
10 Years with Baku State University Law Review

*Orkhan Abdulkarimli**

Being asked to write the foreword for the 10th Volume of the Baku State University Law Review filled me with pride. It also allowed me to reflect on the journey and future of this “child” that has matured over the past decade. As one of the pioneers on this journey, I would like to share my reflections on the founding principles and history of this Law Review, which has evolved into a significant legal publication and a respected platform for academic legal discourse in our country, as well as my vision for its future and objectives.

In October 2014, upon my election as the chairman of the Board of the Student Academic Society at Baku State University Law School, our Board set out to establish a student-managed and edited legal publication—a concept unprecedented in Azerbaijan’s legal education. However, I must admit that envisioning the execution of this goal seemed daunting at the time. Challenges such as the scarcity of original scholarly work, lack of interest, and difficulties in effectively communicating our ideas to the intended audience, which I experienced, loomed large. Even the process of naming the Law Review encountered resistance to omitting the word “student” from the title—a foreshadowing of the obstacles ahead. It is worth noting that in established global practices, such journals do not typically include “student”, “lecturer”, or “professor” in their titles.

We encountered another significant challenge after establishing the Law Review in October 2014. Legal writing was not part of the undergraduate law curriculum in Azerbaijan at the time, rendering this field largely unfamiliar to students. Moreover, the distinct characteristics of legal writing in our region, particularly in countries influenced by the Soviet legal education system, posed stylistic disparities compared to academic legal literature elsewhere. While authors in our region tended to express opinions collectively and sometimes in rigid language, advanced legal writing emphasizes individual accountability and employs softer language. Thus, fostering political flexibility and precision in legal writing became imperative.

Additionally, the referencing conventions in our country did not align with advanced legal writing standards. By adopting footnotes instead of endnotes—a practice prevalent in advanced legal writing traditions—we laid a solid foundation for our endeavor.

* Founding Editor-in-Chief of the Baku State University Law Review and a graduate of 2015.

Consequently, our initial priority was to acquaint students with the norms of academic legal writing. On December 13, 2014, at our request, Altay Mustafayev¹ conducted the first basic training session on this topic for BSU students.² Subsequently, the first volume of the Law Review, featuring 13 articles—some authored by participants of the training—was published. Notably, on the occasion of 1st volume in 2016, professors from renowned U.S. law schools and the president of their respective law reviews at Yale, Harvard, and Georgetown University sent video congratulatory messages to the students.³ It is gratifying to observe that following this training and the publication of the Law Review, the frequency of academic legal writing workshops increased, and several law faculties in the country, including Baku State University Law School, began incorporating legal writing into their undergraduate jurisprudence programs.

Subsequent Editorial Boards continued to advance the Law Review and refine its operations. Access to the HeinOnline database for the first time in Azerbaijan and securing inclusion in Scopus marked significant milestones. The Law Review became the first student-led legal publication in the country to be indexed in these databases. Moreover, its inclusion in international article acceptance systems and the establishment of a bilingual website receiving thousands of monthly views transformed it into an international publication. These would not have been possible without the quality work and hard work of the editorial staff. The fact that the editors who do all this with their own education and personal computer skills are not known by many people today, or even if there is no level of interest in all this, should not mean that the work done is wasted. Because the main principle of the Journal's editorial board is not to win temporary applause from people, but to produce quality work that will stand the test of years. It is known that historically, such initiatives have not received the support they deserve from the societies for many years.

While student-run law reviews are commonplace in U.S. law schools, they have only recently gained traction in European law schools, which are geographically closer to us. Three primary stakeholders contribute to student-run law reviews: editorial students, article authors, and readers. From a student's perspective, these journals are invaluable tools for developing legal

¹ LL.B and LL.M from Baku State University, LL.M from Washington University, Founder and managing partner at Altay Mustafayev Law & Tax LLC, S.J.D. Candidate at Indiana University.

² Student Academic Society of Baku State University, "Akademik Hüquqi Yazı" - Altay Mustafayev (2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPf4HZvF1Gc> (last visited Feb. 6, 2024).

³ Student Academic Society of Baku State University, Congratulations from Yale, Harvard, and Georgetown Law Schools to Baku State University Law Review (2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxfeQK5uaF0> (last visited Feb. 6, 2024).

writing skills and establishing professional and academic credibility. Third-party readers can utilize these law reviews as resources for future work or research, staying abreast of current trends and diverse perspectives.

The principle that the editor, who is the main executor of the process, should be guided by is objectivity. For this purpose, during the past 10 years, the editorial boards, which change every year, have prepared filter criteria for the categories of article requirements, ethical policy and evaluation policy. We are interested in teaching other student societies as an example, the activity and experience of the Baku State University Law Review, the only legal publication managed by students in the CIS, as well as in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, and at the same time indexed in international databases. So, if this activity is not continued according to the traditions of the world experience and if a quality internal competitive environment is not created, we may encounter a lot of low-level and unstable publications.

Repeated use of the term “first” throughout this discourse underscores its significance. While society values novelty, sustainability often remains overlooked. The repercussions of unsustainable initiatives often manifest years later. I am satisfied that the Law Review has earned a reputation for sustainability and growth over the past decade, surpassing its initial “first” label. Despite encountering challenges along the way, the editors have adeptly navigated them.

Having outlined my reflections on the Law Review’s past and present and the legal community at large, I would like to articulate my vision for its future. The Baku State University Law Review aspires to serve as a model for other student societies in the country and the region and to inspire the creation and advancement of publications across various legal fields, not merely limited to general content. Its objectives for the next decade include setting industry benchmarks, leveraging its wealth of experience to educate the legal community, developing and publishing guides on diverse topics in academic legal writing, and proactively addressing contemporary challenges through symposiums and debates. Additionally, the Law Review must continuously strive to enhance editorial quality, research standards, topical diversity, and content richness, aiming for continual improvement and reaching new heights.

While such initiatives are primarily associated with leading U.S. law schools, the Law Review has shattered this stereotype and paved the way for future endeavours. While the current editorial team may not witness the 100th volume of the Journal, I am confident that the individual who authors the foreword for that milestone edition will offer a commendable appraisal of the collective efforts of all past editors.