the most practical ways to address the issue of navigating the social media space is the creation of a large-scale and systematized media project under the working title "Discovery of Azerbaijan." This initiative should become a networked effort of Azerbaijani diaspora communities worldwide, aimed at transforming stereotypical perceptions of the country, strengthening cultural influence, and promoting Azerbaijan as a modern, secular, and diverse country with strong tourism and investment potential.

The experience of other countries confirms the effectiveness of such an approach. For instance, over the past two decades, South Korea has actively used its diaspora as transmitters of the country’s cultural and social codes “Hallyu wave”, particularly in Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America (KEI, 2020). A notable example is the “Talk To Me In Korean” project, which began as an educational initiative and has since become an independent platform of digital diplomacy, forming a positive image of Korea through media content that introduces not only the language but also everyday aspects of Korean life. The platform’s content is purposefully adapted for local markets—from Japan to Brazil—facilitating the soft integration of Korean culture into unfamiliar media spaces (KEI, 2020). India’s experience is also illustrative: within the framework of the “Incredible India” campaign, the Indian diaspora in countries such as the UK, Germany, and the USA created sub-platforms with visual and textual content in local languages, presenting India as a hub of modern technology and culture (CNBC-TV18, 2024). The

diaspora played a crucial role in disseminating this content through local media and academic circles, especially where English-language formats were perceived as "foreign" (Indian Diaspora, 2024). Other relevant examples include Turkey's "Turkey Home" initiative (Skift, 2016) and Israel's "Vibe Israel" project (Vibe Israel, n.d.), in which diaspora centers collaborated in the production of media content tailored to the visual and cultural expectations of local audiences. These initiatives have contributed to a national image that is not confined to religious or political narratives but instead highlights creativity and diversity.

In this international context, the proposed "Discovery of Azerbaijan" project fits organically. Its implementation mechanism is focused on a long-term and systematic approach. It is proposed that each diaspora, regardless of its size, establishes its own digital platform adapted to the host country. For example, in Germany, the diaspora may create a page titled "Entdeckung Aserbaidschans – Deutschland," in France — "Découverte de l'Azerbaïdjan – France," and so on. The content on these platforms should primarily be published in the language of the host country, which is crucial for reaching the local audience. Currently, most content on social networks is predominantly in Azerbaijani, occasionally in English or Russian. Videos and publications should showcase everyday life in Azerbaijan, culture, gastronomy, youth and women's initiatives, and entrepreneurship. It is essential that the content be visually appealing, align with modern visual trends, and be voiced in the target audience's language. This format aligns with the principles of digital diplomacy: instead of direct propaganda—engaging stories, vivid imagery, and emotional resonance.

Special attention in the project is proposed to be given to the visual quality of the content. To achieve this, a media hub can be established within each active diaspora community—comprising specialists in SMM, video editing, and graphic design. This

approach would enable a shift from merely reporting events with formal photo coverage to producing creative, compelling, and relevant content that can compete with the visual output of international brands. In addition, the project envisions involving Azerbaijani bloggers living abroad who already share content about Azerbaijan. Their participation would expand the audience and strengthen the project's outreach both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Thus, the “Discovery of Azerbaijan” project is not merely a media initiative, but a potential vector for transforming Azerbaijan's external image. It brings together local resources and global strategy, modern technologies and cultural identity, visual formats and meaningful diplomatic messaging. With a systematic approach, its implementation could set a precedent for a new form of cultural and reputational diplomacy—one that relies not on abstract messaging, but on real experiences, authentic communication, and a contemporary visual language.

CHAPTER.4. EVALUATION OF POLICY ALTERNATIVES

4.1.1 Azerbaijani Academic Exchange Initiative

The Azerbaijani Academic Exchange Initiative—a fully funded scholarship-and-mobility scheme inspired by Kazakhstan’s *Bolashak* and Turkey’s *Mevlana* programmes—offers a potent instrument for long-term soft-power cultivation and human-capital development. By sending talented Azerbaijani students and faculty to lead foreign universities, while attracting inbound scholars through joint-degree partnerships, the programme would offset the post-Erasmus+ vacuum, foster enduring people-to-people linkages, and build a global alumni network capable of advancing Azerbaijan’s academic reputation. Although scholarships are inherently cost-intensive—covering tuition, stipends, and administrative overhead—their lifetime return on investment is considerable; a post-study service requirement further mitigates brain-drain risk and maximizes public value. Equity can be promoted through competitive selection, regional quotas, and dedicated slots for under-represented fields such as STEM and heritage conservation, though some bias toward urban applicants with stronger secondary preparation may persist. Feasibility is high: Azerbaijan already administers smaller outbound schemes, and scaling up would merely require budget reallocation and new bilateral memoranda of understanding rather than fresh legislation, leveraging existing capacities within the Ministry of Education and ADA University. Flexibility, while moderate—given that cohorts remain abroad for four-to-five-year cycles—can be preserved by annually adjusting destination countries and priority disciplines in response to evolving labour-market needs. Collectively, the initiative represents a strategic,

administratively attainable, and socially inclusive investment in Azerbaijan’s future talent and international standing.

4.1.2 Azerbaijani Cultural Centres Abroad

Establishing a network of **Azerbaijani Cultural Centres Abroad**—modeled on Germany’s Goethe-Institut or Türkiye’s Yunus Emre Foundation—would give Baku a year-round, bricks-and-mortar platform for language instruction, curated exhibitions, and public-policy dialogue in strategically chosen capitals. Such permanent institutes would replace today’s largely ad-hoc cultural diplomacy with a visible, reliable presence capable of markedly boosting Azerbaijan’s brand recognition among opinion-shapers and the wider public. The model is, however, cost-intensive: fixed premises, professional staff, and a steady calendar of events generate sizeable recurrent expenditures, and real economies of scale materialise only once at least five centres can share travelling exhibitions, teacher rotations, and joint marketing. Inevitably, site selection privileges large, globally connected cities—London, Paris, Istanbul—though mobile outreach and tiered fee schemes (e.g., reduced tuition for low-income learners) can extend indirect benefits to smaller diaspora communities. Feasibility is moderate: each centre requires host-country approvals, lease negotiations, and the recruitment of bilingual cultural officers—processes that demand time, political capital, and sustained funding commitments from the Ministry of Culture. Flexibility is the model’s weakest dimension: once long-term leases are signed, exit costs are high and geographic redeployment is cumbersome, even though programming themes can still be refreshed annually. In short, cultural centres offer high reputational payoff but at the price of significant upfront investment, recurring overhead, and limited agility.

4.1.3 Targeted investment in Azerbaijan’s creative industries

Targeted investment in Azerbaijan’s creative industries—encompassing film, music, design, and emerging digital media—offers a nimble, market-aligned route to both economic diversification and soft-power amplification. International precedents are compelling: South Korea’s K-wave and the UK’s creative-industry strategy demonstrate how grants, tax breaks, and export promotion can turn cultural output into robust GDP gains while projecting persuasive national narratives abroad. By deploying micro-grants and co-investment funds, Azerbaijan could catalyze high-impact digital products and commercially viable content at relatively low unit cost, provided that disbursement is governed by transparent peer review and incubator-style mentorship. Equitable access hinges on well-designed calls that include regional quotas and minority creators; resolving digital-payment and IP-registration hurdles (e.g., PayPal barriers) is therefore essential. Feasibility is moderate-to-high: it chiefly requires legislative tweaks to introduce creative-sector tax incentives and fintech gateways, plus a dedicated support unit for IP advice and export promotion within the Ministry of Economy. Flexibility is a core strength: funding windows can pivot swiftly from film to gaming or fashion as global demand shifts, and grants are inherently time-bound, allowing periodic re-prioritization without long-term fiscal lock-in. In essence, a well-structured creative-industry fund would leverage private capital, broaden cultural participation, and export compelling Azerbaijani stories through profitable global channels.

4.1.4. Strengthening diaspora networks for cultural diplomacy

A strategic focus on **strengthening diaspora networks for cultural diplomacy** positions Azerbaijani communities abroad as agile, cost-effective amplifiers of the country’s soft power. Well-resourced diaspora organisations can act as authentic messengers, quickly penetrating host-country media ecosystems and countering misperceptions through locally resonant narratives. When supported by structured youth

camps, professional associations and co-created cultural events, these networks extend Azerbaijan's international reach without the high overheads associated with permanent cultural centres. Matching micro-grants with volunteer labour yields an excellent return per manat, and digital coordination platforms (shared calendars, grant portals, livestream hubs) minimise administrative friction. Nonetheless, efficiency hinges on rigorous vetting: disparities in governance capacity across NGOs can undermine impact if oversight is weak. Equity considerations are paramount. Targeted micro-grants, regional quotas and weighted evaluation criteria can empower smaller or less affluent communities—such as those in Eastern Europe—preventing the capture of funds by large, well-organised clusters in Russia or Türkiye. Feasibility is high: the State Committee on Work with the Diaspora already holds the legal mandate, and scaling the programme requires only modest budget increases and focused capacity-building workshops rather than new legislation. Finally, flexibility is exceptional. Funding ceilings, thematic priorities and project timelines can be recalibrated each year, and the low level of sunk costs allows rapid redirection in response to geopolitical shifts or community feedback.

4.2.1. **Matching Fund Programs**

The **proposed Matching Fund Programs** with Diaspora Communities, under which the government undertakes to compensate every manat or dollar raised by the Diaspora communities in a ratio of 1:1 or 1:2, represents a pragmatic, community-oriented mechanism for expanding the use of "soft power" in Azerbaijan. The implementation of such projects shows that co-financing stimulates thousands of significant cultural, educational and social projects at the local level, while strengthening the responsibility of the diaspora for the results. Since public funds are allocated only to initiatives that have already received private support, however, digital grant management tools will be necessary to contain administrative costs as the project portfolio expands,

which may indicate the moderate efficiency of this project. However, equity depends on careful planning: it will be easier for well-organized communities in richer countries to attract seed capital, so regional quotas, tiered remuneration rates, or micro grants for small associations are needed to prevent increased inequality within the diaspora. The feasibility of this initiative is high, as the mechanism can be launched by a ministry decree and managed through an existing diaspora support fund, with a pilot phase in several countries before its wider implementation. Finally, flexibility is a key advantage: compliance rates, thematic priorities, and application deadlines can be adjusted annually, and the program can be suspended without long-term commitments related to the issuance of bonds or the construction of cultural centers. In general, a well-thought-out scheme for allocating funds would make it possible to mobilize the underutilized resources of the diaspora, promote the division of responsibility between the state and public figures, and expand the cultural reach of Azerbaijan through projects that have both local and international fame.

4.2.2. A Hybrid Financial Strategy for Azerbaijani Diaspora Engagement

The proposed Diaspora bonds plus Grant Fund offers Azerbaijan a reliable two-tier solution to the problem of chronic underfunding of its policy towards the diaspora. Relatively low-denomination diaspora bonds borrowed from the Israeli and Indian experience could mobilize significant savings abroad, while a grant fund capitalized on the proceeds from the bonds would allow resources to be directed to such notable initiatives as the creation of departments of Azerbaijani studies, English-language media and leading cultural diplomacy projects, thereby increasing the impact of soft the forces in the country, in accordance with which we can state the high efficiency of this project. Despite the fact that startup costs include legal structuring, credit rating fees, and marketing, bond coupons in the 3-5% range are still cheaper than for traditional

government loans; at the same time, a single grant management center provides economies of scale in project selection and monitoring, reducing duplication and overhead costs, thereby making efficiency high. It is worth noting that Equity pays off: bonds with a low nominal value expand access for middle-income expatriates, and grants on a competitive basis redistribute income in favor of resource-starved communities in Eastern Europe or Central Asia, smoothing out inequalities within the global diaspora. The feasibility is also high, Azerbaijan currently has a fairly low debt and stable financial indicators: the country regularly executes the budget and has no problems with payments. Therefore, investors are generally willing to trust the government and buy its securities. As for the administration of the new grant fund, there is no need to create new institutions for this — the State Committee for Work with the Diaspora and the Diaspora Support Fund already exist. They will just need to expand their staff a bit and strengthen their internal processes in order to cope with the additional workload. The bond tranche is a long-term commitment, but the timing of grants remains largely regulated, which makes it possible to change thematic priorities annually, taking into account geopolitical dynamics or feedback from stakeholders, which make flexibility of this option moderate. In general, the "bonds plus grant" model provides a sustainable, strategically targeted financing mechanism that turns passive sympathies into active co-investment, positions members of the diaspora as co-authors of a national brand, and strengthens the architecture of Azerbaijan's public diplomacy in a sustainable, community-driven resource base.

4.3.1. “Discovery of Azerbaijan

Initiative **“Discovery of Azerbaijan”** is a multi-generational one, which is primarily focused on the diaspora as an instrument to strengthen the influence of soft power abroad, allowing to form a positive image of the country. Global cases ranging from the South Korean "Talk to Me in Korean" program to the Indian "Incredible India"

program prove that when expatriate communities manage localized platforms in the host country's language, they contribute to the formation of a positive vision of their native country, as well as the promotion of the country's interests. Thus, giving Azerbaijani communities abroad the opportunity to create and curate such content would bring significant reputational dividends by presenting daily life, innovation, and culture through a modern, inclusive lens. Cost-effectiveness is equally important: by mobilizing existing social media managers, bloggers, and designers from the diaspora, the project limits reliance on external suppliers, while a lightweight central media center can provide common templates, training, and analytics, reducing duplication and realizing economies of scale. It is important to note that the model is fair: its modular design — from full—fledged websites to simple podcast channels - allows even small or financially weak communities to participate, provided that the initial microgrants, toolkits, and mentoring are designed for resource-starved groups. From the point of view of implementation, the feasibility is high; the scheme does not require the adoption of new legislation, only coordination through the State Committee for Work with the Diaspora and phased pilot projects in countries such as Germany, France or the United States. Finally, the initiative is remarkably flexible: content topics can change rapidly from cooking to technology startups, formats can change from video to audio, and broadcasts across the country can be scaled or paused without the losses typical of traditional cultural centers. Taken together, these characteristics position Discovery of Azerbaijan as a low-cost and highly effective investment in digital public diplomacy, which transforms members of the diaspora from passive observers into active co-authors of Azerbaijan's global image.

(The evaluation of the proposed options will be ranked according to the following categories: Low, Moderate, and High.)

	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Equity	Feasibility	Flexibility
The Azerbaijani Academic Exchange Initiative	High	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate
Azerbaijani Cultural Centres Abroad	High	High-Moderate	Moderate	High	High
Targeted investment in Azerbaijan's creative industries	High	High	Moderate	High	High

Strengthening diaspora networks for cultural diplomacy	High	High	Moderate	High	High
Matching-Fund Programme	High	High	Moderate	High	High
The combined diaspora-bond and centralized grant-fund	High	High	High	High	Moderate
The “Discovery of Azerbaijan” initiative	High	High	High	High	High

The policy proposals advanced herein seek to recalibrate and strengthen Azerbaijan's engagement with its diaspora—an indispensable soft-power instrument capable of promoting national interests abroad and fostering a favorable global perception of the country. Each thematic challenge is matched with a flagship intervention that can fundamentally reconfigure state–diaspora relations. In particular, targeted investment in Azerbaijan's creative industries, the diaspora-bond coupled with a centralized grant fund, and the “Discovery of Azerbaijan” digital-media platform collectively offer robust mechanisms for remedying current deficiencies and unlocking the full diplomatic and cultural potential of Azerbaijani communities worldwide. Nevertheless, among all proposed solutions, the policy option "Discovery of Azerbaijan" emerges as the most advantageous, consistently demonstrating high scores across the evaluated criteria. This initiative effectively integrates cultural diplomacy and digital outreach, thereby significantly enhancing Azerbaijan's soft power capabilities and international visibility. Its innovative approach not only addresses existing gaps in diaspora engagement but also sets a promising benchmark for future public diplomacy strategies.

CHAPTER 5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study comprehensively examined the potential of applying mechanisms of soft power and public diplomacy by Azerbaijan through the activation of diaspora organizations. Building on Joseph Nye's theoretical concept of "soft power," the research successfully adapted its core principles to the contemporary challenges and opportunities facing Azerbaijan.

The experience of successful diaspora communities such as the Greek, Indian, and Armenian diasporas has demonstrated that Azerbaijan's diaspora, being largely first-generation, requires time for institutionalization and deep integration into host societies. Nevertheless, it is essential not merely to rely on the natural passage of time but to actively implement targeted measures aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of diaspora activities even at this stage of development.

Based on the conducted analysis, three major challenges were identified that continue to constrain the full realization of Azerbaijan's soft power potential:

1. Insufficient Development of Educational and Cultural Projects

Education and culture are fundamental components of soft power. However, Azerbaijan currently lacks a systematic and sustainable approach to promoting these areas abroad. Fragmented events cannot substitute for long-term strategic initiatives. One of the proposed solutions is the establishment of Azerbaijani cultural and educational centers abroad, modeled after the Goethe-Institut, British Council, and Confucius Institute, to more effectively disseminate knowledge about Azerbaijan's culture, language, and historical heritage.

2. Low Financial Efficiency

The evaluation of the State Committee on Work with the Diaspora's budget utilization for 2020–2023, conducted through Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA),

revealed a significant decrease in efficiency: despite increased funding, the number of events organized per unit of budget fell more than fivefold. The lack of transparency in financial reporting complicates the interpretation of these outcomes. To address this issue, innovative financial mechanisms are proposed, including the issuance of diaspora bonds and the implementation of matching fund programs with diaspora organizations, aimed at ensuring more stable and efficient resource mobilization.

3. **Weak Digital Representation of Azerbaijan in the Global Media Space**

The Azerbaijani diaspora has yet to fully leverage modern digital channels for shaping and promoting the national image abroad. In an era of intense information competition, this significantly undermines the effectiveness of public diplomacy. To counter this, the project proposes the creation of an international digital media platform, "Discovery of Azerbaijan," focused on systematically building and disseminating an attractive image of Azerbaijan across global media.

These challenges are closely linked to broader transformations in the global architecture of soft power, where a state's success is increasingly determined by its ability to engage in continuous, multilayered, and emotionally resonant communication with external audiences.

To move forward, a more structured and future-oriented policy is needed — one that is both inclusive and proactive. *The State Committee on Work with Diaspora* should take the lead in developing a comprehensive national diaspora strategy. This strategy must clearly define its goals, target regions, and engagement mechanisms, considering the diversity of the Azerbaijani diaspora worldwide. In addition to organizing cultural events or formal gatherings, the Committee should focus on building sustainable partnerships with diaspora organizations, especially those led by young professionals, academics, and

creatives. Introducing tools such as diaspora grants, matching funds, and diaspora bonds could foster greater financial and civic involvement in Azerbaijan’s development. At the same time, the Committee’s internal structure needs modernization — including digital platforms, data collection systems, and evaluation tools — to better respond to the needs of communities abroad.

The Ministry of Science and Education also has a key role to play. Expanding international academic programs and partnerships is essential for fostering ties with diaspora youth and attracting foreign students. A new scholarship and mobility initiative — ideally modeled after successful programs like Kazakhstan’s “Bolashak” — could focus on strengthening educational links with countries where the Azerbaijani diaspora is most active. Alongside this, increasing the number of English-taught programs and encouraging dual-degree partnerships with global universities would enhance Azerbaijan’s academic profile and create more entry points for international engagement.

From the perspective of cultural diplomacy, the *Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs* should collaborate on establishing Azerbaijani Cultural Centers in major global cities. These centers should not only offer language and history programs, but also serve as active platforms for cultural exchange, showcasing contemporary Azerbaijani art, music, film, and literature. In parallel, the ministries should offer practical support to diaspora-led cultural initiatives abroad — including technical guidance, media resources, and funding opportunities. Such efforts would help to ensure that cultural narratives about Azerbaijan are shaped by its own citizens and communities.

In the digital realm, the *Ministry of Digital Development and Transport*, in cooperation with the Diaspora Committee, should prioritize the creation of a modern, multilingual online platform — for example, under the name *Discover Azerbaijan*. This platform should present high-quality, localized content tailored to specific audiences in

Europe, North America, the Middle East, and elsewhere. It could include videos, podcasts, interactive stories, and regular news updates, managed through a decentralized network of local media hubs embedded in diaspora communities. Investing in the training of young diaspora content creators — in digital storytelling, video editing, and community management — would also increase authenticity and sustainability.

Taken together, these recommendations aim to move diaspora engagement beyond symbolism — toward a coordinated, inclusive, and strategically grounded policy that views Azerbaijanis abroad not only as cultural ambassadors, but as full-fledged contributors to the country’s present and future. A professional, modern, and globally connected diaspora policy will not only strengthen Azerbaijan’s international visibility but also reinforce internal development through new networks, skills, and ideas.

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Appendix



Consent Form for Interview

- I _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this interview for a capstone project.
- I understand even with my agreement to participate; I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can request for the data used from my interview to be withdrawn within a week after the interview.
- I have been briefed about the nature and purpose of the capstone project.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation in the interview involves audio recording, to which I agree.
- I understand that all of my information will be kept confidential.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2. Approval Form

ADA UNIVERSITY

Program: _____

Student Names: _____

APPROVED by:

Academic Supervisor: _____

Organization Supervisor: _____

Dean of the School: _____

Date: _____

DD/MM/YY