



Mr. Kubanychbek Omuraliyev

Secretary General of the Organization of Turkic States

**OTS: A FAMILY
OF TURKIC NATIONS**



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COP29
Baku
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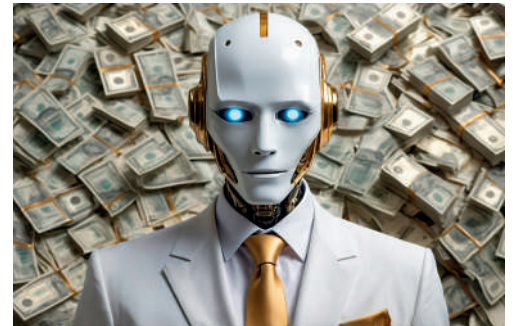
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Mr. Qasim Mohiuddin,
Pakistan's Ambassador to Azerbaijan

PAKISTAN AND AZERBAIJAN: ALLIES IN PEACE

IN THE INTERVIEW WITH PAKISTAN'S AMBASSADOR TO AZERBAIJAN, MR. QASIM MOHIUDDIN, WE EXPLORE THE DEEPENING TIES BETWEEN THE TWO BROTHERLY NATIONS, HIGHLIGHTED BY THE HISTORIC STATE VISIT OF AZERBAIJAN'S PRESIDENT ILHAM ALIYEV TO PAKISTAN IN 2024. THE AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES THE FIFTEEN AGREEMENTS AND MOUS SIGNED DURING THE VISIT AND SHARES INSIGHTS INTO THE PREFERENTIAL TRADE AGREEMENT AND TRANSIT TRADE AGREEMENT, WHICH ARE SET TO BOOST ECONOMIC GROWTH AND REGIONAL TRADE. ADDITIONALLY, MR. QASIM MOHIUDDIN TOUCHES ON THE SHARED COMMITMENT BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND AZERBAIJAN ON GLOBAL ISSUES LIKE CLIMATE CHANGE AND REGIONAL PEACE, PARTICULARLY IN KASHMIR AND KARABAKH.

BY ELENA KOSOLAPOVA

AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

Question: *President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev paid a state visit to Pakistan in 2024. What were the major outcomes of this visit, and what priorities have been set for strengthening bilateral ties?*

Answer: At the invitation of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, paid a state visit to Pakistan on the 11th and 12th of July 2024. The President's delegation included Ministers for Defence, Defence Industry, Economy, and Digital Development and Transport, as well as the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. This historic visit was a continuation of the upward trajectory of Pakistan-Azerbaijan bilateral relations, further deepening the bonds of brotherhood between our countries. The two leaders reaffirmed two countries' strategic partnership and expressed satisfaction with Pakistan and Azerbaijan's close security and defence cooperation. The two leaders also agreed to further enhance bilateral trade and investment and develop joint investment projects in the energy, infrastructure, connectivity, and defence industries. The bedrock of Pakistan and Azerbaijan's strategic partnership is steadfast friendship, brotherhood, and mutually advantageous cooperation across all sectors, including political, economic, trade, and military.

Q: *Several Agreements and MoUs were signed during the visit. Which sectors of the economy are likely to benefit the most from these agreements?*

A.: Fifteen Agreements and MoUs of cooperation were signed in the fields of consular affairs, privatization, transit and preferential trade, legal collaboration, mineral resources, cultural exchange and literature, information and communication technology, broadcasting, scientific and technical cooperation, tourism, air services, city twinning, and small and medium enterprise development. I am confident these agreements would further encourage economic and defence cooperation and promote cultural tourism and people-to-people exchanges.

Q: *With the signing of preferential trade and transit trade agreements, how do you see these contributing to increased trade volumes between Pakistan and Azerbaijan in the coming years?*

A.: The Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) and the Transit Trade Agreement (TTA) would help to foster a more favorable environment for bilateral and regional trade and investment, leading to increased trade volumes and stronger economic ties between Pakistan, brotherly Azerbaijan, and other Central Asian countries. The PTA will help reduce tariffs on various goods, making Pakistani and Azerbaijani products more competitive in each other's

markets. This would encourage businesses to explore new trade opportunities. It would also provide better market access to the business communities of both countries. The TTA will streamline the movement of goods between the two countries, reducing transportation costs and time. By facilitating trade and investment, these agreements would contribute to economic growth in both countries, creating jobs and fostering economic development.

Q: *Azerbaijan is a significant energy player. Are there specific projects being considered to leverage Azerbaijan's expertise in energy for Pakistan's growing energy needs?*

A.: Pakistan looks forward to benefitting from Azerbaijan's expertise in the oil and gas sectors. There are several projects under consideration. There is a growing cooperation between the two countries in the energy sector. I am confident that our collaboration in this important sector will continue to grow in the years ahead.

Q: *Pakistan participated in the UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku with a high-level delegation. What is Pakistan's perspective on the outcomes of this conference?*

A.: Pakistan would like to congratulate brotherly Azerbaijan for hosting a successful event, both substantively and logistics-wise. The Prime Minister led Pakistan's delegation at COP29. Pakistan is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world. The devastating floods in Pakistan in 2022 are a testament to this fact. It is, therefore, important for the major emitters – the developed countries – to urgently assist developing countries in transitioning to green energy production. Climate change is an existential threat requiring immediate collective action by the international community, not just a few countries. Pakistan greatly appreciated the significant and positive outcomes of COP29, including the agreement reached on Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, after almost a decade of negotiations. This will pave the way for carbon trading, which includes rules for country-to-country trading and a new international carbon market. One positive outcome of COP29 is the Agreement on the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance through financial commitments of \$300 billion by 2035 from developed countries to assist developing countries transition to green energy, though this is still far below the estimated \$1 trillion needed to meet the

‘THE BEDROCK OF PAKISTAN AND AZERBAIJAN'S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP IS STEADFAST FRIENDSHIP, BROTHERHOOD, AND MUTUALLY ADVANTAGEOUS COOPERATION ACROSS ALL SECTORS, INCLUDING POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, TRADE, AND MILITARY.’





Ambassador Mohiuddin and his family: spouse Sumaira, daughter Rabia and son Murtaza in Baku in December 2024.

needs of developing countries. Another positive outcome was addressing the need for financial and technical support to developing countries for reporting and capacity-building related to loss and damage associated with climate change. Pakistan remains committed to supporting Azerbaijan during its Presidency of COP, with the goal of tackling the common existential threat of climate change urgently and meaningfully.

Q.: How important is the mutual support on issues like Kashmir and Karabakh in reinforcing the political ties between Azerbaijan and Pakistan?

A.: Pakistan greatly values its fraternal ties with brotherly Azerbaijan. Our bilateral relationship is grounded in cultural

‘THERE IS GENUINE AND SINCERE SOLIDARITY, RESPECT, LOVE, AFFECTION, AND TRUST BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENTS AND THE PEOPLE OF PAKISTAN AND AZERBAIJAN.’

and religious affinities. The Multani Caravan Sarayi in Baku’s Icherisheher (old town) is a testimony of our centuries-old connection. There is genuine and sincere solidarity, respect, love, affection, and trust between the governments and the people of Pakistan and Azerbaijan. Both countries also emphasize the importance of international law and United Nations resolutions in addressing global challenges

‘PAKISTAN PLACES THE HIGHEST IMPORTANCE ON ITS CLOSE FRATERNAL CONNECTIONS WITH AZERBAIJAN AND TÜRKIYE, WHICH ARE ANCHORED IN SHARED CULTURAL, HISTORICAL, AND RELIGIOUS TIES, ALONG WITH MUTUAL RESPECT AND SUPPORT ON KEY ISSUES.’

and disputes. Pakistan was one of the first countries to recognize Azerbaijan after its independence. Pakistan has always supported and will continue to support Azerbaijan's just position on Karabakh. Azerbaijan's stance is based on internationally recognized principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the right to self-defence in accordance with the UN and OIC resolutions. Under the able leadership of President Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan has successfully established its writ in Karabakh. Azerbaijan's victory and liberation of its legitimate and rightful territory of Karabakh was also celebrated across Pakistan. The celebration was a demonstration of Pakistan's belief and support of Azerbaijan's just position that Karabakh has always been the rightful territory of Azerbaijan, and several United Nations Security Council Resolutions and International Law have endorsed this. Azerbaijan's continued efforts toward reaching a peace agreement with Armenia, even after Azerbaijan achieved a decisive and complete victory on the battlefield, is a testament to President Ilham Aliyev's visionary leadership and the resolve of the brave Armed Forces and of the people of Azerbaijan. Pakistan will continue to support Azerbaijan's efforts to promote peace and stability in the South Caucasus. As a valuable member of the OIC Contact Group on Kashmir, Pakistan greatly values the continued support extended by Azerbaijan to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Real and durable peace in South Asia remains contingent upon the peaceful and just resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions and the aspirations and wishes of the brave Kashmiri people. We hope that, like Karabakh, the people of Jammu and Kashmir will also see the dawn of freedom sooner rather than later.

Q.: Both nations share a close friendship with Türkiye. How do you see this trilateral relationship evolving in the future?

A.: Pakistan places the highest importance on its close fraternal connections with Azerbaijan and Türkiye, which are anchored in shared cultural, historical, and religious ties, along with mutual respect and support on key issues. The Pakistan-Türkiye-Azerbaijan Trilateral Summit's first session was convened alongside the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit in Astana, Kazakhstan, in July 2024. Attending the Summit were Prime Minister of Pakistan, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and President of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The Summit reaffirmed that the three brotherly nations hold a consistent perspective on numerous matters of common interest and concern. It was mutually agreed that enhancing trilateral cooperation among Pakistan, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye would advance the prosperity of their peoples and foster regional and global peace and stability. The intertwined historical, cultural, and political connections



‘BAKU IS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL CITIES THAT I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE DURING MY CAREER. THE MAGNIFICENT ARCHITECTURE, EFFICIENT PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND UNPARALLELED CLEANLINESS ARE INDEED A MODEL TO BE FOLLOWED BY CITY PLANNERS WORLDWIDE.’

among Pakistan, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye provide a robust basis for collaboration across all domains.

Q.: Having spent about six months in Azerbaijan, what are your thoughts on life and work in Baku?

A.: It is a great honor to have my first ambassadorial appointment as Pakistan's Ambassador to brotherly Azerbaijan. The assignment comes with tremendous responsibilities to make every effort to diversify further and strengthen the close and fraternal bilateral ties, as envisioned by the leadership of Pakistan and Azerbaijan. It was an honor and a privilege to have presented my credentials to President Ilham Aliyev. The President was kind enough to permit my kids, son Murtaza and daughter Rabia, to accompany Sumaira and me at the ceremony. It is indeed something that we as a family will always remember with great fondness and appreciation. Baku is one of the most beautiful cities that I have had the opportunity to see during my career. The magnificent architecture, efficient public transport and unparalleled cleanliness are indeed a model to be followed by city planners worldwide. Under the direct instructions of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, beautification work is being carried out in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, on the pattern of Baku. The love and respect we receive every day is truly heartwarming. The warm and genuine affection between the people of Pakistan and Azerbaijan is special. The people of this great nation are genuinely warm and hospitable, a remarkable quality common in the people of both Pakistan and Azerbaijan. My family and I feel that we are indeed in our second home.



Mr. Kubanychbek Omuraliyev,
Secretary General of the Organization of Turkic States

OTS: A FAMILY OF TURKIC NATIONS

OVER 15 YEARS AGO, THE SIGNING OF THE NAKHCHIVAN AGREEMENT LAID THE FOUNDATION FOR WHAT IS NOW THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES (OTS), A DYNAMIC AND RAPIDLY GROWING ALLIANCE IN THE HEART OF EURASIA. IN AN INTERVIEW FOR AZERI OBSERVER, OTS'S SECRETARY GENERAL KUBANYCHBEK OMURALIYEV DISCUSSES THE ORGANIZATION'S EVOLUTION OVER THESE YEARS, HIGHLIGHTING ITS EXPANDING ROLE IN TRADE, DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, TRANSPORTATION, AND EVEN SPACE EXPLORATION. HE ELABORATES ON MAJOR INITIATIVES, INCLUDING THE TURKIC INVESTMENT FUND, THE JOINT TURKIC ALPHABET, AND ADVANCEMENTS IN CLIMATE ACTION, AND TOUCHES ON THE OUTCOMES OF RECENT SUMMITS, SUCH AS THE GARABAGH DECLARATION AND AGREEMENT ON SECURITY COOPERATION. LOOKING AHEAD, MR. OMURALIYEV SHARES INSIGHTS ON THE LONG-TERM GOALS OF THE OTS AND ITS GROWING INFLUENCE ON THE GLOBAL STAGE.

◀ **BY ELENA KOSOLAPOVA**
AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

Question: *Last year marked the 15th anniversary of the Nakhchivan Agreement, which laid the foundation for the Organization of Turkic States. How has the organization evolved over the years in terms of its capabilities and priorities?*

Answer: The evolution of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) is truly a remarkable journey, reflecting the aspirations and shared vision of its member states. While the Nakhchivan Agreement in 2009 officially marked the establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking States, the roots of Turkic cooperation extend much further. In the early 1990s, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the first Summits of the Leaders of the Turkic-Speaking States was held. These summits symbolized the collective resolve of our nations to unite, foster mutual understanding, and build a framework for collaboration across diverse fields. This sense of unity led to the landmark signing of the Nakhchivan Agreement in 2009, when the leaders of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Türkiye met in Nakhchivan (Azerbaijan) and agreed to establish the Council of Turkic-speaking States. In 2021, at the summit in Istanbul, the Council was transformed into the Organization of Turkic States, becoming a full-fledged international structure. Despite its relatively short existence, the OTS has already gained significance not only at the regional level but also globally. Since 2015, summits have been held regularly, with action plans adopted in various areas, including economy, social policy, culture, and education. What makes the Organization of Turkic States unique is that it is not merely a platform for economic cooperation, trade or regional integration. It stands on a far deeper foundation - one forged through centuries of shared history, a common

language, rich cultural heritage and enduring traditions that unite our nations. The OTS is not just a strategic alliance; it is a brotherhood built on trust, solidarity, and a collective vision for the future. OTS countries are now pursuing their bilateral relations with a new perception based on the identity of OTS membership. This is a new situation. We see that our Organization brings forward the spirit of "brotherhood" in the bilateral relations between our countries. Today the OTS is active in over 30 areas, ranging from foreign policy and trade to energy, green economy, digitalization, and even space exploration and artificial intelligence. You might wonder why space. At our last Summit in Bishkek, we signed a groundbreaking Memorandum of Understanding between the Member States of the Organization of Turkic States on Space-Related Activities. This agreement marks a significant step in strengthening cooperation in the space sector, fostering technological advancements, and promoting joint research and development initiatives among our countries. One of the key projects we have been working on for the past year and a half is the development of a shared satellite, which is expected to be launched within the next one to two years. While it may not be the most expensive satellite, its impact will be significant - enhancing weather forecasting, disaster prevention, and agricultural assessments by providing valuable data on crop yields. Over time, the OTS has evolved into the leading platform for sustainable and institutional dialogue among its members, establishing itself as a reliable mechanism for regional cooperation.

◀ **'THE OTS IS NOT JUST A STRATEGIC ALLIANCE; IT IS A BROTHERHOOD BUILT ON TRUST, SOLIDARITY, AND A COLLECTIVE VISION FOR THE FUTURE.'** ▶

Q.: What key initiatives and projects is the OTS focusing on to enhance economic cooperation, improve trade, and strengthen regional integration among its member countries?

A.: A key area where we are making significant strides is economic cooperation. Our region, strategically positioned at the crossroads of East and West, North and South, with a population of around 170 million people and covering 4.5 million square kilometers, offers vast opportunities for enhanced trade and economic collaboration. In terms of total GDP, the OTS member states rank 12th in the world. Currently, the total foreign trade volume of OTS member states stands at \$860 billion, but intra-regional trade makes up only 5% of that - around \$42.3 billion. While this is still below our potential, the trend is encouraging: just a few years ago, the figure was only 3%. Our goal is to rapidly raise this share to 10%, unlocking the full economic potential of our region. Through strategic frameworks like “Turkic World Vision 2040” and the OTS 2022-2026 Strategy, we are working hard to drive regional integration.

Several landmark initiatives are driving this transformation, including:

- The Turkic Investment Fund: The first joint financial institution of the OTS, with an initial capital of \$500 million, designed to support SMEs and boost economic growth.
- The Union of Turkic Chambers of Commerce and Industry: Enhancing business cooperation and trade facilitation among member states.
- The Digital Economy Partnership Agreement: A major step toward strengthening digital trade and technological collaboration.
- The Free Trade Agreement in Services and Investment: Currently in its final stages, this agreement will further integrate our economies.

To develop trade, it is essential to eliminate barriers, particularly in the areas of transportation and logistics. Active work is being done in this direction, with long-term projects being implemented by the UN and the International Road Transport Union. One of the most significant developments is the growing importance of the Trans-Caspian International East-West Middle Corridor - also known as the Middle Corridor. Passing through our member states, it offers unparalleled advantages. It is 2,000 kilometers shorter than the Northern Corridor and can deliver goods from China to Europe three times faster than sea routes - within just 15 days. Infrastructure enhancements along the Middle Corridor are expected to triple the volume of cargo transported by 2030, reaching 11 million tons. A vital component of this corridor is the

‘OUR REGION, STRATEGICALLY POSITIONED AT THE CROSSROADS OF EAST AND WEST, NORTH AND SOUTH, WITH A POPULATION OF AROUND 170 MILLION PEOPLE AND COVERING 4.5 MILLION SQUARE KILOMETERS, OFFERS VAST OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCED TRADE AND ECONOMIC COLLABORATION. IN TERMS OF TOTAL GDP, THE OTS MEMBER STATES RANK 12TH IN THE WORLD.’

China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project, which will significantly reduce transit distances and has the potential to transport up to 15 million tons of cargo annually. Our milestone achievements in our transport and customs cooperation include agreements such as Simplified Customs Corridor, International Combined Freight Transport, and digitalization initiatives like E-Permit, E-CMR, and E-TIR - further streamline logistics and enhance trade efficiency.

Education and culture are cornerstones of our cooperation. The establishment of the Turkic Universities Union is a prime example of this commitment, fostering collaboration among academic institutions, promoting student and faculty exchanges, and supporting unified educational standards. Another landmark achievement is the development of the Common Turkic Alphabet, finalized in Baku. This 34-letter alphabet is a crucial step in preserving our linguistic heritage and strengthening communication across Turkic communities. Additionally, the World Nomad Games hold a special place in our organization. First initiated by Kyrgyzstan in 2012, these games have grown into a global celebration of our culture. The last games in Kazakhstan were a success, and we are now looking forward to the 6th World Nomad Games in Kyrgyzstan in 2026.

Q.: You mentioned economic, cultural, and educational cooperation. What other initiatives are the OTS currently implementing?

A.: Our recent initiatives in cultural tourism have been a major achievement for the OTS. Projects like the Turkic Silk Road and the Tabarruk Ziyarat have united our member states’ cultural heritage, while the Turkic World Tourism Capital Program has helped raise the profile of our member states’ cities. Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan, was recently declared as the 2025 Turkic World Tourism Capital. The success of our cultural tourism efforts was recognized globally when we received the 2024 World Tourism Leader Award for our innovative multilateral initiatives. We have also seen growth in winter tourism collaboration, with the launch of the Union of Turkic Ski Resorts, showcasing the untapped potential of our region’s landscapes. Soon, Uzbekistan will host the first-ever Turkic Ski Championship, with each member country contributing two ski resorts to participate. We are also developing a “unified ski pass” system, allowing citizens of OTS member countries to use ski lifts at resorts in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan seamlessly. In terms of international cooperation, our efforts have expanded significantly in recent years. In line with the directives of our Heads of State, we have successfully expanded our cooperation with international organizations over the past years, working with institutions based in Geneva, Vienna, Brussels, Paris, and New York, as well as their regional offices. The Secretariat developed and signed targeted work plans and MoUs with key international bodies, including UN institutions such as UN-Habitat, WHO, FAO, and UNIDO. Notably, we signed an MoU with UN-Habitat to promote urban development and sustainability, and a Joint Declaration with UNIDO focusing on clean energy and sustainability. Additionally, the 2024-2025 Action Plan with WHO will guide our collaboration on



improving emergency preparedness, strengthening health systems, and promoting well-being across our region. Our cooperation with other international organizations such as OSCE, GCC, OIC, ECO, ASEAN, OECD, and the African Union has not only strengthened our political potential and visibility but has also enhanced our diplomatic influence, economic resilience, and connectivity globally. This comprehensive approach is vital in addressing shared challenges and advancing mutual interests. Furthermore, to promote our mission and values through public diplomacy, we collaborated with the UN Office in Geneva to organize ‘Turkic Week’ in April 2024. This event showcased Turkic cooperation on the international stage, with several activities held alongside other Turkic Cooperation Organizations to enhance our visibility. Building on the success of this initiative, we are now preparing to host ‘Turkic Week’ in other international capitals as well.

Q.: Last year, a summit was held in Bishkek. What were the key points and issues discussed?

A.: Yes, this was the 11th Summit. Over the past two to three years, the Leaders of the Member States have been convening not only for official summits but also for informal gatherings, fostering closer dialogue and strategic cooperation. Notably, ahead of the Bishkek Summit in 2024, an informal summit was held in Shusha, Azerbaijan, reinforcing the spirit of unity and strengthening ties among the Turkic States. As for the 11th Summit, its main themes were economic development, sustainability, and security. Special attention was given to issues related to digitalization. In this context, Bishkek was declared the digital capital of the Turkic world for 2025. On the economic front, we saw the signing of important agreements, including one on central bank cooperation and another on e-commerce, which is becoming increasingly vital with the rise of online trade. Overall, our leaders, Foreign Ministers, and Sectorial Ministers signed and adopted 16 different agreements, decisions, and protocols across various fields, all aimed at enhancing integration and cooperation among our member states. In 2025,

under Kyrgyzstan’s chairmanship, the OTS will prioritize key initiatives to further strengthen ties within the Turkic World and beyond. Throughout the year, various events will be organized across OTS member states under Kyrgyzstan’s leadership, fostering deeper cooperation and regional integration. A major milestone will be the first-ever meeting of the Heads of Government/Vice Presidents of OTS member states. This high-level gathering will provide a strategic platform to advance joint initiatives, reinforce economic partnerships, and drive sustainable development across the region.

Q.: You mentioned that last year an informal summit of the OTS was held in the liberated Azerbaijani city of Shusha, which ended with the signing of the Garabagh Declaration. What role could this document play in advancing economic and trade cooperation among Turkic countries?

A.: The Informal Summit in Shusha was a landmark event that highlighted the strong unity and shared vision among the Turkic nations. The theme of the summit, “Building a Sustainable Future through Transport, Connectivity, and Climate Action,” reflects the collective determination to address pressing global challenges together. Shusha, a city of deep historical and symbolic significance, stood as a testament to Azerbaijan’s full territorial restoration and sovereignty. This context added a powerful layer of meaning to the summit. The Garabagh Declaration, which was a key outcome, outlined areas of enhanced cooperation, including transport infrastructure, digital economy, climate action, energy integration, and space technologies. Another important milestone of the summit was the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Electronic Permit (E-Permit) system for international road transport operations. This

‘THE INFORMAL SUMMIT IN SHUSHA WAS A LANDMARK EVENT THAT HIGHLIGHTED THE STRONG UNITY AND SHARED VISION AMONG THE TURKIC NATIONS.’



Garabagh Declaration was adopted at Informal Summit of the Heads of State of the Organization of Turkic States in Shusha on July 6, 2024.

agreement sets the stage for digitalizing and streamlining road transport procedures among the Turkic States. The E-Permit project aims to simplify border crossings, reduce administrative costs, and eliminate the challenges posed by physical permits, such as loss or misuse. It is a game-changer for cross-border logistics, enhancing transparency, efficiency, and accountability. In line with the “Turkic World Vision-2040,” the E-Permit initiative represents a significant leap towards a more digitalized and interconnected future. The summit was not just a political gathering but a symbol of the unity and readiness of the Turkic World to tackle regional and global challenges together. This collective spirit is expected to shape the future of cooperation within the Organization of Turkic States, guiding them toward a more prosperous and connected future.

◀ **‘COOPERATION AMONG OTS MEMBER STATES IS KEY TO SOLVING ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IN OUR REGION BECAUSE IT ALLOWS US TO WORK TOGETHER, SHARE IDEAS, AND TAKE ACTION AS A TEAM.’** ▶

Q.: During the COP29 conference held in Azerbaijan last November, the first meeting of environment and ecology ministers of the member states of the Organization of Turkic States took place, resulting in the signing of a “ministerial declaration” on ecology. How can cooperation in this area help address environmental challenges in our region?

A.: Cooperation among OTS Member States is key to solving environmental problems in our region because it allows us to work together, share ideas, and take action as a team. First, we have a shared plan and goals. Important documents like the “Turkic World Vision - 2040” and the “OTS Strategy for 2022-2026” guide us to prioritize protecting the environment and fighting climate change together. Second, we have set up practical solutions. For example, the Drought Prevention Institute in Budapest helps us tackle issues like managing water, preventing droughts, and improving irrigation systems. This brings experts together to find the best ways forward. Third, we’re taking united action. At the Bishkek Summit in 2024, OTS leaders adopted the “Turkic Green Vision,” reaffirming their joint commitment to sustainability and climate action. This initiative enables member states to align policies, share best practices, and implement green technologies, tackling environmental

challenges as a united front. Fourth, the OTS has created new platforms for dialogue and joint initiatives. The first-ever meeting of Environment Ministers of OTS during COP29 in Baku marked a significant step toward coordinated regional action on climate change, conservation, and sustainable resource management, while also strengthening engagement on global environmental issues. Finally, we're getting better at dealing with disasters. Natural disasters are a growing concern, and by working together, we're building resilience. Following the Extraordinary OTS Summit in Ankara in 2023, member states agreed to establish a Civil Protection Mechanism to enhance disaster preparedness. This initiative, formalized with the signing of the Agreement on the Establishment of the Civil Protection Mechanism of the OTS at the Bishkek Summit in November 2024, enables: joint emergency response efforts for disasters such as floods, wildfires, and earthquakes; early warning systems and coordinated risk management strategies, resource sharing to strengthen disaster relief operations across the region. By

working together, OTS Member States can achieve far greater environmental and climate-related impact than acting alone. Our joint efforts in sustainability, disaster resilience, and regional cooperation will ensure a cleaner, safer, and more sustainable future for the entire Turkic world.

Q.: Additionally, last year witnessed the inaugural meetings of the ministers of industry, science, technology, and innovation, as well as the justice ministers of the Organization of Turkic States. What priorities have been set in these areas, and what issues are expected to be addressed during the second meetings, which will be held in Azerbaijan this year?

A.: Last year was a significant moment for the Organization of Turkic States, as we had the inaugural meetings for both the Ministers of Industry, Science, Technology, and Innovation, Ministers of Justice, Ministers of Interior/Internal Affairs, Heads of mapping Institutions. These meetings laid the foundation for the relevant areas of collaboration among

‘BY WORKING TOGETHER, OTS MEMBER STATES CAN ACHIEVE FAR GREATER ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE-RELATED IMPACT THAN ACTING ALONE. OUR JOINT EFFORTS IN SUSTAINABILITY, DISASTER RESILIENCE, AND REGIONAL COOPERATION WILL ENSURE A CLEANER, SAFER, AND MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR THE ENTIRE TURKIC WORLD.’





our member states. For the Ministers of Industry, Science, Technology, and Innovation, we adopted an Action Plan centered on Quality Infrastructure, Research and Development, Green Transformation of Industry, and Digital Transformation. Our primary focus is to enhance the global competitiveness of the Turkic region while ensuring economic independence and national security. The second meeting, set to take place in Azerbaijan later this year, will build on these discussions, with a particular emphasis on advancing technological innovation, strengthening research collaboration, and exploring opportunities in space technologies. For the Ministers of Justice, the first meeting in Astana marked a significant step in advancing legal cooperation across the OTS region. A key outcome was the signing of the Astana Declaration, which established a framework for strengthening the rule of law and promoting judicial reforms among member states. The upcoming second meeting in Azerbaijan in 2025 will provide an opportunity to further align our legal systems and enhance cooperation on critical issues such as cybercrime, human trafficking, and other transnational challenges. During the first meeting of the Ministers of Interior/Internal Affairs, discussions focused

on key security priorities, including joint efforts against transnational organized crime; information exchange to combat illicit production and trafficking of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, and their precursors; coordinated measures to prevent, detect, and investigate cyber-related crimes; cooperation in the digitalization of internal affairs bodies across OTS member states. The second meeting, scheduled to take place in Azerbaijan in May 2025, will build on these discussions, reinforcing security collaboration and strengthening the mechanisms needed to tackle regional and global threats effectively. Finally, the first meeting of the Heads of Mapping Institutions of the OTS countries, held in Ankara in 2024, established a framework for cooperation between civil and military mapping institutions of our member states. The second meeting, set to take place in Azerbaijan in May 2025, will build on these foundations, further deepening technical cooperation in this critical field. Overall, the upcoming meetings in Azerbaijan will provide an opportunity to expand on the progress made last year, with a strong focus on technological collaboration, legal harmonization, and economic development. These efforts will play a crucial role in shaping the future of the Turkic world, ensuring that

◀ **'THE UPCOMING MEETINGS IN AZERBAIJAN WILL PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPAND ON THE PROGRESS MADE LAST YEAR, WITH A STRONG FOCUS ON TECHNOLOGICAL COLLABORATION, LEGAL HARMONIZATION, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. THESE EFFORTS WILL PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN SHAPING THE FUTURE OF THE TURKIC WORLD, ENSURING THAT OUR REGION REMAINS COMPETITIVE, RESILIENT, AND SECURE IN THE EVOLVING GLOBAL LANDSCAPE.'** ▶

our region remains competitive, resilient, and secure in the evolving global landscape.

Q.: How do you assess Azerbaijan's role in the Organization of Turkic States and its contributions to joint projects?

A.: As already mentioned, Azerbaijan is a founding member of the Organization of Turkic States and the Agreement on the Establishment of the Organization of Turkic States was signed in the city of Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan in 2009. First of all, Azerbaijan, which is located geographically in the middle of the Turkic region, carries special importance for the unified Turkic World. Tied with other Turkic countries by the common history, language, culture and traditions, Azerbaijan plays the role of bridge in the Turkic world. Secondly, we can proudly point out the significant political, economic and social development of Azerbaijan after the restoration of its independence in 1991. Azerbaijan proved itself to be a reliable partner in the international arena. During the current time of harsh political-military turbulences in the world, any country's willingness and ability to safeguard peace, stability and security has become a significant asset. The policies of Azerbaijan, which is an integral part of the Turkic world, might serve as an example in this respect. Today, after the full restoration of its sovereignty and territorial integrity on the basis of the principles of international law, Azerbaijan strongly contributes to peace, stability and prosperity not only within the country but also in the region and beyond. Moreover, Azerbaijan is a key driver of the development of trade, transport and connectivity in the Turkic region. Azerbaijan is one of the initiators of the regional projects on energy and transport

in the bilateral and multilateral format within the Turkic countries. As known, the country implemented large-scale regional energy and transportation projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Southern Gas Corridor, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, etc. Additionally, the agreement signed by Azerbaijan in December 2022 with Georgia, Hungary, and Romania aims to build a strategic partnership in the field of green energy development and transmission, which includes developing a submarine power cable under the Black Sea, effectively creating a renewable energy transmission corridor from Azerbaijan, via Georgia, to Romania and further onward to Hungary. We believe that this project could become a new and reliable power source for the European Union. At the same time, Azerbaijan is increasing investments to raise the transmission capacity of the East-West transport corridor, which connects Central Asian countries and Türkiye through Azerbaijan. Projects aimed at digitalizing the Middle Corridor and simplifying trade are currently in progress. These projects will increase logistical efficiency and reduce costs. I would like to emphasize that Azerbaijan significantly contributes to the ongoing and new projects carried out within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States, such as the Civil Protection Mechanism, Digital Economy Partnership, TURKTRANSPLANT Unified Information System, etc.

‘WITH THE TURKIC WORLD VISION 2040 AS OUR GUIDING FRAMEWORK, WE ARE COMMITTED TO DEEPENING REGIONAL TIES, ADVANCING ECONOMIC INTEGRATION, EMBRACING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, AND ENSURING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND SECURITY.’

Azerbaijan's commitment to strengthening the OTS is further demonstrated through its leadership in high-level engagements. Upon the proposal of President Ilham Aliyev, the Informal Summit of the OTS Heads of State is now held annually, in addition to the regular Summits. In 2024, Azerbaijan hosted the Informal Summit in Shusha, under the theme “Building a Sustainable Future through Transport, Connectivity, and Climate Action”. Looking ahead, Azerbaijan will host the next regular OTS Summit in 2025, after which it will assume the OTS Chairmanship, further shaping the organization's strategic direction and regional priorities. As the Secretariat of the Organization of Turkic States, we have always felt the strong political will of the leadership of Azerbaijan to strengthen and solidify the Turkic world. In this regard, I would like to refer to the remarks made by President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, during his inauguration ceremony in February 2024. In his address, President Aliyev emphasized that the Organization of Turkic States is a priority and the main international organization for Azerbaijan, describing it as a family. As the President mentioned, the Turkic World possesses a vast geography, an extensive territory, a large military prowess, a substantial economy, natural resources, transportation routes, a young and growing population, and peoples from the same roots: “Can there be a stronger union than this? Of course not! We must make a joint effort so that the Organization of Turkic States becomes an important actor

and power center in the global arena. We can only achieve this together”. These words reflect Azerbaijan's deep commitment to advancing Turkic unity, regional integration, and global influence, reinforcing the OTS's role as a powerful and dynamic force in the international arena.

Q.: How do you envision the future of the Organization of Turkic States in the context of global changes, and what long-term goals do you set for the organization?

A.: The Organization of Turkic States has made remarkable strides over the past 15 years, strengthening unity, fostering cooperation, and driving sustainable development among its member states and observers. With the Turkic World Vision 2040 as our guiding framework, we are committed to deepening regional ties, advancing economic integration, embracing digital transformation, and ensuring environmental sustainability and security. These collective efforts position the Turkic world as not just a geographical region, but an economic powerhouse, a leader in innovation, and a model for regional cooperation. As Kyrgyzstan assumed the Chairmanship of the OTS in 2025, it brings a renewed focus on “Empowering the Turkic World: Economic Integration, Sustainable Development, Digital Future, and Security for All”. This leadership will drive strategic initiatives that strengthen trade, enhance digital infrastructure, promote environmental resilience, and ensure regional stability. With a shared vision and unwavering commitment, the OTS is poised to become a stronger, more resilient, and globally influential organization, shaping a brighter and more sustainable future for all.



COP29
Baku
Azerbaijan
UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE

COP29: AZERBAIJAN'S EFFORTS' TRANSFORM WORDS INTO ACTION



BY SALATIN MIRZAYEVA
AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

There is perhaps no other topic that has sparked as much debate in recent years as climate change. It is a recurring theme on television screens, in newspaper headlines, and at international forums. However, as environmental rhetoric becomes a regular part of the information landscape, the key question remains: what actions are being taken? The task today is not to prove the importance of the problem but to find real solutions and unite efforts for their implementation.

By hosting the 29th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29), Azerbaijan took a significant step forward, showcasing its commitment to addressing global environmental challenges. The country's unique strategic location and rich natural resources provide a solid foundation for active participation in shaping the green agenda. More importantly, these opportunities are being put into practice. Today, Azerbaijan's initiatives are evident both in national policy and in the efforts of leading companies implementing innovative approaches to a sustainable future.

For modern businesses, the revision of outdated strategies is a necessity. Environmental challenges compel them to adapt to a new reality in which caring for the environment becomes an integral part of competitiveness. Ignoring environmental standards can lead to reputational losses, economic sanctions, and reduced market opportunities.

In the Green Zone pavilion at COP29, we had the opportunity to learn how Azerbaijani companies actively integrate the principles of sustainable development into their strategies, setting an example both in the region and beyond.

One striking example of this approach is the Crescent Development Project implemented by Pasha Real Estate. This large-scale initiative comprises three key buildings: Crescent Mall, Crescent Residence, and the City Tower

office building. The project's standout feature is the adoption of advanced technologies, such as the Sea Water Cooling System. This system, which uses sea water for cooling, reduces energy consumption by 10% while preventing pollution of the Caspian Sea.

AZIMA GULIYEVA
LEAD SPECIALIST IN SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT, PASHA REAL ESTATE

"The Sea Water Cooling System cools buildings using naturally cold sea water, which is then returned to the sea without harming the ecosystem. Additionally, the project is equipped with smart technologies that automatically turn off lights and switch escalators and elevators to energy-saving modes when not in use, significantly reducing energy consumption. The complex also includes charging stations for electric vehicles, encouraging the use of eco-friendly transportation. Innovative Smart Windows maximize natural light, making the buildings even more energy-efficient."

However, it is worth noting that Baku's journey toward sustainable development began long before this, instigated by the ambitious White City project. Previously known as "Black City," this area was an industrial zone heavily polluted over decades of oil refining. Contaminated soil, emission-laden air, and oil-slicked waters painted a picture of ecological catastrophe.

Thanks to the efforts of the government and international experts, the situation has drastically changed. Extensive land reclamation work was carried out in a 1,650-hectare area. In place of old factories, there are now modern residential districts, parks, office buildings, and shopping centers.

Buildings in White City are designed with green construction principles in mind, with energy-efficient systems, rainwater collection, and environmentally friendly



Another important milestone in Azerbaijan's sustainable development is the Sea Breeze project, which embodies the idea of harmoniously integrating nature into urban environments.



The Crescent Development Project, implemented by Pasha Real Estate, comprises three key buildings: Crescent Mall, Crescent Residence, and the City Tower office building. The project's standout feature is the adoption of advanced technologies, such as the Sea Water Cooling System.

materials being integral to the design. Notably, the White City Office Building became the first structure in Azerbaijan to receive international environmental certification. This project not only improved the ecological situation but also set a benchmark for future initiatives, proving that change is possible even in the most challenging circumstances.

Another important milestone in Azerbaijan's sustainable development is the Sea Breeze project, which embodies the idea of harmoniously integrating nature into urban environments. Sea Breeze actively utilizes renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, and its buildings are designed with energy efficiency at their core.

The unique infrastructure for electric vehicles promotes the adoption of eco-friendly transport, helping to reduce the carbon footprint. This project demonstrates that sustainable development can coexist with nature, serving as an example of how environmental standards can align with economic growth.

These projects implemented in Azerbaijan have garnered positive feedback not only from local residents but also from international experts and representatives of major corporations. For instance, in an interview with the Turkish publication Enerjimiz Bir in January 2025, SOCAR Vice President Afgan Isayev highlighted key directions for global transformation in the energy sector.

**AFGAN ISAYEV
VICE PRESIDENT, SOCAR**

“As countries and companies intensify their efforts to reduce carbon emissions, renewable energy – particularly solar, wind, and hydrogen – will continue its rapid growth. Digital transformation will also accelerate; technologies such as artificial intelligence, emissions monitoring systems, and energy optimization tools will play a crucial role in this process. Modernizing energy grids will become

a critical element, enhancing the integration of renewable energy sources, electricity distribution, and grid resilience.”

These words are supported by concrete actions taken by the company, which shared its experience in the Green Zone at COP29. SOCAR Green, an initiative of the state-owned oil company, has become a key element of its sustainable development strategy. The company actively invests in solar and wind energy projects, green hydrogen technologies, and emission monitoring systems such as Methane.AI. Moreover, SOCAR collaborates with international partners to implement cutting-edge carbon capture and utilization technologies (CCUS), further solidifying its role in the global energy transformation.

‘SOCAR GREEN, AN INITIATIVE OF THE STATE-OWNED OIL COMPANY, HAS BECOME A KEY ELEMENT OF ITS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY. THE COMPANY ACTIVELY INVESTS IN SOLAR AND WIND ENERGY PROJECTS, GREEN HYDROGEN TECHNOLOGIES, AND EMISSION MONITORING SYSTEMS SUCH AS METHANE.AI.’





While initiatives like SOCAR Green demonstrate how large companies can drive environmental transformation through their resources and technological capabilities, sustainable development also requires contributions from smaller players addressing localized ecological challenges.

One such company is Azchemco, a young agrochemical enterprise focused on addressing key environmental issues, such as soil degradation, salinity, and water scarcity. Over the past six years, Azchemco has specialized in producing liquid- and water-soluble fertilizers that minimize water use while ensuring efficient nutrient absorption by plants.

**RUSLAN AKCHURIN
GENERAL DIRECTOR, AZCHEMCO**

“Our company, specializing in agrochemistry and equipped with proprietary formulas and production technologies, has conducted extensive research on the causes of soil salinity not only in Azerbaijan but also across the region. As a result, we began collaborating with the Ministry of Ecology, and in April of this year, a memorandum was signed to jointly implement a project for restoring saline soils and returning them to agricultural use.

The product we developed addresses multiple global challenges simultaneously, minimizing water usage, restoring soil health, and promoting the cultivation of environmentally friendly crops. We are confident that it will make a significant contribution to achieving the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.”

To demonstrate the effectiveness of its technology, Azchemco presented samples of treated and untreated soil

◀ AZERBAIJAN’S EXAMPLE DEMONSTRATES THAT EVEN A RELATIVELY SMALL COUNTRY CAN TAKE ON A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN SOLVING GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGES BY ADOPTING AN INNOVATIVE MINDSET AND STRATEGIC APPROACH. ▶

at its exhibition stand. Using TripDrop 369, the company successfully cultivated strawberry seedlings in the treated soil while minimizing water usage through subsurface drip irrigation. This method eliminates evaporation and significantly conserves water resources, addressing one of the critical challenges in sustainable agriculture.

The company’s products have already attracted interest from partners in the United States, Europe, and the Persian Gulf, highlighting its potential as a global leader in the agrochemical industry.

These and other initiatives reflect Azerbaijan’s broader commitment to creating an environmentally sustainable future. By combining cutting-edge technologies with a deep understanding of local challenges, the country has become a role model for effectively addressing global problems.

Azerbaijan continues to move confidently toward transformation, implementing advanced technologies across various sectors from urban infrastructure to agriculture. The nation’s example demonstrates that even a relatively small country can take on a leadership role in solving global ecological challenges by adopting an innovative mindset and strategic approach.

Ultimately, environmental sustainability is not merely a responsibility; it is a meaningful contribution to a future where the economy and nature coexist in harmony.



FROM COP29 TO COP30: ADVANCING GLOBAL CLIMATE ACTION

Mr. Manuel Montenegro,
Brazilian Ambassador to Azerbaijan



IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW FOR AZERI OBSERVER, BRAZILIAN AMBASSADOR TO AZERBAIJAN, MR. MANUEL MONTENEGRO, REFLECTS ON THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF COP IN SHAPING GLOBAL CLIMATE ACTION. HE DELVES INTO THE GROUNDBREAKING OUTCOMES OF COP29 IN AZERBAIJAN AND DISCUSSES THE INNOVATIVE “BAKU TO BELÉM ROADMAP TO 1.3T,” A JOINT INITIATIVE BETWEEN BRAZIL AND AZERBAIJAN TO MOBILIZE \$1.3 TRILLION ANNUALLY FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES’ CLIMATE FINANCE BY 2035. AMBASSADOR MONTENEGRO ALSO HIGHLIGHTS BRAZIL’S FORWARD-LOOKING THIRD-GENERATION NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTION AND ITS BROADER VISION FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND ENERGY TRANSITION. WITH BRAZIL SET TO HOST COP30 IN BELÉM, HE OUTLINES THE NATION’S PREPARATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS TO LEAD THE WORLD TOWARD A FAIR AND INCLUSIVE CLIMATE FUTURE.

BY ELENA KOSOLAPOVA
AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

Question: Looking back at COP29, what do you think were the meeting’s biggest achievements, and how do you see it shaping the legacy for COP30?

Answer: First of all, I would like to point out that COP29 raised our countries’ already excellent bilateral relations to an unprecedented level, symbolized by the participation of the Vice President of Brazil, Geraldo Alckmin, who held a significant meeting with President Ilham Aliyev on the sidelines of the conference. Close collaboration between our respective teams of negotiators took place on the way to COP29, as well as under the aegis of the G20 Climate Task Goal created by the Brazilian 2024 Presidency over the group of the world’s largest economies. Going back to your question, there can be no doubt that the two major achievements of COP29 were the approval of the New Quantifiable Contributions Goal (NQCG) and the adoption of rules for the carbon market under the Paris Agreement. Both goals were presented as the main criteria for assessing the outcome of COP29, and the Azerbaijani leadership of the conference successfully delivered on them. The adoption of rules for carbon markets under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, which was the first milestone to be announced at COP29, cleared the last pending issue of the Paris Agreement’s so-called “Book of Rules,” which covers nine major issue-areas, including mitigation, adaptation, compliance, and financing, as well as carbon market regulation. The lack of such uniform, consensus-based rules was holding back the development of a global carbon market, which can now attract resources and direct them toward fighting climate change much more efficiently. Moreover, the adoption of the New Quantifiable Contributions Goal (NQCG), under Article 9 of the Paris Agreement, set a target of climate financing of at least US\$300 billion per year by 2035. The complex negotiations that led to reaching an agreement on the NQCG went into overtime and required indefatigable efforts on the part of COP29 President, Azerbaijan’s Minister of Ecology Mukhtar Babayev, and the negotiators of the parties. Concerns regarding NQCG involved not only the volume of funds to be pledged but the allocation of funds to countries that need them the most. In this context, a major obstacle was removed when the parties agreed to seek to treble, by 2030, the yearly outlay of the funds that compose the Financial Mechanism of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and of the Paris Agreement – Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility – as well as of the Least Developed Countries Fund, the Adaptation Fund, and the Special Fund for Climate Change. Last but not least, one key element for achieving the final NQCG consensus was the initiative tabled by Azerbaijan and Brazil to create the “Baku to Belém Roadmap to 1.3T.” The initiative is expected to result in

measures to increase climate finance to at least US\$1.3 trillion per year by 2035.

Q.: For the first time, COP28, COP29, and COP30 hosts – the UAE, Azerbaijan, and Brazil – formed the COP Presidencies Troika to support “Mission 1.5.” What are the main advantages of this format, and how does it enhance global climate action?

A.: The mandate accorded at COP28 to the Troika to pursue “Mission 1.5” was a major concrete deliverable of the first Global Stock Take decision. The initiative, which was a Brazilian proposal, contributed to the more ambitious tone at COP28 and will do the same for the ensuing COP29 and COP30. Moreover, the Troika format under the leadership of the presidencies of the UAE (COP28), Azerbaijan (COP29), and Brazil (COP30) greatly facilitates continuity and coordination of efforts. “Mission 1.5” aims at uniting the international community around climate ambition aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in the context of combating hunger, poverty, and inequality. “Mission 1.5” will be implemented through a set of activities to strengthen international cooperation, including an increase in climate ambition in the next round of countries’ Nationally Determined Contributions, to be presented by February 2025.

Q.: As you mentioned, last year, Azerbaijan and Brazil signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the “Baku to Belém Climate Partnership.” How does this agreement strengthen our collaboration on climate initiatives and sustainable development?

A.: I am pleased to say that throughout 2024, there was a superb degree of collaboration between the Azerbaijani and Brazilian negotiation teams, led respectively by Deputy Foreign Minister Yalchin Rafiyev and Ambassador Andre Correa do Lago (who, I am delighted to add, has been appointed as COP30 President). This close collaboration proved to be especially important during the conference itself, leading to the joint proposal to create the “Baku to Belém Roadmap to 1.3T.” It should be pointed out that the US\$1.3 trillion figure refers to the minimum annual climate financing needs of developing countries first assessed by the African Group and later endorsed by developing nations under the aegis of the G77 & China Group. Developing countries consider that climate finance costs should be mostly borne by developed countries’ public sectors, as developing countries’ reliance on private funding sources would create additional pressure on their public accounts, which in turn would jeopardize their ability to adopt more ambitious national climate strategies. Non-debt instruments seem therefore to be critical for energy transition finance in most developing countries. The “Roadmap to 1.3T” mechanism broadly parallels that of “Mission to 1.5,” which was also a Brazilian



proposal, and assumes the US\$300 billion NQCG per year to be a floor for future finance flows, not a ceiling. Moreover, recall that both mechanisms face the challenge of the very short window of opportunity that the IPCC has identified to keep global warming below the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold. In this context, the Memorandum of Understanding on the “Baku to Belém (B2B) Climate Partnership” signed between Brazil and Azerbaijan just before COP29 signals the political will of both countries to pursue cooperation at a high level. The partnership will facilitate coordination between our two countries as they pursue the mandate given to COP29 and COP30 Presidencies to jointly pursue the “Roadmap to 1.3T” goal to mobilize and scale up developed countries’ climate finance for developing countries; this will be achieved in part through the review of subsidies, concessional instruments, and measures to create fiscal space, as well as through innovative sources of international climate finance from international financial institutions and others. It should be added that cooperation under the aegis of the “B2B Climate Partnership” extends beyond 2025, which will no doubt boost a wide-ranging bilateral cooperation agenda.

Q.: Brazil was among the first countries to submit its third-generation Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). What are the key elements of this plan, and how will Brazil work to achieve these goals?

A.: The Brazilian third-generation NDC under the Paris Agreement was indeed formally submitted by Vice President Alckmin in Baku, on the side during COP29, to the UN Secretary-General and the UNFCCC Secretariat. Its content

and its innovative structure were very well received. Our NDC vision is that, by 2035, Brazil will be an agro-forestry and neo-industrial powerhouse featuring a clean energy infrastructure. The new NDC goals include a 59–67 percent net greenhouse gas emissions reduction from 2005 levels. The NDC includes all sectors of the economy and gas emissions and is in line with the Paris Agreement goal of keeping global warming to below 1.5°C and with the Brazilian goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. The Brazilian NDC was conceived as an investment platform to channel international investments toward ecological transformation based on innovative technologies and the rational use of natural resources, which will enhance economic productivity, promote higher employment and income levels, and further the goals of achieving climate justice and lowering inequalities. The Brazilian NDC may therefore also be viewed as an investment portfolio to attract financial and technological expert resources to support the Brazilian Government’s major domestic environmental and industrial policies.

Q.: Brazil is a G20 leader in renewable electricity, and Azerbaijan is aiming to increase renewables in its energy mix. How can the two countries collaborate in this area?

A.: I have long been convinced that there is enormous potential for collaboration between Brazil and Azerbaijan on renewables, including technology development and investments in generation capacity. Both countries have set ambitious goals for themselves concerning so-called green energy sources, which demand significant technological, infrastructure, regulatory, and financial efforts. Over the next

few months, I am optimistic that bilateral understandings concerning our shared responsibilities under the aegis of the 1.5°C and 1.3T Missions will also lead to an enhanced bilateral dialogue on climate change, energy transition, and other areas that are consequential for Brazilian and Azerbaijani strategic renewable energy goals and investment priorities.

Q.: How is Belém, the host city for COP30, getting ready to welcome this major international event?

A.: COP30 will take place from November 10 to 21, 2025, in Belém, the capital of the state of Pará, a city of 1.3 million people that was founded in 1616 located at the mouth of the Amazon River. More than 60,000 people are expected to attend the conference, including heads of state, diplomats, businesspeople, investors, activists, and delegations from UNFCCC member countries and international organizations. A series of initiatives are being carried out to meet the expected demand for transportation, accommodation, and suitable venues for the summit. The investments that have been already committed, estimated at about 1.4 billion manat, are being footed by the federal public budget, the National Social and Economic Development Bank, and the Itaipu Hydroelectric Corporation – which generates about eight percent of Brazil’s total electricity output. Urban interventions include a wide array of public works, involving the city’s mobility, water and sewage services, and port, airport, and road infrastructure, including new bicycle lanes and the renovation of major thoroughfares. The Governor of the State of Pará, Mr. Helder Barbalho attended COP29 and told me he was greatly impressed at the scale and quality

of Baku’s logistics, infrastructure, and services. In a recent interview, Governor Barbalho said that all public works to host COP30 have either already been licensed, are in the bidding phase, or are already underway. This includes 260 new electric buses that will use exclusive lanes, such as was the case in Baku. Air arrivals in Belém from January to November 2024 already show an increase of 59 percent compared with the previous year, before it was announced that the city would host COP30. The task of accommodating the influx of COP participants is already mobilizing the local, state, and federal governments, as well as the private sector. According to the President’s Chief of Staff Office, which has been assigned overall responsibility over COP30 infrastructure, there will be new and renovated hotels, as well as several thousand additional beds that will be made available through residential rentals managed by established internet hospitality services, at adapted government facilities, and on cruise ships that will dock at Belém’s Outeiro harbor. About 500 conference negotiators and staff will be hosted at an “Olympic Villa” close to the COP30 venue, which will be later recycled as office space.

Q.: What are Brazil’s primary goals for COP30, and what does the country hope to achieve as the host nation?

A.: Under the leadership of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Brazil is once again at the forefront of global efforts against climate change. Brazil is actively working to promote dialogue between nations, seeking convergence between the demands of developing countries and the responsibilities of developed countries. Brazil has a unique





role as a bridge between the Global North and South at a challenging time for climate discussions. As G20 President in 2024, Brazil called for developed countries to bring forward climate neutrality timelines and to present ambitious nationally determined contributions (NDCs) at COP30. It also sought to mobilize the world's largest economies to fight climate change. At the helm of the G20 Climate Task Force, Brazil successfully proposed a common agenda to cap global warming to 1.5°C, which was adopted by the 20 major economies, central banks, international financial institutions, institutional investors, and other actors. Brazil also successfully promoted the integration of the financial and climate agendas, advancing models of neo-industrial planning and channeling investments to developing countries. Furthermore, the G20 adopted voluntary principles for a fair and inclusive energy transition, recognizing the existence of multiple paths to reducing emissions and achieving carbon neutrality in the energy sector, such as biofuels. The Belém COP will need to set an agenda for emissions reduction, climate adaptation, and climate financing. A fair and inclusive energy transition also involves halting the loss of biodiversity, restoring ecosystems, and ending deforestation and forest degradation. In this regard, at COP30 Brazil will launch the Tropical Forests Forever Fund, to economically value standing forests through an innovative financial mechanism that should reward developing countries for the conservation and restoration of their tropical forests. Its objective is to value standing forests through the services they derive, providing economic opportunities for people – especially those most in need – and complementing approaches focused on reforestation and combating deforestation. Brazil will seek to increase

‘BRAZIL HAS A UNIQUE ROLE AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE GLOBAL NORTH AND SOUTH AT A CHALLENGING TIME FOR CLIMATE DISCUSSIONS. AS G20 PRESIDENT IN 2024, BRAZIL CALLED FOR DEVELOPED COUNTRIES TO BRING FORWARD CLIMATE NEUTRALITY TIMELINES AND TO PRESENT AMBITIOUS NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTIONS (NDCS) AT COP30.’

international support for the implementation of policies for environmental preservation, sustainable development, and combating the degradation of ecosystems. One of the challenges for Brazil is to bring to COP30 the knowledge of climate solutions that Brazilian society itself is developing. Brazil has exemplary initiatives, programs, and experiences. Therefore, it can be beneficial in two ways: from what it is already doing, which is unique, and from what it can do, given its internationally recognized leadership. This will bring enormous benefits to the Brazilian economy, positioning Brazil as a leader in the new economy, since all climate solutions require economic solutions. Of course, COP30 will also focus on finalizing work on NDCs, mobilizing resources toward the US\$1.3 trillion climate financing goal along with Azerbaijan, and on the Troika 1.5°C Mission. After more than three decades of negotiations and the progress achieved at COP28, COP29, and what I expect to be a very successful COP30, I hope the world may finally be able to start transitioning away from the negotiations phase of the UNFCCC into an era of concrete implementation of the climate change regime.



MR. Ravan Hasanov,
Executive Director of the Baku International
Multiculturalism Center

PHOTOS BY ADIL YUSIFOV

MULTICULTURALISM AGAINST CONFLICTS: WHAT AZERBAIJAN CAN OFFER THE WORLD

HOW CAN IDENTITY BE PRESERVED IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION? WHAT MEASURES CAN CURB THE RISE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA, ANTI-SEMITISM, AND OTHER FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION? MOST IMPORTANTLY, CAN MULTICULTURALISM SERVE AS A UNIVERSAL ANSWER TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY, OR IS THE WORLD MOVING TOWARD NEW FORMS OF ISOLATION AND CONFLICT? IN AN INTERVIEW WITH RAVAN HASANOV, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE BAKU INTERNATIONAL MULTICULTURALISM CENTER, WE DISCUSSED HOW AZERBAIJAN PROMOTES ITS VALUES ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE, WHETHER MULTICULTURALISM CAN ACT AS A BARRIER TO RADICALISM, AND WHY TOLERANCE IS NOT JUST A STRATEGY BUT A KEY TO SURVIVAL IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD.

◀ **BY SALATIN MIRZAYEVA**
AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

Question: *Today, the world is witnessing a crisis of intolerance, with ethnic and religious conflicts becoming increasingly severe. How, in your view, can multiculturalism become a tool to address these global problems?*

Answer: In an era of globalization and migration, we are increasingly confronted with challenges stemming from ethnic, cultural, and religious differences.

Azerbaijan's model of multiculturalism is unique because it is not an artificially constructed concept. It is a way of life that has developed over centuries. More than 30 ethnic groups and diverse religious communities coexist in harmony here, something that seems unattainable in many other countries. For instance, in Azerbaijan, sunnis and shias pray together in the same mosques. In our country, you will never see armed guards at the premises of mosques, churches, or synagogues because we have never faced threats to our sacred sites. This is not proclaimed as an achievement; it is simply a part of our life. And that is truly unique.

On international platforms, we strive to demonstrate how this model works. At COP29, where environmental issues were discussed, we showcased how multiculturalism can be a tool for addressing other global challenges as well.

Q.: *Could we conclude that radicalism, extremism, and fundamentalism can only be fought by creating an ideological barrier – multiculturalism, the model of coexistence?*

A.: Regrettably, despite all the talk about interfaith and intercultural dialogue, the number of ethnic and religious conflicts worldwide continues to grow.

On the other hand, if we look at the Global Terrorism Index report, we see that in 2018 alone, approximately 80 terrorist attacks were carried out under the guise of religion, compared to 40 in 2013. In just five years, that number doubled, prompting the question: why is the situation deteriorating?

The reality is that our world is home to about 2,000 distinct peoples, speaking different languages and adhering to different religions and cultures. Yet there are only 198 independent states. This means that we either create 2,000 new states for each of these peoples or learn to coexist peacefully by respecting and promoting multicultural values. Preserving the ability of peoples to maintain their cultures,

religions, and languages is perhaps the only policy that can ensure harmonious existence in the future. This is why we assert that there is no alternative to multiculturalism.

When multiculturalism was not a primary state policy, there were two main models of managing multicultural societies. The first was assimilation – an attempt to erase the distinct characteristics of one culture and blend it into the dominant one. The second was isolation – segregating an ethnic or religious group from the rest of society. These approaches led to apartheid and other crimes. History has shown just how catastrophic the consequences of such decisions can be. Before the two World Wars, nationalism and cultural segregation created fertile ground for tragedies. Today, we see some countries returning to isolationism, which only exacerbates the problem.

Q.: *Given your background in law, how would you assess the current legal framework for protecting religious groups? Is it sufficient to combat discrimination, or are changes needed?*

A.: Today, we see that many states attempt to regulate religious freedom but often encounter contradictions. A notable example is the law passed in France aimed at strengthening democratic values. At first glance, this seems like a progressive measure. However, this law prohibits the wearing of religious symbols in public spaces, directly infringing on the rights of Muslim women in hijabs, Jewish men in kippahs, and adherents of other faiths. It restricts their access to education, employment, and social life, effectively isolating them from society.

Such measures not only contradict international human rights conventions but also heighten tensions between different groups. This is a clear example of how legislation can exacerbate conflict instead of fostering dialogue.

◀ **'AZERBAIJAN'S MODEL OF MULTICULTURALISM IS UNIQUE BECAUSE IT IS NOT AN ARTIFICIALLY CONSTRUCTED CONCEPT. IT IS A WAY OF LIFE THAT HAS DEVELOPED OVER CENTURIES. MORE THAN 30 ETHNIC GROUPS AND DIVERSE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES COEXIST IN HARMONY HERE, SOMETHING THAT SEEMS UNATTAINABLE IN MANY OTHER COUNTRIES.'** ▶



‘AT COP29, THE BAKU INTERNATIONAL MULTICULTURALISM CENTER ACTIVELY PARTICIPATED IN SHOWCASING HOW MULTICULTURALISM CAN CONTRIBUTE TO ADDRESSING GLOBAL CHALLENGES, INCLUDING THOSE RELATED TO ENVIRONMENT.’

Q: *You mentioned that Azerbaijan often initiates international platforms. Which initiatives do you consider the most successful?*

A.: One of the most successful initiatives is undoubtedly the Baku Process, which has served for many years as a platform for dialogue between various cultures and religions. We organize events where issues of multiculturalism, tolerance, and cooperation are discussed. This not only strengthens international ties but also helps share our experience.

We are also proud that educational programs on multiculturalism are taught in 27 universities worldwide. These courses cover political, historical, literary, religious, and cultural aspects of Azerbaijan. They provide students with a deeper understanding of how the multiculturalism model works and its practical benefits.

Another important project is the International Summer and Winter Schools of Multiculturalism, a unique initiative that allows students from dozens of countries to visit Azerbaijan and see how our multiculturalism model works firsthand. These students return home with new knowledge and become ambassadors of the Azerbaijani model, spreading its ideas in their countries and showcasing that cultural diversity is not a threat but a strength.

We should also mention our active participation in COP. For instance, during the 29th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29), the UN organized a Religious Pavilion, where the link between ecology and multiculturalism was discussed. This highlighted that these issues are interconnected and require a comprehensive approach.

Q: *How did you demonstrate the values of the Baku International Multiculturalism Center at COP29?*

A.: At COP29, the Baku International Multiculturalism Center actively participated in showcasing how multiculturalism can contribute to addressing global challenges, including those related to environment. One of the key events was the Global Baku Summit of Religious Leaders, organized by the State Committee on Religious Associations, the Muslim Council of Elders, the Caucasus Muslims’ Board, and the United Nations Environment Programme, which emphasized the importance of involving religious communities in solving ecological problems. Religious leaders hold significant influence over their followers, and their involvement can help foster a sense of responsibility toward the planet.

During the summit, a visit to the liberated territories of Karabakh was organized, allowing participants to witness the destruction of religious and historical monuments. This was a deeply emotional moment that vividly demonstrated the devastating impacts of war – not only on nature but also on cultural heritage. The experience underscored the importance of preserving such monuments as potential bridges between nations, fostering dialogue and reconciliation, even in times of conflict.

Our participation in the Pavilion of Religions, organized under the UN's initiative, was another major highlight. Through several sessions, we discussed how cultural and religious values could address ecological challenges. It became clear that administrative measures alone are insufficient; spiritual motivation is essential to unite people and inspire action. This approach resonated strongly with many participants and was recognized as a valuable contribution to the conference.

Q.: Why do you think the involvement of religious leaders in addressing ecological problems is so significant?

A.: Today, approximately 80% of the world's population adheres to some form of religious belief or spiritual tradition. Religious leaders wield immense influence, shaping the moral and ethical perspectives of their communities; by integrating environmental values into religious teachings, they can motivate millions of people to take better care of the planet as a shared home.

At COP29, we focused on exploring how spiritual guidance could amplify ecological awareness and action. For example, discussions in the Pavilion of Religions highlighted the experiences of various countries in addressing ecological problems through cultural and religious frameworks. This approach aligns deeply with multicultural principles, where shared values can transcend borders and unite people from diverse backgrounds.

Looking ahead to COP30 in Brazil, we plan to expand these discussions, emphasizing the synergy between environmental sustainability and multiculturalism. It is increasingly evident that global challenges like climate change require not just technical solutions but also a moral and spiritual commitment driven by shared human values.

Q.: How do you see the future of multiculturalism on a global scale?

A.: I firmly believe that multiculturalism is the only viable model for harmonious coexistence in a diverse world. With the rise of nationalism, Islamophobia, and anti-semitism in certain parts of the world, the richness of Azerbaijan's multicultural identity becomes even more apparent.

When I travel abroad, I often hear people describe Azerbaijan as a former Soviet republic or a resource-rich, oil-producing country. While these definitions are not incorrect, they fail to capture the essence of our nation. National Leader Heydar Aliyev often emphasized that the greatest wealth of Azerbaijan lies in its people – their cultural, national, and spiritual identity.

We invest resources in preserving and promoting these values, ensuring that they are passed down to future generations. Unlike natural resources such as oil and gas, which may eventually be depleted, human values are eternal. By investing in our cultural and spiritual heritage, we contribute not only to our national development but also to the enrichment of global humanity.

When asked whether promoting Azerbaijani multiculturalism abroad is challenging, my answer is both yes and no. Yes, because the reception of Azerbaijan varies across countries, and we sometimes encounter biases and double standards. But no, because our model's success speaks for itself. Practical examples, such as the restoration of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish heritage sites in Azerbaijan, serve as compelling evidence of our



‘I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT MULTICULTURALISM IS THE ONLY VIABLE MODEL FOR HARMONIOUS COEXISTENCE IN A DIVERSE WORLD. WITH THE RISE OF NATIONALISM, ISLAMOPHOBIA, AND ANTI-SEMITISM IN CERTAIN PARTS OF THE WORLD, THE RICHNESS OF AZERBAIJAN’S MULTICULTURAL IDENTITY BECOMES EVEN MORE APPARENT.’

commitment to multiculturalism. These initiatives, championed by figures such as First Vice President Mehriban Aliyeva, have garnered international respect and admiration.

Q.: What personal beliefs guide your efforts in promoting multiculturalism?

A.: One of my guiding inspirations comes from the great Islamic thinker Ibn al-Arabi. His profound statement encapsulates the essence of multiculturalism and tolerance: “Believe in your religion in a way that does not reject other religions and beliefs. If you do not, you reject the true essence of the truth itself. For God is not the product of a single person’s imagination.”

This idea resonates deeply with me. When individuals worship God and pray, they are essentially affirming their own humanity and existence. As the Quran says, “Wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah.” This understanding can serve as the foundation for interfaith dialogue. Radical or fanatical attachment to one belief system undermines the universal essence of truth. True understanding comes from respecting and accepting other beliefs, fostering a richer and more harmonious world.

GLOBAL CITIZENS SHAPING LOCAL SOLUTIONS

BY KELLY CHAIB DE MARES
AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

The European Azerbaijan School (EAS) is at the forefront of empowering youth in addressing global challenges through innovative initiatives and international collaboration. From reimagining the iconic 1928 play *Sevil* [by Azerbaijani playwright Jafar Jabbarly] to tackle modern gender equality issues to organizing impactful events like the Festival of Hope and COP29 Climate Simulation, EAS is shaping a new generation of global citizens. With a strong emphasis on experiential

learning, sustainability, and cross-cultural dialogue, the school's Director and CEO, Francesco Banchini, is driving meaningful change at local and regional levels while preparing to partner with major agencies, including the Educational Collaborative for International Schools (ECIS) and United Nations (UN).

In 1918 Baku, the character of *Sevil* transformed from a devoted-yet-disregarded wife into a symbol of empowerment and social change. Today, the students of EAS are reimagining Jafar Jabbarly's iconic work, which once inspired countless women to discard their veils, to address contemporary challenges of gender equality in



In 1918 Baku, the character of *Sevil* transformed from a devoted-yet-disregarded wife into a symbol of empowerment and social change. Today, the students of EAS are reimagining Jafar Jabbarly's iconic work, which once inspired countless women to discard their veils, to address contemporary challenges of gender equality in Azerbaijan.



The Festival of Hope was held for the first time in the region on April 12, 2024, at EAS, taking place as part of the Third International Conference on Experiential Learning. The event brought together over 200 students from various schools.

Azerbaijan. This impactful project will be presented by the students at the UN.

This initiative was born within the framework of the Festival of Hope platform, which empowers students to share ideas and collaborate on solutions to global challenges. The festival was held for the first time in the region on April 12, 2024, at EAS, taking place as part of the Third International Conference on Experiential Learning, organized by the Caucasus and Central Asia Association of IB World Schools (CCAIBWS). The event brought together over 200 students from various schools to engage in critical discussions on pressing

global issues identified by the students themselves as being relevant in their local context, such as, climate change, peace, and conflict, in addition to gender inequality.

Currently, EAS students are collaborating with their peers from the Nazarbayev Intellectual School of Astana to identify topics of relevance in Astana for discussion during the Second Festival of Hope, which will take place in Kazakhstan in April 2025 as part of the Fourth International Conference on Experiential Learning of the Association. That is how the students from Baku are sharing their expertise and experiences acquired during the organization



EAS partnered with the British Council to host the COP29 Climate Simulation, which brought together approximately 170 students from nearly 60 schools and 30 universities.



EAS launched the Tree-Planting Eco Project with the support of the Executive Power of Yasamal District, where students and notable guests planted 100 trees at the MIDA Residential Complex.

◀ BUILDING ON ITS ESTABLISHED RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA REGION, EAS IS EXPANDING ITS INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS, INCLUDING COLLABORATIONS WITH WESTERN AND EUROPEAN SCHOOLS. ▶

of the inaugural Festival of Hope in the region to ensure the overwhelming success of the event in Astana, and this sharing will make their in-person participation as impactful and beneficial as possible.

By training global citizens capable of developing such interesting initiatives, EAS and its leader Francesco Banchini are demonstrating, not only to Astana but to the world, that meaningful change can begin with a willingness to act, even on a small scale, such as within a school. For instance, the discussions on climate change during the Festival of Hope inspired impactful initiatives, such as:

1) The school partnered with the British Council to host the COP29 Climate Simulation, which brought together approximately 170 students from nearly 60 schools and 30 universities. With representatives from the UK and a group of student journalists, the event fostered a diverse and engaging atmosphere to explore ways to reduce pollution and address the impact of oil and gas usage.

2) EAS launched the Tree-Planting Eco Project with the support of the Executive Power of Yasamal District, where

students and notable guests planted 100 trees at the MIDA Residential Complex.

Student discussion resumed in late November 2024 at the International European Azerbaijan Model United Nations (IEAMUN 2024), sponsored by PD&MS Group – an event that underscores the importance of collaboration, critical thinking, and leadership in tackling the world’s most pressing challenges, providing a platform where students from various international schools participated in dynamic debates, exchanged ideas, and challenged perspectives while working toward innovative solutions for a better future.

Building on its established relationships in the Caucasus and Central Asia region, EAS is expanding its international connections, including collaborations with Western and European schools.

Currently, students in Baku are identifying issues of mutual concern with their peers at the International School of Bologna. After completing the online brainstorming phase, the students will travel to Italy to design actionable initiatives and develop specific projects aimed at advancing the Sustainable Development Goals.

A similar process is underway with La Scuola d’Italia in New York, which EAS students plan to visit at the end of the academic year. During this visit, EAS will present their student-led initiatives to the United Nations, showcasing hands-on projects that have delivered tangible outcomes at the local level.

The enthusiasm of EAS students is demonstrating – at both national and regional levels – the importance



Student discussion held in late November 2024 at the International European Azerbaijan Model United Nations (IEAMUN 2024), sponsored by PD&MS Group – an event that underscores the importance of collaboration, critical thinking, and leadership in tackling the world’s most pressing challenges.

of forming global citizens. As a result, Mr. Banchini is regularly contacted by Azerbaijani university rectors requesting his famous monthly sessions that equip teachers with tools to become international educators or educators with an international mindset. During the third quarter of the academic year, the program will expand to universities in Guba and Nakhchivan.

At a regional level, EAS will continue to share its experience in training global citizens who value diversity, respect cultural differences, and contribute to building a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable world. This will be achieved during the second half of the academic year through workshops conducted in collaboration with the CCAAIBWS Association in Baku, Tbilisi, and Tashkent.

To conclude the academic year on a high note, EAS will formalize its partnership with ECIS by hosting the International

EAS WILL CONTINUE TO SHARE ITS EXPERIENCE IN TRAINING GLOBAL CITIZENS WHO VALUE DIVERSITY, RESPECT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, AND CONTRIBUTE TO BUILDING A MORE EQUITABLE, INCLUSIVE, AND SUSTAINABLE WORLD.

Conference on Education. This collaboration with ECIS, a global organization supporting internationally minded schools since 1965, represents the latest initiative led by Mr. Banchini. Driven by his belief in the power of collaboration to foster meaningful change, the partnership aims to engage major agencies in achieving a broader and more impactful influence on education at both national and international levels.

Blending Heritage in Diplomatic Life

Mrs. Florence Davion,
The Spouse of Swedish Ambassador
to Azerbaijan



IN THE INTERVIEW FOR AZERI OBSERVER, MRS. FLORENCE DAVION, THE SPOUSE OF THE SWEDISH AMBASSADOR TO AZERBAIJAN, SHARES HER INSPIRING JOURNEY FROM HER FRENCH VILLAGE ROOTS TO THE HEART OF DIPLOMATIC LIFE IN BAKU. SHE REFLECTS ON HOW HER EARLY EXPOSURE TO INTERNATIONAL CULTURES, HER CAREER AS A FRENCH TEACHER, AND HER FAMILY'S NOMADIC LIFESTYLE PREPARED HER FOR THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF DIPLOMACY. FINALLY, MRS. DAVION OFFERS INSIGHTS INTO HER FAMILY'S TRANSITION TO AZERBAIJAN, THEIR EXPLORATION OF LOCAL TRADITIONS, AND HER ROLE IN FOSTERING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SWEDISH AND AZERBAIJANI CULTURES.

BY ELENA KOSOLAPOVA
AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

Question: *Can you share insights into your personal and professional background prior to becoming the spouse of the Swedish Ambassador to Azerbaijan? How did your previous experiences prepare you for this role?*

Answer: While I cannot say I was prepared since childhood to be the spouse of the Swedish Ambassador in Baku, I was certainly prepared to have the life we are living now. When I was six years old, I joined a folk dance group in my village. Every summer, we organized an international folk dance festival for children. It took place in July and lasted seven to fifteen days, with groups from every continent coming to dance and share a part of their culture; they were from what was then Yugoslavia, Senegal, Mexico, Canada, Thailand... We even hosted some of the children in our home, and very quickly they became part of our family. Some other times, my group also visited other countries such as Czechoslovakia and Hungary... This had a huge impact on my childhood and teenage life and is still part of who I am today. From a very young age, I was ready to travel and discover other cultures. I even met my husband in high school, which he attended as an exchange student. In my twenties, I worked as a French teacher in France for a short period of time, and very soon I moved to other countries like Spain, Ecuador, and China before finally reuniting with my husband in Sweden. When he became a diplomat, we were ready for the new adventure ahead of us.

Q: *What were your initial thoughts upon learning about the assignment to Azerbaijan? How did you and your family prepare for the move, and what were your first impressions upon arrival?*

A.: The first time we were offered to come here was in the early 2010s. Back then, I knew nothing about this part of the world, as I had majored in Spanish language. As many of my friends did, I checked on a map where it was located and got curious about the country. Eventually, it did not work out that time. During our last posting in Austria, Baku came up on the list of vacancies. As a family, we agreed on having Baku on our list of preferences. And somehow I felt before it was even officially decided that we would be living there. It was like Azerbaijan had been calling and waiting for us all these years. We had the opportunity to visit Baku in the spring before our move. My husband had already been here for work previously, but for the rest of the family, it was our first time. Our first impression was very positive. We were very happy with the city, and we looked forward to the new school year.

Q: *As a French national married to the Swedish Ambassador, how do you blend French and Swedish cultures in your diplomatic engagements in Azerbaijan? Are there*

any challenges or advantages this dual perspective brings?

A.: It is true I am French, and I am proud to talk about my culture and my region – the Cognac region where I lived eighteen years without moving once. In this regard, I am particularly pleased to be in Azerbaijan, which also has a culture of brandy production. At the same time, I have been sharing my life with Tobias for thirty-three years; we lived in Sweden, we have kids who also speak Swedish fluently, we have family and friends there, and I am a Swedish citizen. In my everyday life, I try to balance depending on the situation. I love to represent Sweden with a French touch!

Q: *In what ways do you participate in diplomatic activities alongside your spouse? Can you provide examples of your involvement in initiatives or events that aim to strengthen Sweden-Azerbaijan relations?*

A.: The most important event the Swedish Embassy organizes every year is Sankta Lucia on December 13th. That evening, we receive the Swedish and diplomatic community as well as Azerbaijani colleagues in our residence to enjoy the Lucia procession and typical Swedish food. Apart from that, I try to be present at different events in which the Swedish Embassy participates when I am available. In October, for example, we took part in the European Food Festival in Baku and presented the famous Swedish kanelbulle, or cinnamon bun. Additionally, as spouse, I am part of the Head of Missions spouses' group (HoMs Spouses). HoMs Spouses recently organized the International Charity Winter Bazaar, where we could sell cinnamon buns, Astrid Lindgren books translated into Azerbaijani, and Swedish cosmetics from Oriflame. Also, as part of HoMs Spouses last year, we organized a visit to Villa Petrolea, the house museum of the Swedish Nobel brothers, to learn more about this important link between Sweden and Azerbaijan.

Q: *Can you share your experiences as a French teacher in Azerbaijan? What inspires you most about teaching your native language here?*

A.: While I am not a French teacher in Azerbaijan, I have my own company based in Sweden and work online with students in different countries. Sometimes, I assist the French Institute in Azerbaijan when they need a native-speaking teacher to evaluate students for some official French language tests, for example. This kind of experience gives me the opportunity to learn more about

‘FROM A VERY YOUNG AGE, I WAS READY TO TRAVEL AND DISCOVER OTHER CULTURES. I EVEN MET MY HUSBAND IN HIGH SCHOOL, WHICH HE ATTENDED AS AN EXCHANGE STUDENT.’



'WHILE I AM NOT A FRENCH TEACHER IN AZERBAIJAN, I HAVE MY OWN COMPANY BASED IN SWEDEN AND WORK ONLINE WITH STUDENTS IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES. SOMETIMES, I ASSIST THE FRENCH INSTITUTE IN AZERBAIJAN WHEN THEY NEED A NATIVE-SPEAKING TEACHER TO EVALUATE STUDENTS FOR SOME OFFICIAL FRENCH LANGUAGE TESTS, FOR EXAMPLE. THIS KIND OF EXPERIENCE GIVES ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT AZERBAIJAN, ITS TRADITIONS, AND CULTURE.'



Azerbaijan, its traditions, and culture. Some of the participants became friends who have helped me discover more about Azerbaijan, like typical delicacies such as homemade pahlava and walnut jam, while I help them with the French language.

Q.: How do you manage your personal interests and any professional endeavors while supporting your spouse's diplomatic career? What strategies have you found effective in maintaining this balance?

A.: The key words here are "mutual support." In the thirty-three years we have been together, we have supported each other in every way. Ready to move at any time, ready to let the other move by him/herself for a shorter or longer period of time. Of course, we always discuss any possible change or project we would like to accomplish while involving the children in the choices we make.

Q.: What have been some of the most challenging aspects of life as a diplomat's spouse, and what have been the most rewarding experiences?

A.: Living in a diplomatic family means that you are ready to move regularly, discover new cultures, enrich your life, and most importantly for me, get to know new people, make new friends. I am a very social person, and I like to meet new people, sharing unforgettable, priceless moments with them. That is the most rewarding part of our life. And then, at some point, you have to say goodbye. Leaving friends is the most heartbreaking part, starting in my childhood and the festivals and extending now to our nomad life. You know you will meet a few of them again in a few months or a few years; for some others, they were part of your life during a short period of time and will be forever in your heart.

Q.: Balancing diplomatic life and career is demanding. What activities help you unwind and recharge?

A.: To recharge, we have a dog, a golden retriever. I walk her every morning on the boulevard when the city is still (mostly) sleeping.

'LIVING IN A DIPLOMATIC FAMILY MEANS THAT YOU ARE READY TO MOVE REGULARLY, DISCOVER NEW CULTURES, ENRICH YOUR LIFE, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY FOR ME, GET TO KNOW NEW PEOPLE, MAKE NEW FRIENDS. I AM A VERY SOCIAL PERSON, AND I LIKE TO MEET NEW PEOPLE, SHARING UNFORGETTABLE, PRICELESS MOMENTS WITH THEM.'





‘TO RECHARGE, WE HAVE A DOG, A GOLDEN RETRIEVER. I WALK HER EVERY MORNING ON THE BOULEVARD WHEN THE CITY IS STILL (MOSTLY) SLEEPING. WE MEET OTHER DOGS AND DOG OWNERS. SHARING WITH THEM IS SIMPLE AND EASY, AND IT’S RELAXING.’

We meet other dogs and dog owners. Sharing with them is simple and easy, and it’s relaxing. I do some sports as well. It’s vital. I train three times a week at home and run on Sundays. And sometimes I go for a hike in the mountains. And last but not least, going out with friends is also essential. Lunches, coffees, dinners... Any excuse to meet a friend works for me!

Q.: How have you and your family adapted to Azerbaijani culture? How has living in Azerbaijan influenced your family’s dynamics and daily life?

A.: As a family, we have adapted very well here. Our children are happy in school, and they have good friends. We came here when they were teenagers, and it helped them become more independent. They feel secure, and we feel secure knowing they are going by themselves to different parts of the city.

Sometimes, not speaking the language can lead to misunderstandings and frustrations. I did try to learn Azerbaijani, but it is a difficult language, though I am happy to at least be able to use “Yavash yavash, pendir lavash!” We enjoy the opportunity to travel across your beautiful country. As a family, we have travelled to the shores of Lankaran, we have stayed in an old caravanserai and visited the Khan’s palaces in Sheki, and we have hiked in the mountains around Lahic. We have skied in Shahdag, we have visited the rock carvings at Gobustan – which, by the way, have a lot of similarities with rock carvings in Sweden – and we have enjoyed the pleasures of Azerbaijani wineries.

Q.: Finally, we have the same question for all ambassadors’ spouses. There is a saying that behind every successful man, there is a woman. How does that manifest in your life?

A.: My husband’s success is above all his own success. The same goes for me. And behind both of us is not only our spouses but also our closest family, our kids, willing to move every time, even though having to leave their friends is heartbreaking. Behind us, there is also the wider family, our parents and siblings supporting our choice of life, accepting the long-distance relationship, the time difference when we schedule talks on the phone. The family we have has made us who we are and has enabled the success we have achieved.



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THE IMPACT OF AI ON ACCOUNTING AND AUDITING: EMBRACING THE FUTURE

BY NASIBA MURADKHANOVA
AZERI OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Just 20 years ago, the world of accounting and auditing was very different. Accountants and auditors' primary tools were paper records, calculators, and ledgers, and they would spend hours manually documenting transactions, checking figures, and creating reports. This isn't a distant past, however; it was the reality for financial professionals until very recently. In fact, this world of manual processes only began to change as digital technologies started to take hold.

While the global shift to digital tools like spreadsheets and accounting software began earlier in other parts of the world, Azerbaijan experienced this transformation a bit later. Initially, many accountants and auditors found it challenging to transition from paper-based systems to using Excel and other digital tools. But over time, the move to electronic records proved invaluable, dramatically speeding up workflows and reducing human error. As new technologies began to emerge, financial professionals were introduced to more sophisticated programs that automated tedious tasks, made calculations more accurate, and improved overall efficiency.

Fast forward to today, and the landscape of accounting and auditing has evolved even further. The introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed the profession, enabling accountants and auditors to move beyond routine tasks and instead focus on more strategic, value-adding activities. In the realm of auditing, this shift has been particularly profound. Once seen as "strict controllers" who comb through documents for errors and mistakes, auditors now take on a more value-adding role, helping businesses understand their financial health, optimize operations, and mitigate risks. Modern auditors are more than just mistake finders; they are key partners in improving business transparency and guiding companies toward more informed decision-making.

Today, AI is playing an increasingly critical role in accounting and auditing processes. In our work at KPMG, we have adopted AI tools that assist with everything from automating document verification to analyzing complex financial data. For example, what used to require hours of work manually comparing documents can now be completed in a matter of seconds by AI-powered systems. Instead of checking each document by hand, auditors can simply upload scanned materials into specialized software, which then cross-references the documents and provides a summary. This frees up valuable time and allows professionals to focus on higher-level analysis and strategic insights.

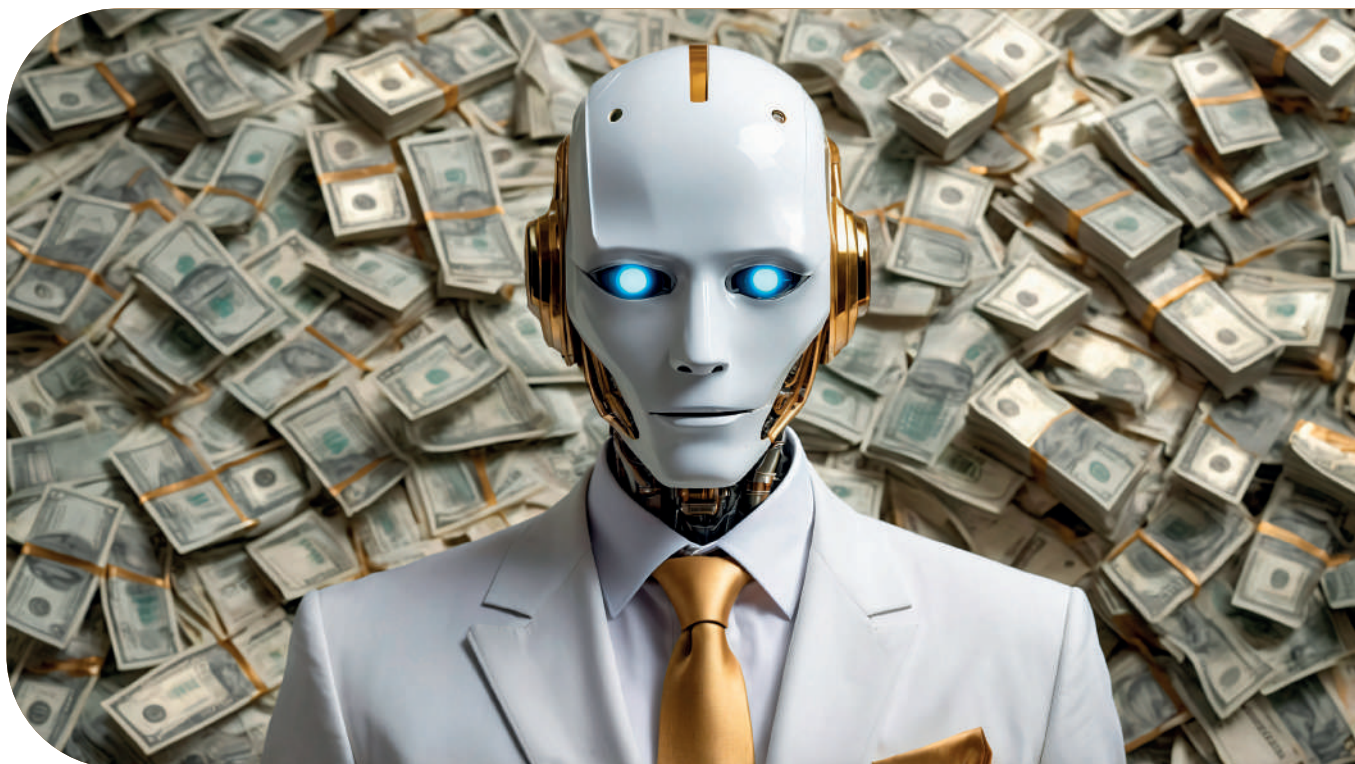


Nasiba Muradkhanova is an audit professional with over 14 years of experience delivering high-quality services to clients across the public and private sectors in the United Kingdom, Azerbaijan, and other CIS countries. At KPMG's Azerbaijan office, where Nasiba spent over a decade, she has managed audit and advisory engagements for more than 100 clients, showcasing her deep industry knowledge and analytical skills. In her current position as an Audit Partner, she is focused on advancing KPMG Azerbaijan's audit practice, driving continuous improvement, and ensuring the delivery of exceptional audit services.

A GLOBAL TREND: THE RISE OF AI IN BUSINESS

The adoption of AI in the accounting and auditing sectors is part of a broader trend in the global business world. According to recent KPMG Global Research conducted among 1,800 financial leaders and board members across 10 countries, nearly 75% of companies have already integrated AI into their operations, and this trend is only expected to accelerate. In fact, almost 99% of companies plan to use AI in their financial processes within the next three years.

▲ ACCORDING TO RECENT KPMG GLOBAL RESEARCH CONDUCTED AMONG 1,800 FINANCIAL LEADERS AND BOARD MEMBERS ACROSS 10 COUNTRIES, NEARLY 75% OF COMPANIES HAVE ALREADY INTEGRATED AI INTO THEIR OPERATIONS, AND THIS TREND IS ONLY EXPECTED TO ACCELERATE. ▼



The research highlights that AI adoption is becoming increasingly widespread across industries such as telecommunications, healthcare, manufacturing, and financial services. AI is particularly valuable in streamlining routine tasks, improving decision-making, and providing more accurate insights into financial data. This enables auditors to offer more detailed analyses and to better support business leaders in making data-driven decisions.

As businesses invest more in AI, it's clear that the technology will continue to play a central role in shaping the future of accounting and auditing. The integration of AI helps businesses to not only work more efficiently but also make better-informed decisions based on real-time data and predictive analytics.

DATA PRIVACY AND SECURITY: A KEY CONCERN

While AI has undoubtedly benefitted the accounting and auditing professions, its use also raises important questions about data privacy and security. At KPMG, we are particularly cautious about the confidentiality of our clients' information. As auditors, we handle sensitive data, so we must ensure that it remains secure at all times. We do not use publicly available AI tools like ChatGPT for processing client data, as we cannot guarantee the security of that information.

Instead, we rely on specialized AI systems designed to ensure data protection and meet the highest security standards. These systems are built to comply with strict privacy regulations and to safeguard client information throughout the auditing process. As AI continues to evolve, data security will remain a top priority for businesses in the accounting and auditing sectors.

THE FUTURE OF AUDITING: AI AS A TOOL, NOT A THREAT

AI serves as a powerful tool for improving accuracy, making processes faster, and reducing human error. However,

it's important to emphasize that AI does not replace humans in the auditing process, which is a common concern. AI is a tool that enhances human work by automating repetitive tasks and improving data analysis, but human judgment and decision-making remain essential to its success. Auditors and finance professionals will still play critical roles in interpreting data, providing insights, and advising businesses based on their findings. The core functions of auditors, such as analyzing financial data, advising clients, and making strategic decisions, will continue to rely on human expertise and judgment. In short, AI is an aid, not a replacement.

As AI becomes more deeply integrated into financial services, professionals in the industry will need to embrace these changes and adapt to new technologies. Far from eliminating jobs, AI will create new opportunities for professionals who are willing to learn and evolve with the technology. It will allow auditors to focus more on high-level tasks that require significant judgment and decision-making in order to provide valuable insights that can shape business strategy.

The future of finance-related professions is not one where technology replaces people, but one where technology empowers people to do their jobs better. The key to success in this new era is to understand how to leverage AI as a tool that complements human expertise. The organizations that embrace this shift will be best positioned to thrive in the rapidly changing landscape of accounting and auditing.

The integration of artificial intelligence into the accounting and auditing sectors is not just a passing trend – it's the future. Companies are investing heavily in AI to improve efficiency, reduce errors, and provide more valuable insights.

As AI continues to evolve, so too will the roles of accountants and auditors. Far from a threat, AI represents an opportunity for professionals to innovate, adapt, and grow in an increasingly data-driven world. The future of the profession is bright, and those who embrace this technology will be at the forefront of the next wave of change.

WAKE UP – LIFE IS TOO SHORT



“WHEN YOU ARE IN LOVE AND FEELING JOY, YOUR MIND IS FULLY IN THE PRESENT. THAT IS WHEN YOU ACHIEVE YOGA. THE ART OF LIVING IS TO LIVE IN THE PRESENT MOMENT.” THIS SIMPLE YET PROFOUND PIECE OF ADVICE WAS SHARED WITH US BY THE INDIAN GURU SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR. A HUMANITARIAN LEADER, SPIRITUAL TEACHER, AND PEACE AMBASSADOR, RAVI SHANKAR IS THE FOUNDER OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION ART OF LIVING. HIS VISION OF A SOCIETY FREE FROM STRESS AND VIOLENCE HAS INSPIRED MILLIONS AROUND THE WORLD. ACCORDING TO HIS PRACTICE, THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF ENERGY AND PEACE OF MIND FOR EVERY INDIVIDUAL IS THEIR BREATH. THESE UNIQUE BREATHING TECHNIQUES ARE TAUGHT BY THOUSANDS OF ART OF LIVING INSTRUCTORS WORLDWIDE.

BY SABINA KULIYEVA

AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

Question: *You’ve visited Baku several times. How would you describe the energy of our city? Is it different from the energy of other cities and countries?*

Answer: The first time I heard about Baku was in 1991 when volunteers from our Art of Living organization came here for the first time. It was a challenging period. I know that the past few decades have been tough for your country, and I’m truly happy that peace has now been restored. Today, I’m

delighted to see Baku as a modern, thriving city. The people here are amazing, and many Azerbaijanis visit our center in India. There is a deep spiritual bond between Azerbaijan and India.

Q.: *Is there a special source of power in Azerbaijan?*

A.: The greatest power in the world is love. I feel a special sense of love and care for one another among your people. So, that power is everywhere here.

Q.: *Where do you find your own source of energy?*

A.: Each of us is a source of energy. You wouldn't ask the Sun where it gets its energy, would you? The Sun would just tell you that energy lies within it [laughs].

Q.: *Could you tell us about the creation of your organization, Art of Living?*

A.: In the beginning, I didn't plan to create an organization. I was simply sharing my knowledge with people. However, wise individuals started saying to me, "Your beautiful painting needs a frame." And so, they created the organization.

Q.: *What do you consider your greatest achievement?*

A.: Recently, we held a cultural event in Washington, D.C., which brought together 1.5 million people. It was a time of joy and celebration because the goal of our organization is to help people understand that the whole world is a celebration. Art of Living brings inner harmony to people. It supports their health and helps them build harmonious relationships with one another. This is how society becomes happier.

Q.: *How can we make Baku happier?*

A.: Baku is home to just three million people. For India, that's a very small number [laughs]. So, our goal here and now should be to make Baku the happiest city – to free its residents from stress and worries. I would love to see more happiness and joy here. To achieve this, we all need to practice breathing techniques and share them with others.

Q.: *Meanwhile, the world is full of wars. How can the world achieve peace?*

A.: Conflict begins within a person. It starts in the mind and then spreads to their relationships with others. To achieve

peace, we need to calm the mind. God is energy and love, and this energy and love reside within each of us.

Q.: *What prevents people from living peacefully?*

A.: That's my question as well. I ask it to everyone. I believe, above all, that ignorance and stress are to blame.

Q.: *So how can we calm the mind?*

A.: It's very simple. Practice breathing techniques every day. These techniques boost our immunity to be five times stronger. You don't need to do anything extraordinary – just breathe correctly. This brings clarity of mind and emotional stability. Anxiety and depression fade away quickly. This simple method can give us all a healthy, harmonious society free from ignorance. I believe that all people in the world are members of one family. By practicing daily, you can gradually change the entire world.

Q.: *Our lives are now deeply connected to gadgets. It's hard to imagine someone without a device in their hands. How can we find a balance between the virtual and real worlds?*

A.: Gadgets make our lives more comfortable, and we should be grateful for that. How do we find balance? Through meditation. During meditation, our consciousness receives everything it needs to achieve balance. It's also important to make time for real connections with other people through, for example, sports, music, and dance. These activities help people step away from gadgets and stay present in the moment.

Q.: *What advice would you give to someone who doesn't feel enough energy to start meditating?*



A.: Come to Art of Living. Just come. Our instructors will first teach you breathing techniques: sudarshan kriya, pranayama, and meditation. These practices will help you raise your energy levels. We're here to assist people in letting go of negativity. Michelangelo, when asked how he created his sculptures, said, "I simply take a block of stone and chip away everything that is not part of it." Inside each of you are all the answers to your questions. The first step is to understand who you truly are, which includes your mind, your body, and your emotions. Chip away everything unnecessary. Once you understand who you are, you'll realize there is no "me" and "them." We are all part of one unified whole.

Q.: *But how can people meditate if they're facing danger in conflict zones?*

A.: Our instructors work in conflict zones as well. We currently have many teachers in Ukraine, Russia, Israel, and Palestine. We are doing everything we can. I know it's not enough. We need to do even more. We need to prevent conflicts, not just resolve them. For that, we need more Art of

Note: Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, or Gurudev, founded the nonprofit educational and humanitarian organization Art of Living in 1981. Its programs are based on unique breathing techniques designed to free the mind from stress. Over 42 years, 450 million people from more than 180 countries have participated in the organization's courses. In 2009, Gurudev was ranked fifth on Forbes India's list of the seven most influential people in India.

Living instructors. Every one of your readers can decide right now to join us and become a yoga teacher, helping to make the world a better place.

Q.: *Many people today struggle with procrastination – the habit of putting off important tasks. How would you advise them?*

A.: Tell them to postpone eating and sleeping too and to imagine that everyone around them put everything off as well – store clerks, restaurant waiters, doctors, teachers. Then they would truly experience what procrastination feels like [laughs].

Q.: *Can these practices help overcome phobias, like the fear of death?*

A.: First, let go of the belief that you even have a fear. Fear is the opposite of love. Both fear and love are forms of energy. When love grows, fear diminishes, and vice versa. However, if we convince ourselves that we have a phobia, we attract everything that reinforces it. Just let it go, and fill yourself with love. Of course, breathing techniques will help you do this.

Q.: *What if you want to help someone, but they don't want to accept your help?*

A.: Think about what your mother did when you were a child and didn't want to eat. She distracted you with songs, stories, and fed you one spoonful at a time. Do the same.

Q.: *What can we say to people to support them?*

A.: Wake up. Life is very short. We don't have much time to argue or suffer. We need to live and cherish every single day!



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CREATE TO INSPIRE: ENRIQUE CABRERA'S MISSION

ENRIQUE CABRERA IS A CONTEMPORARY MEXICAN ARTIST, SCULPTOR, PHOTOGRAPHER AND MUSICIAN. HE IS KNOWN FOR WORKS THAT POPULARIZE MEXICAN ART AND CULTURE ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE. CABRERA HAS PARTICIPATED IN EXHIBITIONS IN MORE THAN 28 COUNTRIES, INCLUDING EXPOSITIONS AT THE LOUVRE AND THE PICASSO MUSEUM. HE IS ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN CHARITY WORK, COLLABORATING WITH SUCH FOUNDATIONS AS SCHOLAS OCCURRENTES, THE EVA LONGORIA FOUNDATION, AND THE RICKY MARTIN FOUNDATION. IN ADDITION, HE PARTICIPATES IN THE RESTORATION OF HISTORICAL SITES AND CREATES PROJECTS INSPIRED BY HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL THEMES, INCLUDING MODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF TRADITIONAL SYMBOLS. LAST YEAR, HIS SCULPTURE "LA GRAN MANZANA" WAS FEATURED ON ONE OF WHITE CITY'S STREETS IN BAKU. IN THIS INTERVIEW, HE SHARES HIS THOUGHTS ON HIS CREATIVE PATH, SOURCES OF INSPIRATION, AND PLANS TO CONTINUE HIS ARTISTIC LEGACY.



"La Gran Manzana" stands on one of White City's streets in Baku.



BY EMIL AKHUNDOV

AZERI OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

Question: *Your works often redefine the connection between urbanism and nature. What elements inspire you when creating projects like “Palmarius” or “El Toro de Oro”?*

Answer: “Palmarius” is inspired by palm trees, which symbolize not just growth and vitality but also my roots, traditions, and beginnings. It’s a homage to Mexico, where the concept of life in death is common; however, I see skulls as celebrations of life because we are all born with a skull, an integral part of our existence. “Palmarius” aims to reflect this duality of life and death, central to Mexican culture, raising awareness about our origins and the transient nature of life. Conversely, “El Toro de Oro” embodies human strength, determination, and resilience in pursuing our goals. It’s a tribute to struggle and effort, capturing the essence of humanity’s relentless pursuit of achievement and resilience against urban challenges. My aim with these projects is to blend the natural with the urban while sparking a dialogue on identity, resilience, and the celebration of life.

Q: *“La Gran Manzana” has become a symbol of New York City. What was it like working on such an iconic project, and what message did you aim to convey through this sculpture?*

A.: Creating “La Gran Manzana” was a journey into the heart of what makes New York both a dream and a reality. The sculpture encapsulates the city’s promise of opportunity and its invitation to ambition. Through this work, I aimed to convey a message of inclusivity and aspiration, where every visitor or resident can see themselves as part of this vibrant tapestry. My intention was to leave a cultural imprint that inspires generations, demonstrating that art can elevate human spirit and vision, which contributes to my legacy of transcending through time without the necessity of death.

Q.: How have your experiences in Poza Rica shaped your artistic vision and led you to create monumental works?

A.: Poza Rica, with its blend of industrial and natural landscapes, has been a pivotal influence, teaching me about the delicate balance between human progress and nature’s resilience. This contrast has fueled my drive to create monumental works that serve as beacons of environmental consciousness and cultural identity. My art here seeks to leave a legacy that speaks to the future, urging a reevaluation of how we livewith and respect our environment.

Q.: You emphasize the importance of art in urban spaces. How do you see the role of public art in modern metropolises?

A.: Public art in modern cities serves as a cultural anchor, transforming mere spaces into vibrant, interactive communities. It humanizes our urban environments, turning concrete into canvases of collective memory and aspiration. Through my works, I aim not only to beautify but also to provoke thought, encourage social change, and build community. This contribution to public discourse is integral to my vision of a legacy where art perpetually enhances human life, making cities places not just to live but to thrive culturally.

Q.: How do your works help bridge different cultures and promote intercultural dialogue?

A.: My art integrates symbols from around the globe, crafting a visual dialogue that transcends cultural barriers. By focusing on universal themes like nature, human emotion, and shared heritage, my works invite viewers into a conversation about our common humanity. This approach aims to foster a world where dialogue leads to understanding and respect, promoting peace through art and showcasing our interconnectedness.

Q.: You collaborate with international brands and real estate developers. How can art become an integral part of commercial and residential spaces?

A.: For art to be truly integrated into commercial and residential spaces, it must transcend mere decoration to embody the space’s vision by adding depth, identity, and narrative. My collaborations focus on creating art that resonates with people’s lives, enhancing their environment in a way that speaks to them, ensuring my work leaves a lasting cultural footprint in these spaces, contributing to a legacy of art that lives with and through people.



La Gran Manzana “The Big Apple” is the first and unique project created in homage to New York by international artist Enrique Cabrera in collaboration with Mitsui Fudosan America Inc., one of the most important real estate developers in the country and the major in Japan.

Q.: Your works garner record-breaking figures at international auctions. How do you perceive the commercial success of your art, and how does it influence you as an artist?

A.: While commercial success is validating, it’s the platform it provides that truly matters, as it allows for more expansive projects and broader reach. This success empowers me to explore new territories in art, all while staying true to my vision of creating works that inspire and endure. My goal is to use this success to amplify my message, ensuring my art



remains relevant and influential far beyond my lifetime, part of an enduring legacy.

Q.: *You speak about transcendence and creating a legacy. Which of your projects do you believe will leave the most profound cultural impact?*

A.: “La Gran Manzana” in New York and “Palmarius” stand out for their potential cultural impact. The former embodies the city’s spirit, encouraging a legacy of dreams and inclusivity, while the latter challenges urbanites to reconnect with nature, potentially altering future city planning. Both projects are designed to resonate through time, embodying my vision of transcendence where art shapes not just current but future cultural landscapes.

‘I’M KEEN ON EXPLORING SUSTAINABILITY, USING ECO-FRIENDLY MATERIALS OR CREATING WORKS WITH ECOLOGICAL BENEFITS. THIS EVOLUTION IS PART OF MY JOURNEY TOWARD A FUTURE WHERE ART NOT ONLY REFLECTS BUT ACTIVELY IMPROVES OUR WORLD.’

Q.: *How do you plan to evolve your art in the future? Are there areas you would like to explore but haven’t yet?*

A.: I aim to delve into interactive and digital art, where technology can bridge the physical and virtual, enhancing



El Toro de Oro by Enrique Cabrera, at Gansevoort Meatpacking NYC.



public interaction with art. Additionally, I'm keen on exploring sustainability, using eco-friendly materials or creating works with ecological benefits. This evolution is part of my journey toward a future where art not only reflects but actively improves our world.

Q.: Your “La Gran Manzana” sculpture in Baku’s White City has become one of its significant symbols. What inspired you to choose this image for the city?

A.: The choice of “La Gran Manzana” for Baku was inspired by the city’s ambition to blend its rich history with a modern vision. Just as New York is known as the Big Apple for its promise and potential, Baku, with its history as a cultural crossroads, represents a similar allure of new beginnings. My goal was to create a symbol that would

resonate with this narrative, fostering a legacy where my art becomes part of the city’s identity, encouraging a dialogue about ambition, culture, and the journey toward modernity.

Q.: How did you approach working with the context and space of White City when creating this project?

A.: In White City, I aimed to respect the architectural harmony while adding a bold statement. This involved understanding the historical and modern elements of Baku’s skyline, ensuring “La Gran Manzana” would not only fit but also enhance this dialogue. My approach was to make the sculpture a part of the city’s evolving story, contributing to a legacy where art and architecture narrate a tale of cultural pride and forward-thinking, transcending mere aesthetics to become a beacon of identity.



‘I ENVISION A SERIES OF INTERACTIVE INSTALLATIONS THAT PLAY WITH LIGHT, PERHAPS USING THE UNIQUE LIGHT OF THE CASPIAN SEA TO CREATE ART THAT CHANGES WITH THE DAY’S PROGRESSION. THIS WOULD NOT ONLY BEAUTIFY BUT ALSO ENGAGE, TURNING THE CITY INTO A LIVING GALLERY.’

Q.: What challenges did you face in integrating your art into the urban landscape of Baku?

A.: Integrating art into Baku’s urban landscape presented unique challenges due to the city’s rich historical context and rapid modernization. One significant challenge was ensuring that my work respected the cultural heritage while contributing to the city’s contemporary identity. I overcame this by engaging in extensive dialogues with local historians, architects, and community leaders to deeply understand the city’s narrative.

Another challenge was physical integration due to environmental factors like the Caspian Sea’s influence on materials and the city’s unique light conditions. I addressed this by selecting materials that could withstand these conditions, using light as part of the art’s expression, which turned potential limitations into a feature of the work.

Lastly, there was the challenge of making the art accessible and relevant to a diverse audience. I tackled this by designing pieces that were not only visually striking but also invited interaction, fostering a sense of ownership and pride among the local populace. My goal was to ensure that my art in Baku would not just be viewed but experienced, becoming part of the city’s daily life and thus, part of my lasting legacy of art that educates, inspires, and connects across generations.

Q.: You mentioned your desire to add more of your works to White City. What new projects or ideas do you envision for this area?

A.: I envision a series of interactive installations that play with light, perhaps using the unique light of the Caspian Sea to create art that changes with the day’s progression. This would not only beautify but also engage, turning the city into a living gallery. My legacy here would be one where art evolves with its environment, encouraging both locals and visitors to see the city in new lights, literally and metaphorically, promoting a culture of innovation and appreciation for art in daily life.

Q.: If you had the opportunity to create a series of works for Baku, on what themes or symbols would you focus?

A.: I would focus on themes of cultural fusion and historical connectivity, drawing inspiration ranging from the Silk Road’s legacy to modern-day Baku. Symbols like the flame, representing both the ancient Fire Temple and modern energy, would be central, alongside water motifs reflecting the Caspian Sea’s influence. My aim would be to weave a narrative through these works, highlighting Baku’s role as a bridge between cultures, eras, and ideas, leaving a legacy that celebrates this unique identity on the world stage.

Q.: What impressed you the most about Baku and its architectural environment?

A.: What struck me most about Baku was its extraordinary ability to merge ancient with contemporary architecture. The juxtaposition of the old city’s winding streets against futuristic structures like the Flame Towers embodies a city that honors its past while boldly looking toward the future. This dynamic environment inspired me to create art that could both reflect and contribute to this narrative, aiming for a legacy where my work becomes an integral part of Baku’s ongoing story of cultural and architectural evolution.

Q.: What advice would you give to young artists aiming to establish themselves on the international stage?

A.: Stay true to your vision while being open to cultural nuances worldwide. Build networks, but more importantly, engage deeply with each community where your art is placed. Understand that failures are stepping stones to success. My legacy is not just in my artworks but in the path I pave for others, encouraging a generation where art is a means to connect, inspire, and transcend borders, ensuring a legacy of art that grows with humanity.

For me, the most important aspect of my career as an artist is the ability to transcend without having to die, ensuring my great legacy endures and serves as inspiration for the new generations embarking on this grand adventure called life. Life offers us the opportunity to pursue all our projects and fulfill our goals and dreams based on determination, effort, strength, perseverance, dedication, and always seeking perfection in everything to achieve our goals and objectives to the fullest. My legacy is not just about the art left behind but about the inspiration it provides for others to explore, create, and surpass themselves, since life’s only promise is the potential to achieve through hard work and passion.

G

ASTRONOMIC DEBUT

THE CAPITAL OF AZERBAIJAN CONTINUES TO SURPRISE FOOD ENTHUSIASTS WITH NEW VENUES WHERE AESTHETICS, TASTE, AND RESTAURANT CULTURE INTERTWINE SEAMLESSLY. THIS TIME, LA CRITIQUE CULINAIRE'S CRITIC HIGHLIGHTS FOUR NEW SPOTS, EACH WITH THE POTENTIAL TO IMPRESS.

◀ **BY EMILIA TEMURZADE**
AZERI OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

IVA RESTAURANT BAKU

WHERE THE ELEGANCE OF SIGNATURE CUISINE MEETS THE ENERGY OF A LIVELY PARTY

Iva is a place where modern European cuisine finds a new voice through the creative interpretation of Chef Alexander Tsukanov. In Azerbaijan, Alexander's gastronomic journey began with intimate chef's table dinners held in a cozy, homey setting with his project partner Nikolay Fedotov. I was fortunate enough to attend their very first dinner and fell in love with the dishes that can now be enjoyed at Iva. The standout items on the menu for me were sea bass crudo with citrus and green oil, veal brain pâté, dorado in an apple-cream sauce with trout roe, and tartare with truffle and pecorino. The Iva Dvor terrace at the restaurant is more than just an open space; it's the hub of trendy parties set to the beats of top DJs. It's where the foundation for vibrant events is laid, making it an integral part of Baku's urban life.



LA CRITIQUE CULINAIRE RECOMMENDATION:

Be sure to try the flank steak – a lean cut of meat with a rich flavor, served with a piquant sauce. End your day with signature cocktails and dance to a DJ set at Iva Dvor. It is an ideal plan for an unforgettable night.

ASTORIA PROSECCO BAR

THE ITALIAN SOUL IN THE HEART OF BAKU

Astoria Prosecco Bar is the first and only prosecco bar in Azerbaijan, preserving the authentic Italian aperitivo culture. The Astoria brand, founded in 1987 by the Polegato family, is renowned for its contribution to the art of crafting prosecco. The bar's menu is concise yet meticulously curated. Guests can enjoy a plate of appetizers from genuine Italian products. For instance, prosciutto with goat cheese and honey create a delightful food pairing with Astoria Lounge prosecco. For those who prefer bolder flavors, the truffle mortadella panini served with homemade chips drizzled in aromatic truffle oil is perfect, particularly when accompanied by a glass of Astoria Fano sparkling wine.



LA CRITIQUE CULINAIRE RECOMMENDATION:

Grab a seat on the terrace to enjoy panoramic views of the Caspian Sea. At around 8 PM, get ready for the captivating dancing fountains, a stunning evening highlight.

LULU

SIMPLICITY TURNED INTO ART

LULU is a neo-bistro restaurant that blends French classics with modern gastronomic trends. Dishes are crafted with a perfect balance of the team's expertise and fresh local ingredients under the guidance of Chef Robert Bershansky. The menu surprises with its inventive creations. For instance, the Cheesy Smashburger features a soft, slightly sweet bun baked in-house and is overflowing with cheese, with a juicy beef patty cooked to perfection. Every element – from the crispy pickle to the lightly caramelized onion – adds depth to this dish. Meanwhile, the Taco Sabet showcases tender, spiced meat complemented by refreshing cilantro and silky guacamole, delivering an explosion of flavor in every bite. The bar at Lulu enhances the overall experience. Its menu features cocktails crafted with meticulous attention to detail. The Ruby Red blends strawberry juice, aloe, and raspberry sorbet, offering a refreshing yet rich flavor. Meanwhile, the Old Money, made with gin, martini, and absinthe, captivates with its complexity and bold character.



LA CRITIQUE CULINAIRE RECOMMENDATION:
One of my top picks is the Pumpkin with labneh and miso caramel. The dish transforms a simple pumpkin into something extraordinary, with the sweetness of the caramel perfectly balanced by the creamy texture of labneh and the nutty crunch of seeds, creating a true gastronomic delight.

BITTER

A FLAVOR THAT TELLS ITS OWN STORY

If flavors could speak, Bitter would whisper tales of London, New York, travels, and the culinary secrets its owner has gathered from around the world and brought to life in the heart of Baku. The bar's interior is chic and modern, with touches of vintage charm; a massive bar counter, dim lighting, and cozy sofas create the ambiance of a venue straight out of a Hollywood movie. Soon, vinyl nights will begin, adding even more allure to the place. The bar menu surprises with its boldness and creativity. Signature cocktails range from the bright OnlyFans Martini to the deep and complex Tiki Negroni. The kitchen is equally impressive. The Truffle Beef Burger features juicy beef, truffle oil, and melted cheese, while the Kimchi Peach Ceviche plays on contrasts, balancing the spiciness of fermented kimchi with the sweetness of ripe peach, and the tender texture of the fish ties all the elements together.



**LA CRITIQUE CULINAIRE
RECOMMENDATION:**

Take a seat on the cozy terrace, tucked away from prying eyes, order a House Negroni, and savor this moment of pure bliss.

ASPI WINERY



AZERBAIJAN

SAVALAN



Wine Museum at Savalan - Aspi Winery: History, Interaction, and Tasting

The Savalan - Aspi Winery has opened a unique Wine Museum, where the traditions of winemaking are seamlessly combined with modern technology and educational programs. The museum's exhibits invite visitors on a fascinating journey through the history of winemaking, the unique characteristics of the local terroir, and the secrets of wine production.

One of the museum's highlights is a barrel that has made its way into the Guinness Book of World Records as the "Largest Wooden Wine Barrel." The barrel has a capacity of 66,579 liters, a length of 4.9 meters, and a diameter of 4.75 meters.

This record-breaking barrel is housed within the new museum complex on the grounds of the Savalan - Aspi Winery, where every visitor can see it up close.



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AEOLIAN ISLANDS: WHAT TO SEE OF UNESCO HERITAGE

BY GIOVANNI BELLA
HEAD OF ITALIAN DESK

The Aeolian Islands provide an outstanding record of volcanic island-building and destruction, and ongoing volcanic phenomena. Studied since at least the 18th century, the islands have provided the science of vulcanology with examples of two types of eruption (Vulcanian and Strombolian) and thus have featured prominently in the education of geologists for more than 200 years.

Enchanting places lapped by the sea, characterised by wild nature and 'shaken' by two active volcanoes, Stromboli and Vulcano. Referred to as the «seven pearls of the Mediterranean», these islands enchant all who visit.

Also known as the Lipari Islands, they are part of one of Sicily's three archipelagos, the other two being the Egadi and Pelagie Islands.

They are found in the southern Tyrrhenian Sea, up off the northern Sicilian coast and opposite the Tyrrhenian coast of Messina. They belong to the metropolitan city of Messina.

The seven islands are: Lipari, Salina, Vulcano, Stromboli with the Strombolicchio islet, Filicudi, Alicudi, and Panarea with the islets of Basiluzzo, Dattilo and Lisca Bianca.

Legend has it that the islands were named after Aeolus, a Greek prince who ruled a colony there and could predict the weather from the shape of the clouds of vapour above one of the volcanoes.

◀ **LEGEND HAS IT THAT THE ISLANDS WERE NAMED AFTER AEOLUS, A GREEK PRINCE WHO RULED A COLONY THERE AND COULD PREDICT THE WEATHER FROM THE SHAPE OF THE CLOUDS OF VAPOUR ABOVE ONE OF THE VOLCANOES.** ▶

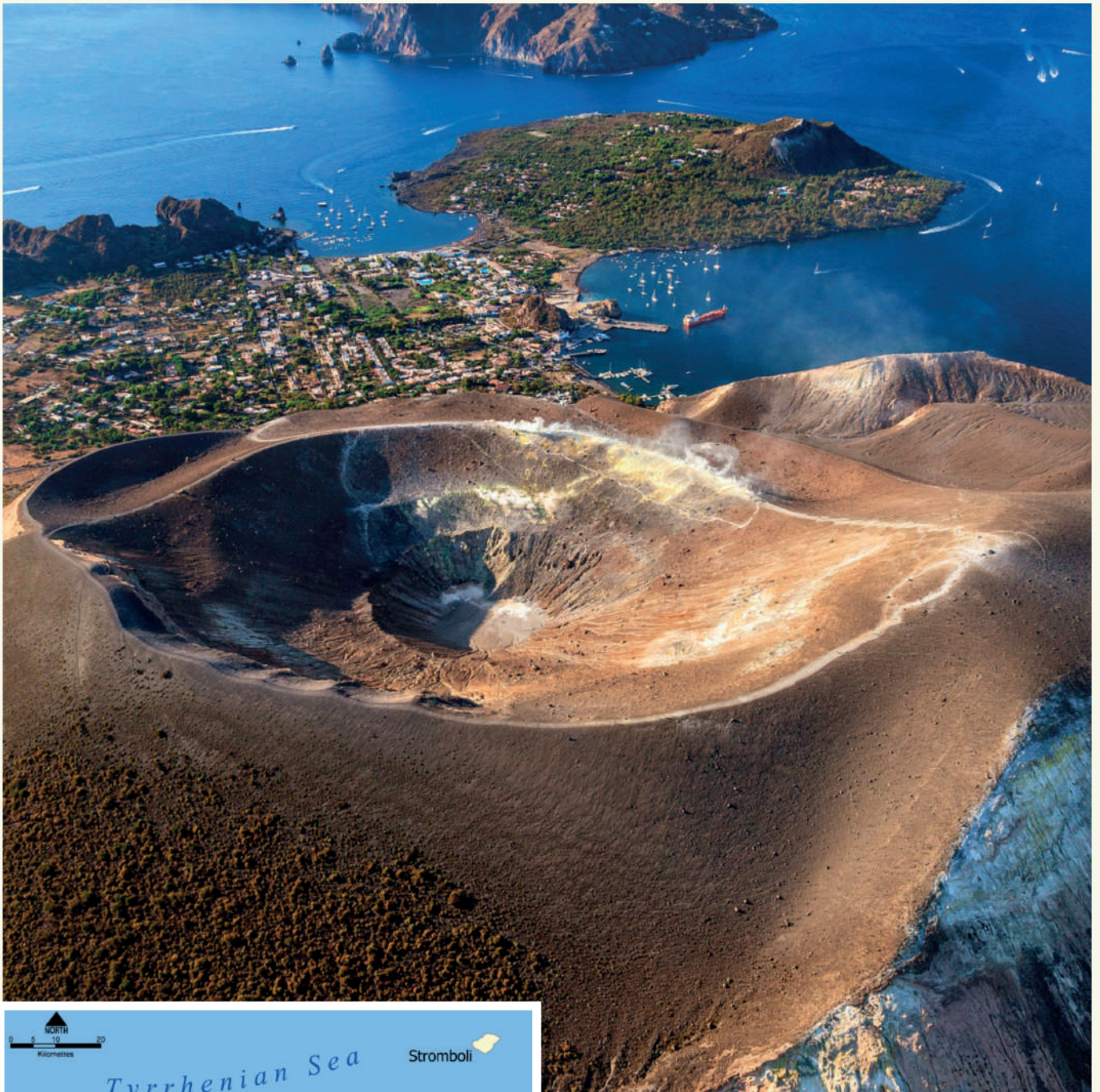
The Aeolian Islands were submarine volcanoes that emerged from the waters around 700,000 years ago. Subsequent eruptions over the millennia have led to the formation of pumice stone and obsidian, which, being so sharp, is perfect for making tools. The export of obsidian throughout the Mediterranean brought great prosperity to the archipelago.

In the early Middle Ages, Lipari was a pilgrimage destination, and miraculous events flourished across the Aeolian Islands. Dioceses and monasteries were opened to repopulate uninhabited areas and revive land cultivation.

The history of the islands is marked by the arrival of the ferocious Turkish pirate Ariadeno Barbarossa, who ransacked and destroyed Lipari, deporting 9,000 inhabitants.

The seven volcanic islands of the Aeolian Islands were added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in December 2000





◀ THE AEOLIAN ISLANDS ALSO BOASTS MAJESTIC SEA STACKS, WONDERFUL BEACHES, COVES AND CAVES, AS WELL AS ITS EXTRAORDINARY SEABED. ▶

due to their specific nature: the volcanic archipelago represents an important model for the study of volcanology worldwide.

The Aeolian Islands are considered a veritable laboratory that has long provided opportunities for study: observed since the 18th century, they have provided geologists with fundamental information.

Volcanic activity is monitored by the National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology in Catania. The site also boasts majestic sea stacks, wonderful beaches, coves and caves, as well as its extraordinary seabed.

Your first destination has to be Lipari, the largest island and home to the ‘capital’ of the Aeolian Islands, the municipality of Lipari, which includes the entire archipelago except Salina. Brimming with cultural and scenic beauty, it is lively and bustling. Via Vittorio Emanuele is a focal point with its narrow streets, restaurants and small shops, while the most popular social space is the small square of Marina



Corta. Also not to be missed is the Archaeological Museum in Lipari Castle.

Despite being the most mundane of the islands, Panarea still has an unending, wild charm, with its untamed nature and sea. It is characterised by its maze of streets and whitewashed houses and is surrounded by a series of islets and rock formations.

The island of Vulcano has a wild, rugged nature. It has been known since ancient times for its therapeutic thermal springs and mud baths, making it a popular destination for

relaxing holidays. Besides the sea heated by fumaroles and the black sandy beaches, the Great Fossa Crater is a truly unmissable attraction.

The island of Salina is also called the Green Island, thanks to its rich and lush nature that produces delicious capers and is home to vineyards where the best quality Malvasia has been produced for centuries. Its name derives from the brackish water lake in the hamlet of Lingua, once used as a saltworks. The blue sea provides a backdrop to incredibly scenic beaches such as Pollara Beach, made particularly iconic by the film *Il Postino* starring Massimo Troisi.

Alicudi e Filicudi are the westernmost islands of the archipelago, characterised by the craters of extinct volcanoes, enchanting wilderness and lush underwater environments.

Our last stop is the island of Stromboli, to admire the Sciarra del Fuoco, a talus scree running down from the volcano's crater to the sea, formed by lava, lapilli and glowing slag. From here, you can enjoy wonderful views of Stromboli's eruptions.

The first local product you must try is the Malvasia, a PDO wine defined by Guy de Maupassant the «wine of the volcanoes». It comes in three variants: white, fortified and raisin wine, made from grapes dried naturally in the sun on trellises of canes.

Sicilian capers are another typical delicacy that has become a Slow Food Presidium.



THE MOST BEAUTYFUL BEACHES IN SICILY

AZERI OBSERVER EDITORIAL STAFF

A quick look at the many beaches and coves, in the wonderful sea of Sicily, amazing for the transparency and richness of the colors.

Wishing to show you just some of the highlights of this incredible island, we can start with the south coast from Capo Passero of Siracusa to Capo Granitola of Trapani which proudly displays its golden sand as exotic features.

Marina di Ragusa, Pozzallo, Punta Secca in the area of Ragusa, Natural Reserve of Torre Salsa nearby Sciacca, Lampedusa Island and Scala dei Turchi in Agrigento the long, often very uncrowded beaches and the “out of this world” relaxation we are all looking for.

This sandy shore extends to Mazara del Vallo and to Marsala and continues through the Via del Sale (Salt Trail), the Natural Reserve of Stagnone and Mozia in Trapani. It is extremely interesting to discover how the salt is produced and to visit its dedicated museums. The Zingaro Natural Reserve and the fine white beach of San Vito lo Capo do not need any introduction and open up to the Tyrrhenian coast, characterized by a succession of beaches and rocks.

Ustica Island, Cefalù and Mondello in Palermo, the Aeolian Islands, Capo d'Orlando and Tindari in Messina and the Egadi Islands in Trapani, all overlook the Tyrrhenian Sea where the blue of the water is intense and the snorkeling is very enjoyable.

From Messina the east coast starts with lava rocks and pebble beaches, Taormina and Giardini Naxos; the Timpa Nature Reserve of Acireale and the rocks of Aci Trezza. Then the sand resumes in the Gulf of Catania, Siracusa, the Vendicari Nature Reserve, up to Marzamemi and the Island of Correnti where you can swim in the exact spot where the Ionian and Mediterranean sea join up.

Choosing just a few of the most beautiful beaches in Sicily is a difficult task. This is because the island offers an exceptional variety of views, crystal clear water, and natural works of art that

CHOOSING JUST A FEW OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BEACHES IN SICILY IS A DIFFICULT TASK. THIS IS BECAUSE THE ISLAND OFFERS AN EXCEPTIONAL VARIETY OF VIEWS, CRYSTAL CLEAR WATER, AND NATURAL WORKS OF ART THAT ARE UNIQUE IN THE WORLD. TO EXPLORE THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF THE SICILIAN SEA, YOU MUST START FROM SOMEWHERE AND EVERYONE.

are unique in the world. To explore the wonderful world of the Sicilian sea, you must start from somewhere and everyone.

Near Siracusa, Calamosche is in the Vendicari wildlife oasis, not far from the baroque style in Noto. It is a beautiful cove, large 200 meters. It is between two rocky promontories full of ravines and caves in a Mediterranean vegetation. Its sea is very clear and calm. Not far away, there is also San Lorenzo beach.

ISOLA DEI CONIGLI

We are in Lampedusa. The beach is right in front of the Isola dei Conigli which can be reached by swimming or you can walk to it when the strip of sand appears.

It is a slice of Africa in Sicily: there is a very rich sea life, where loggerhead turtles go to lay their eggs. Water colors have infinite shades of blue. For this reason, Domenico Modugno loved it so much. Tripadvisor declared l'isola dei Conigli as the most beautiful beach in the world.

Riserva dello Zingaro (and surroundings), between Palermo and Trapani.

There is a stretch of coast that connects two villages that are among the most fascinating ones of the whole island: Scopello, with its towering cliffs and its charming little village, is full of biodiversity and the popular San Vito Lo Capo with its beautiful beach. Its beach is often pink and it seems a real Caribbean one. The reserve and its coves, with a very clear sandy seabed, are the epitome of an unspoiled Mediterranean vegetation. It develops among dwarf palms, olive trees and fragrant evergreens.





SCALA DEI TURCHI

It is a truly unique place. It is located along the coast between Porto Empedocle and Realmonte (Agrigento). It is a pure white limestone and clay high rock, shaped by nature in several layers. It is a fascinating example of nature’s ability of changing landscapes over time.

TORRE SALSIA

It is one of the longest beach in Sicily. It has been a natural reserve for many years and it is a dreamed spot to get out from

stressed moments. That is because it is a truly natural area with no services for tourism. It goes from Siculiana to Eraclea Minoa (Agrigento). There are several access ways to reach it but like all precious gems, it is quite hidden.

SAN LEONE

It is the most famous beach in Agrigento with a long golden and fine sandy shore.

It is a succession of beaches that in the evening transform into outdoors pubs, gathering the young nightlife from Agrigento. Because it is often windy, this place is an excellent destination for surfers too.

MONDELLO

It is considered the Palermo beach. The very light sand is like a colors palette where the sea, the sun, and the clouds paint countless shades from turquoise to emerald green. Colors that remain etched in memory. The long beach lines from palm trees and Art Nouveau villas spread here and there. It is just perfect from spring to autumn even for children. It is equipped with deckchairs, parasols, and unique colorful wooden cabins from May to September.



Around the corner, there is the old fishing village, with many places where you can taste typical dishes, and the small harbor with colorful fishing boats.

ISOLA BELLA

Not far from the Taormina, there is a thin strip of white sand that connects the coast to a very green rock. Swimming in this contest is very emotional. It is not a coincidence that the Isola Bella is known as the “Pearl of the Mediterranean”.

OLIVERI

It is the wonder beach that you see from the Tindari’s sanctuary (Messina). Here, nature designed stretched ponds. When you see the sandy strips from above you want to go down to see them from close. They are at the end of the beach and swimming and walking in such a unique scenery is a great experience.

PUNTA SECCA

Montalbano’s followers would recognize Vigata beach, the one where the windows of the popular commissioner are, at first

look. We are in the province of Ragusa and the golden beach is just charming.

PORTO PALO DI MENFI

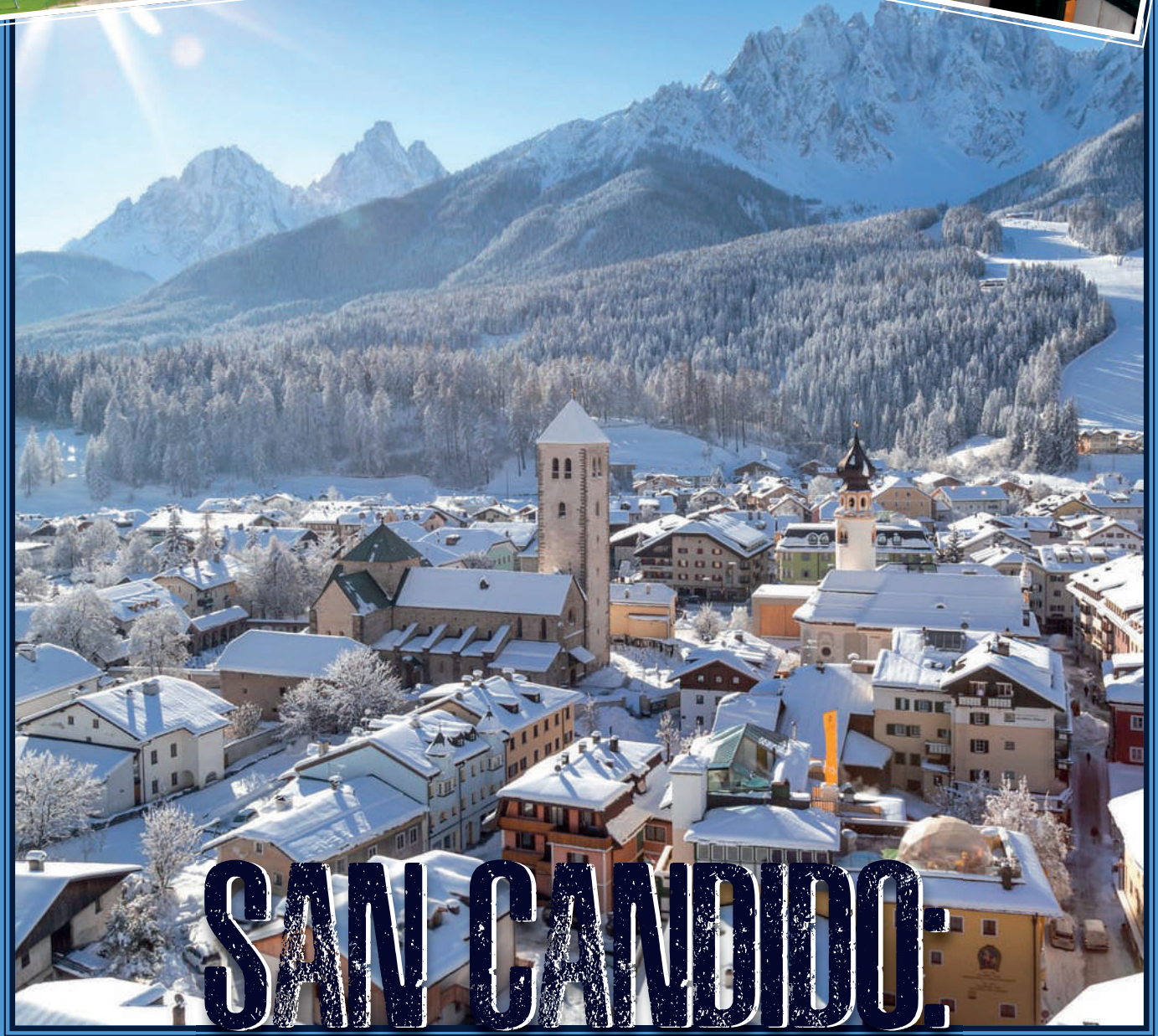
From Menfi (Agrigento) to Capo Granitola and then to Mazara del Vallo (Trapani), there is a succession of sandy beaches. The one in Porto Palo has a special charm, must be for its fresh air, or for the feeling to be away from the hustle. On the seafront you can find typical food places to taste dinner with fresh fish and excellent typical white wine.

CAPO D’ORLANDO

It is the famous beach near Messina, in front of the Aeolian Islands. It is a long stretch beach (8 km) where you can see, depending on the slope, beautiful sunrises and sunsets.

SAMPIERI

This fishing village near Scicli (Ragusa) has a nice long beach. It is lined by a pine wood, rolling dunes and by an astonishing archaeological factory called Fornace Penna, built in the early 1900s to produce clay bricks, that characterize this place.



SAN CANDIDO

A JEWEL OF THE DOLOMITES

BY GIOVANNI BELLA
HEAD OF ITALIAN DESK

In the very east of South Tyrol, in the uppermost part of the Upper Val Pusteria, the market town of San Candido is located at the foot of the mighty Rondo-Baranci Group in the Dolomites. The current municipality developed from a Celtic settlement that already existed here before the birth of Christ and was later known for its healing wild bath. Today it stretches from the cosy village centre with its shops and small cafés to Versciaco, where the lifts to the Monte Elmo start, and to Prato alla Drava on the border with East Tyrol in Austria.

During a walk through the pedestrian zone in the centre of the village, you will be accompanied by the tower of the San Candido Collegiate Church. It is closely linked to the long history of the village and is considered one of the most important Romanesque sacred buildings in the Eastern Alps. The associated MIK Museum im Kapitel invites you to an interesting tour with magnificent treasures. In between, there are often larger events such as the San Candido Folk Festival or the Snow Sculpture Festival. But the village is particularly enchanting at Christmas time, when the rural "Christmas in the Dolomites" in the alleys of San Candido offers a quieter alternative to the five large Christmas markets in South Tyrol with local handicrafts and traditional specialities.

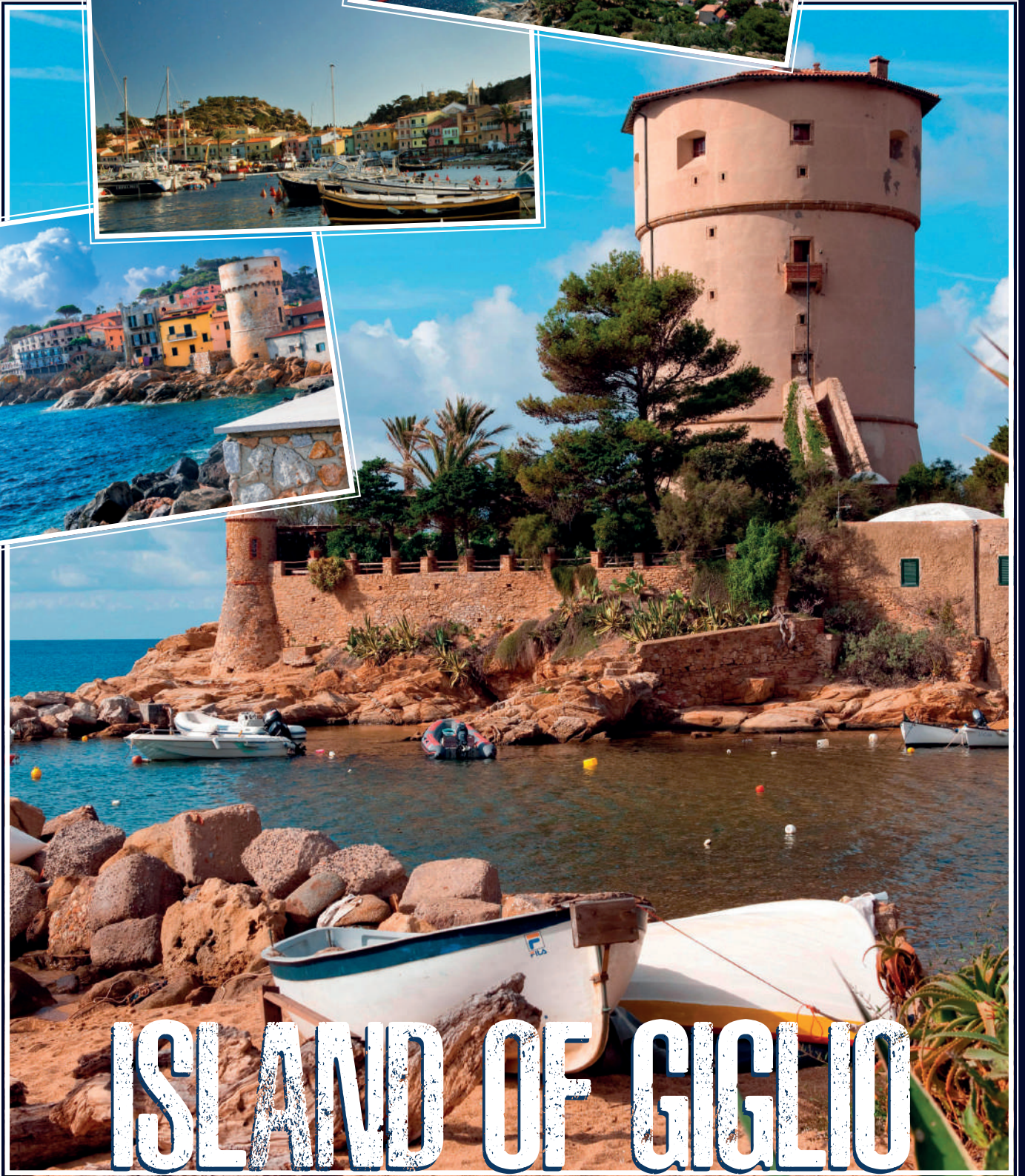
San Candido is already enchanting to look at from the outside, whether from the state road that runs through the Val Pusteria, or from the hike through the San Silvestro Valley between Dobbiaco and San Candido. In San Candido village the lifts start on the Monte Baranci and in Versciaco on the Monte Elmo, where destinations

◀ SAN CANDIDO IS THE CHIEF VILLAGE OF THE MUNICIPALITY AND WAS MENTIONED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 769. LOCATED AT 1,175 M A.S.L., IT HAS GOT 2,100 INHABITANTS ▶

such as Olperl's Adventure Park and Giant Baranci's Kingdom are located in the Three Peaks Nature Park. In winter, the lifts take you to the 3 Zinnen Dolomites Ski Resort, which includes five mountains between San Candido and the Val Comelico in Belluno.

San Candido is the chief village of the municipality and was mentioned for the first time in 769. Located at 1,175 m a.s.l., it has got 2,100 inhabitants. A mixture of culture and nature, a combination of relaxation and adventure, that is what you are going to experience during your stay in this village. San Candido also offers a museum that focuses on the stunning Dolomites, called Dolomythos. In this museum, adults and kids can get useful information on the genesis of the Dolomites.





ISLAND OF GIGLIO

PEARL OF THE TUSCAN ARCHIPELAGO

BY GIOVANNI BELLA
HEAD OF ITALIAN DESK

The island of Giglio (Isola del Giglio) is known above all for its natural beauties: the crystal clear sea, with rich and fishy seabed, are the setting for a where the low Mediterranean vegetation still reigns with its colors and perfumes.

Beautiful sandy beaches and isolated coves, ancient paths immersed in a rich nature, breathtaking views, a picturesque port and the charming medieval village of Giglio Castello make Giglio island a treasure to be discovered.

It is the ideal destination for all those who love a genuine relationship with nature and the rustic country environment, the sea, walks, bird watching, minerals and the fascinating underwater world. The temperate climate allows the visitor to enjoy a wonderful holiday in every season.

The beautiful island of Giglio is located in the southern corner of the Tuscan Archipelago, a group of islands between Tuscany and Corsica in the Tyrrhenian Sea. with an area of 21 square kilometres, 8.3 kilometres long and 4.7 kilometres wide, it is the second largest island in the archipelago after Elba and has a population of around 1500.

The mild Mediterranean climate, characterized by a high level of summer dryness accompanied by the frequent sea breeze, favours evergreen plants such as those with coriaceous leaves or thorns. In addition, there are some rare animals on Giglio, such as the frog "Discoglossus sardo", the peregrine falcon, and the royal and Corsican seagulls, whereas vipers and other venomous animals are all but missing.

The impressive coastline of the island of Giglio stretches for 28 kilometres, alternating between steep cliffs, gentle granite rocks, coves and beautiful sandy beaches. The east coast is generally smoother, with numerous small coves that invite you to linger. The smooth granite cliffs are often comfortable to lie on, provide easy access to the sea and offer cliff-diving opportunities for the children. The west coast, on the other hand, is wilder, with steep cliffs plunging straight into the sea.

Only the north-western Promontorio del Franco is made of limestone rather than granite, and despite the rugged coastline, there are many small pebble beaches that are difficult to reach from the mainland. A wonderful way to explore the island is by sea, and a boat trip (2-3 hours) is a must during your holiday in Giglio.

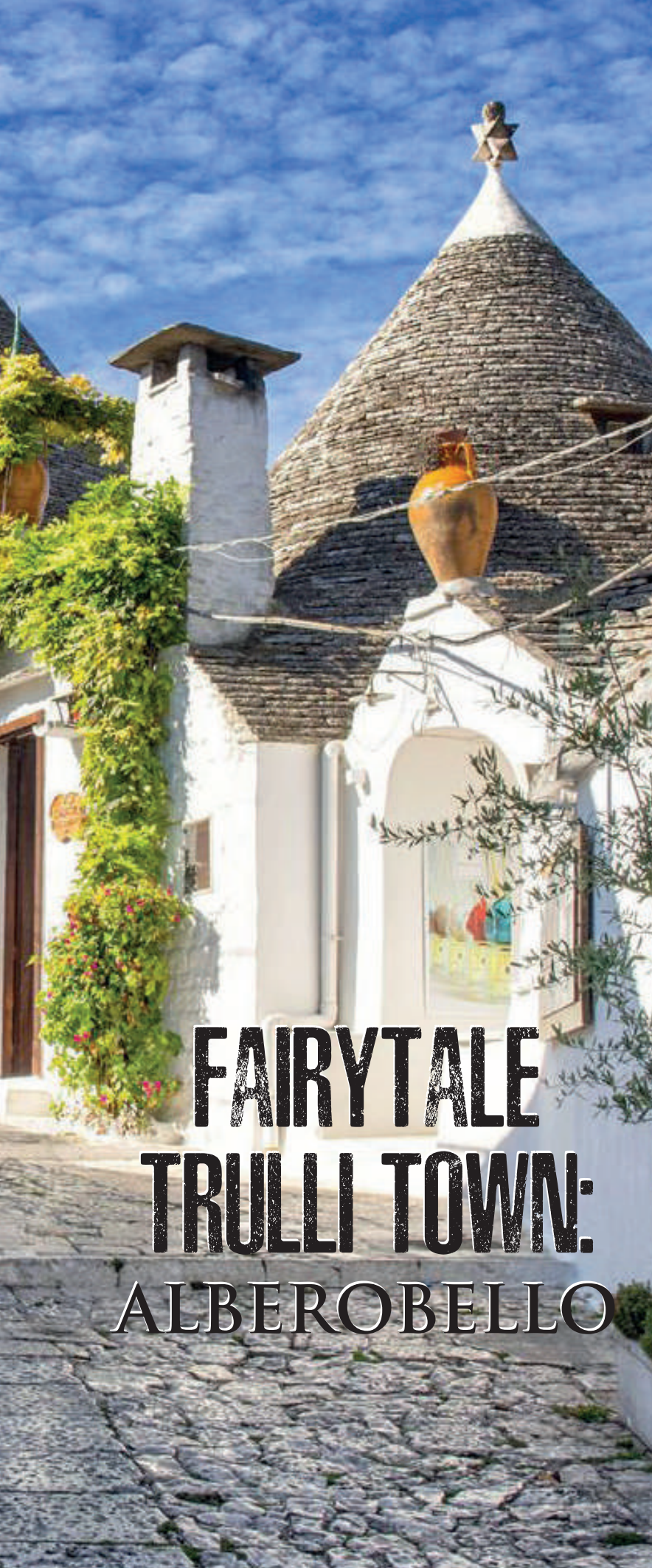
There are four large sandy beaches on the island of Giglio, three of them, Cannelle, Caldane and Arenella, on the eastern coast near the port of Giglio Porto, and one on the north-western coast of the island, Giglio Campese. The beaches are very different from each other, not only in size, and each one has its own unique beauty.

With the exception of the small Caldane beach, which can only be reached on foot or by boat, all the other beaches are easily accessible. All the beaches have a 'free' section and at least one lido with sun umbrellas and deckchairs for hire.

Giglio Porto is the only port on the island, and the small, colourful fishermen's houses are picturesquely arranged in a semicircle around the incredibly clear sea. In the narrow, lively alleys shops of all kinds alternate with restaurants, bars and ice-cream parlours. Worth seeing: the fortified tower Torre del Saraceno and the remains of a Roman villa.







FAIRYTALE TRULLI TOWN: ALBEROBELLO

BY GIOVANNI BELLA
HEAD OF ITALIAN DESK

Alberobello is a fairytale place, a little gem nestled in the Itria Valley between the Apulian provinces of Bari, Brindisi and Taranto.

The capital of the trulli, extraordinary testimonies of dry-stone construction with conical or pyramid-shaped roofs, will enchant you with an expanse of more than 1,500 trulli that have been on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1996.

The Mediterranean climate, excellent accommodation and unparalleled architectural harmony make this town the ideal destination for visitors in search of an atmosphere that has not been affected by the passage of time.

The history of Alberobello is not as old as one might think. The town as we can see today was founded at the end of the 14th century at the behest of the Counts of Conversano, landowners who entrusted the management of the territory to some peasants. The law of the Kingdom of Naples required the payment of a tax for every new village built and, according to some studies, the trulli are the result of a stratagem concocted to avoid paying those taxes.

The appearance of these buildings had to be deliberately precarious to give the idea of buildings that could be easily demolished in the event of an inspection. After an initial settlement of about 40 trulli, there was a major expansion in 1620. It was not until 1797 that Alberobello was freed from all tax claims and feudal servitude to the Counts by decision of Ferdinand IV of Bourbon, King of Naples. But the tradition of the trulli has never stopped.

The small size of the historic centre makes Alberobello easy to visit. All of the must-see sights are within walking distance and can be explored on foot, amidst picturesque alleyways and glimpses to be photographed.



◀ DESPITE ITS SMALL SIZE, ALBEROBELLO IS A TOWN THAT OFFERS PLENTY OF OPTIONS. YOU CAN STROLL AND GET LOST IN THE ALLEYS CHASING SMELLS AND COLOURS. ▶

We start with the Sovereign Trullo located in the northern part of the city: it is the only two-storey trullo in the town and is furnished with original furniture from the early 20th century.

We then move on to Rione Monti, the largest and most famous district of Alberobello with around 1,000 trulli: here you could get lost looking for the perfect photo.

It is the turn of the Rione Aia piccola, the smallest neighbourhood in the historic centre of Alberobello. There are around 400 trulli for residential use here.

Finally, the Belvedere Santa Lucia is the city's most impressive observation point. Visit it at sunset to take dreamy photos.

Despite its small size, Alberobello is a town that offers plenty of options. You can stroll and get lost in the alleys chasing smells and colours.

Many trulli can be visited inside, but only the Museo del Territorio will give you a clear example of the evolution of

Alberobello's architectural culture. The two-storey bit with a tall, narrow façade surmounted by a triangular gable represents the most recent constructions. From there, you can move on to the oldest part, consisting of simple, small organisms, all in one complex of 15 interconnected trulli.

Stroll past souvenir shops and local craft workshops until you reach the top of the hill along Via Monte San Michele.

Strolling through the historic centre of Alberobello gives enormous satisfaction. If you want to take a break at lunchtime and treat yourself to a food experience you won't forget, you have to carefully choose your food in Alberobello. We suggest you start with the delicious Apulian orecchiette pasta topped with turnip tops and salted anchovies. Following with the most famous second course of the Itria Valley: the meat bombette, small beef rolls stuffed with cheese and herbs. Also worth tasting are the pettole, tasty balls of leavened dough fried in hot oil. Typical of the Christmas festivities, they can also be eaten while walking.

BEEF FILLET WITH MUSHROOM SAUCE

BY PACOCHEF

AZERI OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The fillet with mushrooms is a refined second course, ideal to prepare if you have guests and want to amaze them, perhaps after a creamy risotto as a first course!

Fillet with mushrooms is a winter second course, which is prepared in a few minutes and allows you to bring a gourmet dish to the table.

Ingredients:
 500gr Fillet of beef
 80 gr butter
 400 gr mushroom
 few grams of truffle flakes
 2 garlic
 15 gr parsley
 2 tablespoons of oil
 Salt and pepper



Trim and season the fillet of beef, pan sear on all sides, add the rosemary, garlic and butter and briefly fry as well.

Clean the mushrooms well, then cut them into slices horizontally. Place two tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil in a non-stick pan and brown two cloves of crushed garlic, then add the mushrooms and cook over a moderate heat for 7-8 minutes.

Season with salt and pepper and as soon as the mushrooms have softened, add the chopped parsley, mix well and turn off the heat. At this point blend part of this sauce.

Serve the beef fillet covered with a little sauce and some whole mushrooms. On top just add truffle flakes.

You can add a side dish of boiled potatoes with parsley.



EVENING OF MUSICAL IMPROVISATION

The Jazz Club, nestled in the iconic Fairmont Baku Flame Towers, set the stage for one of the most remarkable concerts of the Baku Jazz Festival 2024. In its elegant interiors, with mesmerizing views of night Baku, the Italian trio Lusi-Zanchini-Masciari captivated the audience with their artistry. The event was co-organized by Azeri Observer and luxury lifestyle magazine The M.O.S.T. Fairmont Jazz Club treated true jazz aficionados to gourmet selections from its menu, accompanied by drinks from partners Glenfiddich, Savalan, and Astoria. The night concluded with a raffle featuring gifts from sponsors including Parfum City, Thameen, and CraZzy Gifts and Souvenirs, making the evening even more unforgettable.

PHOTOS BY NIJAT IBADOV

From L to R: 1. Tofiq Hasansoy, Rain Sultanov (Founder of Baku Jazz Festival); 2. Luca Di Gianfrancesco (Ambassador of Italy); 3. George Ganchev (General Manager of Fairmont Baku Flame Towers), Arslan Abbasov (Publisher of Azeri Observer & The M.O.S.T.); 4. Elnara Shikhliinskaya, Nigar Shikhliinskaya (COP 29 Azerbaijan); 5. Francois Enslin (Director of Sabis Sun International School), Lala Rzazada (Sabis Sun International School); 6. Nazrin Hajiyeva, Khayala Asadova (Founder of Uventa fashion house), Yekaterina Eren; 7. Fidan Bagirova (CraZzy Gifts & Souvenirs), Kamil Bagirov (Owner of CraZzy Bear);







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From L to R: 8. Javan Zeynalli, Gasim Khalilov; 9. Nigar Kocharli (Owner of the Ali and Nino bookstore chain), Shahbaz Khuduoghlu; 10. Javid Seyidali with guest of the event; 11. Manuel Montenegro L.Da Cruz (Ambassador of Brasil), Arslan Abbasov; 12. Narmina Abdinbekova (Founder of Shoppinggaz.az), Xalida Babayeva (Savalan Wines), Vera Petrenko (Azeri Observer and The M.O.S.T.); 13. Mushfig Huseynov (Owner of Azsaffron), Gunay Huseynova; 14. Afet Khudaverdiyeva (Luxury Wines), Ruslan Gojayev (Luxury Wines); 15. Guests of the event; 16. Fatima Mirzaliyeva (Embassy of Italia), Gulshan Aliyeva (Embassy of Italia); 17. Indira Mutallibzada (Founder of Beauty of Science), Tomris Mutallibzada; 18. Turana Taghiyeva (Fairmont Baku Flame Towers), Vera Petrenko; 19. Guest of the event, Kamil Bagirov; 20. Farkhad Bakhtiyarov (Glenfiddich), Eldar Alimuradov (Chairman of the Board of the Azerbaijan Hotels Association); 21. Zuleykha Rustamova (Blue Planet), Vera Petrenko.



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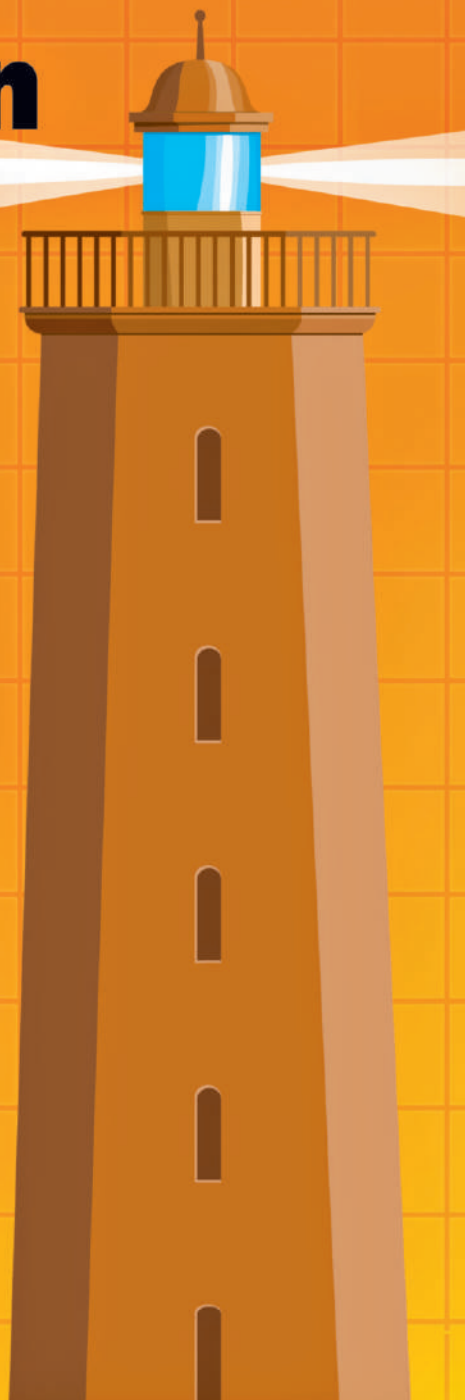


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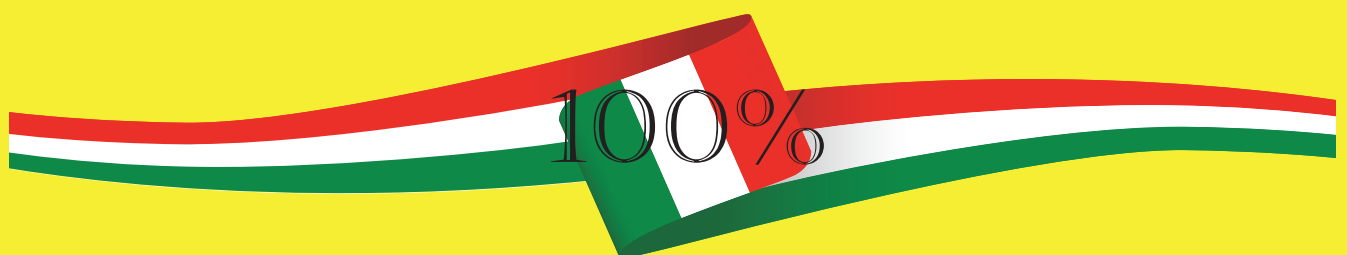
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