

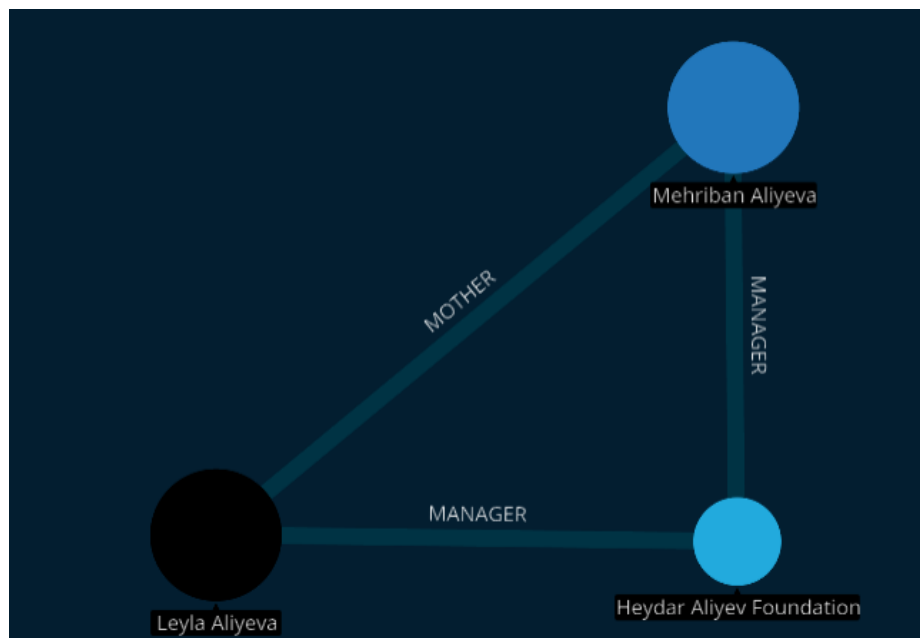
Network Insight: Foundations and Youth Organizations

Leyla Aliyeva's foundations and youth organizations and their role in Azerbaijan's soft power project to curry favor overseas

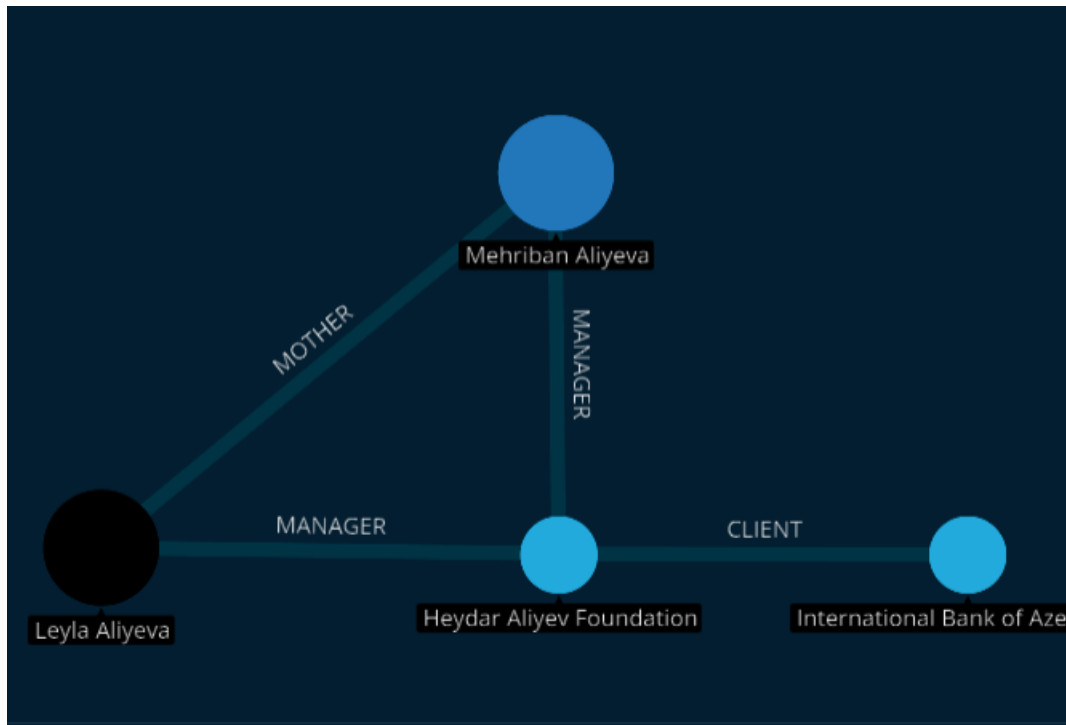
Leyla Aliyeva has been linked to several charitable foundations and youth organizations that are part of a sophisticated soft power project.

Chief among these is the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, which funds cultural and development projects,^[608] including the construction of schools, hospitals, and art galleries in Azerbaijan and abroad.^[610] Some of its projects are in countries where Azerbaijan has signed or is negotiating lucrative deals to export oil and gas, including Georgia,^{[1303] [1304] [1311]} Bosnia and Herzegovina,^{[1305] [1306] [1307] [1312]} Romania,^{[1308] [1309] [1310]} Bulgaria,^{[1313] [1314] [1315] [1316]} Pakistan,^{[1317] [1318] [1319]} India,^{[1320] [1321]} and Vietnam.^{[1322] [1323]} It has also financed cultural initiatives in Western European countries with strategic energy ties to Azerbaijan, including Italy,^{[1324] [1328] [1329]} France,^{[1325] [1330]} and Germany.^{[1326] [1327] [1331]}

Vice President Mehriban Aliyeva is the foundation's president,^[609] and Leyla Aliyeva is its vice president.^[607] Established in 2004,^[609] the foundation has been accused of using cultural soft power to whitewash Azerbaijan's reputation abroad.^{[602] [603]} In particular, it has been accused of advancing Baku's official line on Nagorno-Karabakh,^{[602] [604]} the war-torn region in western Azerbaijan that was occupied by ethnic Armenians for several decades until Azerbaijan retook it in 2023, sparking a mass exodus.^[605]



The Heydar Aliyev foundation does not declare the source of its funding, but it is widely assumed to be Azerbaijan's oil revenues, according to a leaked US diplomatic cable.^[604] There are also anecdotal reports of Azerbaijani officials being compelled to contribute to the foundation in exchange for political protection.^[604] The foundation holds accounts at the International Bank of Azerbaijan (IBA),^[611] a state-controlled bank that has featured in a high-profile embezzlement case and has been implicated in large and suspicious overseas transfers.^{[606] [576]}



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