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By: TA | AP Brief

# Erdogan and Aliyev deny speculation of fraying relationship



The Turkish and Azerbaijani presidents reaffirmed their countries' close ties in response to growing speculation of souring relations.

Turkey and Azerbaijan are traditional allies with deep cultural and ethnic ties and often describe themselves as being "one nation, two states."

But tensions have emerged recently following criticism in Turkey of Azerbaijan's decision to ban hijabs in schools and over Baku's growing ties with Israel.

"Our brotherhood transcends our shared language, history and culture," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, speaking at a joint news conference with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in the city of Shusha.

"That is why we see Baku's joy as Ankara's joy and Shusha's pride as the pride of our entire nation," Erdogan added.

The rift became apparent after social media users in Turkey and some members of Erdogan's Islamic-oriented ruling party criticized Baku's decision in September to ban girls and teachers from wearing Islamic covering in schools. Erdogan's government overturned a similar ban in Turkey after coming to power in 2003.

The criticism drew anger in energy-rich Azerbaijan, which complained of interference even though Turkey's government had made no official statement about the hijab ban.

## 'One nation, two states'

In an effort to ease tensions, Erdogan personally called Aliyev to invite him to a summit of Turkic states hosted by Turkey on Oct. 30.

Erdogan also fired his aide Oktay Saral, who had criticized the headscarf ban on social media, reportedly bowing to a demand from Aliyev, according to the newspaper Cumhuriyet and other media reports.

Aliyev did not attend the Turkic summit and sent his foreign minister instead, further fueling speculation about a rift between the once close allies.

> Relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan have withstood many trials throughout history to reach the advanced level they enjoy today - Recep Tayyip Erdogan

"As you all know, relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan have withstood many trials throughout history to reach the advanced level they enjoy today. The unity of hearts we describe with the motto 'One nation, two states' is an everlasting beacon, drawing strength from our shared past and lighting the way to our future," Erdogan said Sunday.

Erdogan visited Shusha for Azerbaijan's Victory Day celebrations marking the sixth anniversary of the country's victory over Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh.