

*Better research, better policy, better reform*

**CESD** | CENTER FOR ECONOMIC  
& SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

*Global Think-Tank*

## **CESD INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS STRATEGY**

It is an undeniable fact that international relations play a crucial role in the development of civil society institutions. Given that foreign organizations are a major source of independent think tanks' funding, it is clear that the development of foreign partnerships is very important in this regard. From this perspective, CESD established an International Relations Department and specific strategy, which is extremely valuable to the sustainability and effectiveness of an organization.

**The Policy was approved by the CESD Board Members on August 19, 2022**

**Baku, 2022**

The Center for Economic and Social Development (CESD) was established in 2005 to promote research in economic and social policy. CESD always paid special attention to developing and promoting international relations. Since its foundation, the center has collaborated with leading international organizations, including the European Commission, the German Marshall Fund, the International Development Agency, the International Bank of Asia, the Eurasia Foundation, World Bank, the Think Tank Fund, PASOS, LGI, and many others. In a meantime, CESD also strengthened its international partnerships by joining major international think tank networks.

### **Current International Relations Activities**

Department of International Relations was formed in CESD after receiving an institutional grant from the Think Tank Fund. The department was created to supervise and promote relations with foreign institutions and ensure the development of strategies, policies, and objectives aimed at that. The department is closely correlated with Grants and Programs Management, which is in charge of communication with potential donors and international actors.

The Department of International Relations mainly deals with the following activities:

- CESD was the first local civil society institution in Azerbaijan to provide internship opportunities for foreign experts and students. In the summer of 2010, interns from Switzerland and Italy joined CESD staff for a 3-month

program. The practice is continuing, and in 2022, CESD provided an internship opportunity for foreign students both on-site and remotely.

- The department translates news about CESD activities in Azeri, English, and Russian and publishes it on the organization's website. The department also plays a vital role in highlighting the center's activities in the local and foreign press.
- The center has extensive networking with different embassies serving in the country. Therefore, the department supports communication with embassies and updates the database of the embassies constantly.

The formation of foreign partnerships and their involvement in ongoing activities is a key factor of the center's strategy. Thus, the department continually involves new foreign partners with the center's activities and establishes strong links to ensure continuous communication and cooperation.

### **Future Development Strategy**

The Department of International Relations at CESD plans to expand its foreign cooperation robustly. The department strives to achieve this goal through activities performed in 5 distinct directions:

#### *European Integration*

From CESD's perspective, European integration is a precise path for improving Azerbaijan's economic and social policy development. To maintain this

development, CESD plans to increase its relationship with European institutes further. More precise, given that Azerbaijan is an Eastern Partnership country, CESD aims to expand its networking with think tanks in other Eastern Partnership member countries. Thus, interregional initiatives have the ability to share the best knowledge and practices between partner organizations. At the same time, the outreach of the implemented projects will expand, respectively.

CESD is participating in the PASOS Visa Liberalization program for Eastern Partnership countries. Via this project, CESD has attended training seminars and built contacts with similar work-oriented Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Additionally, through Visegrad+ Grants, CESD has an opportunity to establish a successful partnership with EaP countries and EU institutions.

Dr. Vugar Bayramov, Chairman of CESD was elected as the national representative of Azerbaijan for the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum steering committee. Participation in this committee increased the outreach of CESD projects and opened the doors of dialogue with civil society leaders from all of the Eastern Partnership countries and their EU counterparts. This, in turn, provided increased access to EU officials, enhancing the impact of CESD work towards European integration.

### *Expanding connections in Asia*

CESD is always open and keen on future connections with Central and Eastern Asia. Due to different research performances, CESD had an opportunity to

establish successful links with Central Asian institutions. CESD is closely incorporated into both Central and Eastern Asian projects through ADB initiatives. CESD supported the United Nations Democracy Fund-funded project implemented by PASOS, titled "Opening the Doors of Policy-Making in the South Caucasus and Central Asia."

Given that many of the Eastern Asian countries had significant success with high growth rates and rapid industrialization, their success in opening up markets is analyzed by CESD to determine the best path for Azerbaijan's economic policy. In this regard, the establishment and development of connections with Eastern Asia refer to one of the major priorities for CESD.

The center has close ties with CAREC Institute, contributing to the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation program via knowledge sharing and capacity-building initiatives.

#### *Increasing cooperation with the United States*

CESD already had success working with US Government institutions, such as USAID. The center aims to expand this relationship by providing USAID with relevant social and economic analysis reports constantly.

CESD also hosted a United States Peace Corps Volunteer as a project manager. The center benefited from this relationship through support with research projects and assistance in editing papers.

CESD is interested in expanding its cooperation with American think tanks and universities. Multiple experts at CESD have completed higher education at American universities. Member of CESD staff also took part in the "Open World Program for think tank workers" funded by the Library of Congress in 2022.

### *Expanding relations with local embassies*

CESD has the opportunity of improving foreign relations by enhancing relations with different embassies in Baku. The experience proved that local embassies can become a bridge to think tanks in other countries. CESD has close ties with the US Embassy, Czech Embassy, German Embassy, and many other embassies in Baku through the support of initiatives and international projects implemented.

Improving local ties with embassies can open the door for networking in their respected countries. CESD will continue to hold meetings with local diplomats and provide staff with updates about the activities of the center.

### *Improving regional development*

By being post-Soviet republic countries, the three South Caucasus countries of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia face many similar social and economic challenges. Collaboration and exchange of ideas could enhance and boost their development process. Aside from networking with other CSO representatives at PASOS events and trainings, CESD is interested in working together on regional projects.

CESD views foreign relations as an extremely vital part of its performance. The center hopes to expand its efforts, which therefore calls for a stronger and more extensive international relations strategy. The plans and ideas in this strategy lay the groundwork for a successful expansion of CESD's work.