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HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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I. Azerbaijan demands full accountability for the fatal plane crash

On December 25, an Embraer passenger aircraft operated by Azerbaijan Airlines on a Baku-Grozny route crashed near Aktau, Kazakhstan. The flight carried 67 individuals, including 5 crew members. The incident resulted in the deaths of 38 people, comprising citizens of Azerbaijan, Russia, and Kazakhstan. Preliminary investigations suggested that the plane was struck by a missile from a Russian air defense system while flying over Chechen airspace. Simultaneously, it was subjected to interference from radio electronic warfare systems, causing the crew to lose control of the aircraft. Traces of shrapnel from a missile launched by an anti-aircraft missile system were found on the plane's fuselage.

In an exclusive interview with Azerbaijan Television on December 29, President Ilham Aliyev provided detailed insights into the tragic crash of an Embraer passenger plane and Azerbaijan's immediate response. Preliminary findings from the investigation into the crash of an Azerbaijani civilian plane near Aktau, Kazakhstan, indicated that the aircraft was severely damaged by external forces while flying over Russian airspace near Grozny. Evidence showed that the Embraer passenger plane was first disrupted by electronic warfare systems, leading to a loss of control. Shortly thereafter, ground fire caused significant damage to the aircraft's tail section. This sequence of events left the plane critically compromised before it ultimately crashed near Aktau.

"The facts indicate that the Azerbaijani civilian plane was damaged from the outside over Russian territory, near the city of Grozny, and almost lost control. We also know that means of electronic warfare put our plane out of control. This was the first impact on the plane. At the same time, as a result of fire from the ground, the tail of the plane was also severely damaged. Immediately, on the same day, our team captured this video footage from the city of Aktau and informed the public about it," President Ilham Aliyev underscored.

Video footage captured on the day of the crash clearly demonstrated extensive damage to the fuselage, with visible shrapnel holes. This evidence contradicted alternative explanations, such as the theory that the aircraft collided with a flock of birds. Such a theory was implausible given the nature of the damage observed. "The fact that the fuselage is riddled with holes indicates that the theory of the plane hitting a flock of birds, which was brought up by someone, is completely removed from the agenda. It is possible that when the plane was damaged, when it was hit, the pilot could have perceived it as a collision with birds. Because it would probably never have occurred to anyone that our plane might be fired at from the ground while flying over a country friendly to us," President Ilham Aliyev pointed out.

Despite the clear evidence of external damage, some Russian sources initially suggested alternative scenarios, including an onboard gas cylinder explosion. These claims were baseless and indicative of an attempt to obscure the facts. "This clearly showed that the Russian side wanted to cover up the issue, which, of course, is unbecoming of anyone. Of course, our plane was hit by accident. Of course, there can be no talk of a deliberate act of terror here. Therefore, admitting guilt, apologizing in a timely manner to Azerbaijan, which is considered a friendly country, and informing the public about this – these were measures and steps that should have been taken. Unfortunately, for the first three days, we heard nothing from Russia except for some absurd theories," President Ilham Aliyev underscored.

President Ilham Aliyev recalled receiving the news while en route to St. Petersburg for the CIS Summit. "I was informed and immediately ordered that the plane should return to Baku," President Ilham Aliyev said. Upon the arrival, President Ilham Aliyev convened an operational meeting at the airport and instructed the establishment of a State Commission to investigate the crash. "A delegation consisting of representatives of relevant agencies was immediately dispatched to the city of Aktau. Because they had to start work immediately. First

of all, they had to get acquainted with the condition of the plane's remains, conduct on-site observations, obtain video and photo footage, and present them to the public," President Ilham Aliyev explained. In addition to dispatching investigators, the Government sent a team of doctors to Aktau to support the Kazakh medical teams treating the injured. President Ilham Aliyev noted the Kazakh side's significant efforts in providing medical care but emphasized Azerbaijan's commitment to ensuring comprehensive support for survivors. On President Ilham Aliyev's instructions, the Prosecutor General's Office of Azerbaijan launched a criminal investigation. "Work has begun on analyzing the initial theories, though the definitive conclusions will depend on the examination of the black boxes," President Ilham Aliyev added.

President Ilham Aliyev has lauded the crew of the Azerbaijani passenger plane, describing their actions as heroic and instrumental in saving lives. President Aliyev highlighted their professionalism and dedication under extraordinary circumstances.

"The pilots and the entire crew showed true heroism. The pilots showed both professionalism and heroism in controlling the plane that was out of control in various ways. Of course, they were experienced pilots and knew that they would not be able to survive this emergency landing. However, they displayed tremendous heroism to save the passengers, and it is thanks to them that there are survivors in this plane crash. It is thanks to them that a section of the fuselage did not burn, and it is thanks to them that we can clearly say today that the plane was shot down by Russia. This is a fact, and no-one can deny this fact. Again, we are not saying that this was done intentionally, but it was done," President Ilham Aliyev noted. "The pilots and crew members showed both professionalism and composure. I must specifically acknowledge the female crew members. They themselves were in a state of stress, but look how humanely they acted to calm the passengers and prevent chaos inside the plane. Their actions, I repeat, will be duly acknowledged by the Azerbaijani state. May Allah rest the souls of the

deceased crew members and all those who died in peace," President Ilham Aliyev said, adding that an order awarding the crew members will be issued.

President Ilham Aliyev has emphasized Azerbaijan's commitment to ensuring a thorough and transparent investigation into the crash. "Let me repeat, after the flight recorders have been opened and we have obtained more detailed information, the full picture of what happened will be revealed and many questions that still remain outstanding today will be clarified. For example, why couldn't the plane land in Grozny? To what extent did the means of radio-electronic warfare affect the plane's controls? What was the extent of consequences of the strike and the explosion in the vicinity of the plane? Because I must also state that attempts to deny obvious facts and pull the wool over people's eyes here are both nonsensical and absurd. Because fortunately, thanks to the heroism of the crew, an incident occurred that allowed the plane to land, even though it was an emergency landing. Many of the passengers survived, and their testimonies are available. The injuries inflicted on the passengers and crew by the shrapnel that pierced the plane are also obvious. Attributing this to a flock of birds or to the explosion of a gas cylinder is both foolish and dishonest. Therefore, we will find out why the plane could not land after the black boxes have been opened," President Ilham Aliyev noted.

President Ilham Aliyev reiterated Azerbaijan's commitment to fairness and transparency throughout the investigation. "We, the Azerbaijani side, and I personally are trying to be as fair as possible. We do not want to express an opinion on unclear issues before they are fully clarified. However, we must, we do, and we will state our opinion with full determination on obvious issues," President Ilham Aliyev emphasized.

"When exactly was the plane fired at from the ground? Why didn't the plane attempt to land at the nearest airports, which were Mineralnye Vody and Makhachkala? Was the plane sent to Aktau, or was this an objective choice? There are various hypotheses. Some believe that the plane was

deliberately sent off course by ground handling services in Grozny because the plane was already out of control, and there was a high probability it would fall into the sea. If this had been the case, the cover-up attempts would have been successful, and the so-called bird theory would have been presented as the most likely version. According to some experts, Aktau was chosen because it is located in an open space, residential areas are far from the airport, and the crew of the plane could have assumed that this would be an emergency landing and chose a more suitable place for it. On the other hand, however, with nearby airports available, it was riskier for an uncontrollable plane to fly further, especially over the sea. In other words, there are no answers to all these questions yet," President Ilham Aliyev added.

President Ilham Aliyev underlined the importance of involving an international team of experts to uncover the truth behind the incident and criticized initial efforts to obscure the facts. President Ilham Aliyev revealed that Russia had proposed the Interstate Aviation Committee (IAC) as the leading investigative body. Azerbaijan, however, categorically refused. "The Russian side officially suggested to us that the Interstate Aviation Committee investigate this matter. But we categorically refused. The reason is clear. Because it is no secret that this organization consists mostly of Russian officials and is headed by Russian citizens. Objectivity factors could not be fully ensured here. If we had seen fair and reasonable steps by Russia in the immediate aftermath of the accident, we probably would not have objected. But we saw that attempts to cover up the case were quite obvious. Therefore, we expressed this position in our close contacts both to the Kazakh side and the Russian side – a working group consisting of international experts only should be established, and it was. There are representatives of the aircraft manufacturer, Embraer, those of relevant Brazilian agencies, representatives of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia, including the Interstate Aviation Committee – not in leading

roles, but simply as members of the working group," President Ilham Aliyev noted.

President Ilham Aliyev also praised Kazakhstan's prompt and courageous response to the crash of an Azerbaijani passenger plane. President Ilham Aliyev expressed his gratitude to President Tokayev for the immediate actions of Kazakh rescue teams. "[A]s soon as the accident occurred, Kazakh rescuers immediately arrived at the scene and began to pull people out of the destroyed fuselage. They put their own lives at risk. Because they did not know whether there would be another explosion or not. A part of the plane had burned, and the other part could have caught fire as well. But despite this, they showed true heroism. At the same time, the activities of the medical teams were also very valuable. Because the injured passengers were immediately taken to medical facilities, and I expressed my gratitude to President Tokayev for this. I know that the demonstration of solidarity by our Kazakh brothers and sisters also left a great mark in the hearts of the Azerbaijani people. Ordinary people went to our consulate in Aktau, laid flowers, and expressed their attitude and solidarity with us. This is what true friendship and brotherhood are like," President Ilham Aliyev emphasized.

In the aftermath of the recent plane crash involving an Azerbaijani passenger aircraft, Azerbaijan Airlines (AZAL) has suspended flights to several Russian cities. President Ilham Aliyev provided insights into the decision, emphasizing that the safety of passengers remains the primary focus. President Ilham Aliyev explained that the decision to suspend flights was driven by the unpredictable nature of airspace closures and operational regimes in certain Russian cities. These closures are sometimes implemented under what is known as the "Kovyor operation," a term used to describe special airspace restrictions. "Because airspace in many Russian cities is occasionally closed, and a special operating regime is applied there. They call this a "Kovyor (carpet) operation," and returning to what I mentioned in the first question, I must also mention that one other thing must also be

clarified: when was that “Kovyor operation” announced? Because according to the information on our hands, that “Kovyor operation” was announced only after our plane had been exposed to external influence. If this is the case, it once again shows that local services did this to cover up the issue. As for AZAL flights, AZAL has indefinitely suspended its flights to seven Russian cities. At the same time, we have also suspended flights of Russian airlines from three Russian cities to Azerbaijan. Our air connection with a total of 10 cities has now been suspended, and let me repeat that, first of all, security issues are at the forefront here. We have always considered the safety of our passengers a priority, and this situation has been declared. Whatever we do, we do it openly. Let me repeat, this decision has been made. When will these flights be resumed, especially to the city of Grozny? Most likely, they will not. Life will tell, and the security of Russian airspace will certainly be taken into account,” President Ilham Aliyev explained.

President Ilham Aliyev has outlined Azerbaijan’s official demands to the Russian Federation. These demands reflect Azerbaijan’s expectations for accountability, justice, and compensation in response to the incident. “All these conditions are fair. There are no extraordinary demands or issues here; all of this is based on international experience and normal human conduct,” President Ilham Aliyev noted.

“We have clearly expressed our demands to the Russian side. These demands were officially communicated to them on 27 December. What do these demands consist of? First of all, the Russian side must apologize to Azerbaijan. Secondly, it must acknowledge its guilt. Thirdly, those responsible must be punished, brought to criminal responsibility, and compensation must be paid to the Azerbaijani state, to the injured passengers and crew members. These are our conditions. The first of these was fulfilled yesterday. I do hope that the other conditions will also be accepted,” President Ilham Aliyev underscored.

On December 28, Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke by phone with President Ilham Aliyev regarding the crash of an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger plane on December 25. According to the official [website](#) of the Kremlin, Vladimir Putin “apologised for the fact that the incident happened in Russian airspace, once again offered deep and sincere condolences to the victims’ families and wished a speedy recovery to the injured.”

During the phone call, President Ilham Aliyev [emphasized](#) that “the Azerbaijan Airlines passenger plane encountered external physical and technical interference while in Russian airspace, resulting in a complete loss of control. The Azerbaijani President noted that the aircraft was redirected to Kazakhstan’s city of Aktau and was able to make an emergency landing solely due to the courage and professionalism of the pilots. The head of state highlighted that the multiple holes in the aircraft’s fuselage, injuries sustained by passengers and crew due to foreign particles penetrating the cabin mid-flight, and testimonies from surviving flight attendants and passengers confirm evidence of external physical and technical interference. During their discussions, the heads of state emphasized the need for a thorough and comprehensive investigation into all the details of the tragedy, ensuring those responsible are held accountable.”

During the meeting with the families of the crew members who tragically lost their lives, as well as the surviving flight attendants, President Ilham Aliyev described how the AZAL-operated flight lost control near Grozny due to external impacts, including damage caused by electronic warfare and ground fire. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that the survival of those passengers was solely due to the extraordinary efforts of the pilots and crew, who exhibited unparalleled courage and professionalism. President Ilham Aliyev noted that the State had formally recognized the heroism of the crew. Three crew members — two pilots (Igor Kshnyakin and Alexander Kalyaninov) and one flight attendant (Hokuma Aliyeva) — had been posthumously awarded the title of National Hero,

the highest honor in Azerbaijan. Two surviving flight attendants were awarded the Order of Rashadat (Valor) of the 1st Category. President Ilham Aliyev remarked that these honors reflected not only the crew's exceptional dedication to their duties but also the state's deep respect for their sacrifice. The President also highlighted the composure and bravery of the flight attendants, particularly in maintaining order aboard the plane despite the overwhelming challenges they faced.

In addressing the investigation, President Ilham Aliyev provided updates on its progress and reiterated Azerbaijan's commitment to transparency. President Ilham Aliyev explained that a State Commission and the Prosecutor's Office of Azerbaijan were actively involved in uncovering the facts. Teams had conducted operational investigations in Grozny and Aktau, gathering critical evidence. Preliminary findings indicated that the "Kovyor operation," a procedure to close Russian airspace during threats, was initiated only after the plane had been fired upon, suggesting significant failures in communication and protocol.

President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that the damage sustained by the plane, including shrapnel from ground fire and injuries caused by foreign particles entering the cabin, left no doubt about the external interference. President Ilham Aliyev expressed disappointment with Russian attempts to attribute the crash to implausible causes, such as bird strikes or an onboard gas cylinder explosion, calling such explanations both baseless and deeply disrespectful to the victims.

The black boxes from the plane are currently being decoded in Brazil under the supervision of international representatives, including those from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia. President Ilham Aliyev explained that Azerbaijan had insisted on this arrangement to ensure objectivity, given concerns about the impartiality of certain investigative bodies. President Ilham Aliyev expressed confidence that the black boxes would shed light on critical unanswered questions, including why the plane was directed to Aktau and

whether the decision was made by local air traffic control or the pilots themselves.

President Ilham Aliyev criticized the lack of warnings to the crew, especially given that another AZAL flight had been turned back near Grozny just ten days prior to the crash. "If Russian airspace was under threat, the captain of the plane should have been promptly informed. The airspace should have been closed immediately, and the plane should have been instructed to turn back. I should also mention that approximately 10 days prior to the accident, a similar incident occurred near the city of Grozny, when an AZAL plane was turned back midway. Why was this information not communicated to the crew this time? Naturally, the investigation will uncover the answer. Once again, I want to emphasize that the information we have is based on the truth. The cover-up of this incident by Russian state agencies and their focus on absurd theories evoke surprise, regret, and rightful indignation. Innocent lives were lost," President Ilham Aliyev emphasized.

President Ilham Aliyev reaffirmed Azerbaijan's demands for accountability, including the punishment of those responsible for the incident. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that the tragedy could have been avoided had proper measures been taken to close Russian airspace near Grozny and to coordinate civilian and military protocols.

"The initial investigation and its results have been reported to me, but I can say with full certainty that the blame for the deaths of Azerbaijani citizens in this disaster lies with representatives of the Russian Federation. And we demand justice, we demand punishment of the guilty, we demand full transparency and human behavior," President Ilham Aliyev emphasized, reiterating his determination to see the investigation through to its conclusion, ensuring full accountability and justice for all those affected by the tragedy.

II. Year in Review: Foreign policy highlights of 2024

In 2024, Azerbaijan navigated a dynamic geopolitical landscape characterized by rising political and economic tensions, the erosion of international law, and growing uncertainty. Amid these challenges, Azerbaijan steadfastly pursued an independent and pragmatic foreign policy, rooted in the principles of international law. This approach allowed the country to effectively safeguard its foreign policy interests and address risks to its national security.

Azerbaijan expanded its diplomatic outreach through both bilateral and multilateral engagements, solidifying its role as a key player in promoting regional and global peace and security. By extending its diplomatic representation and forging stronger partnerships, the country reinforced its ability to protect its national interests on the international stage.

This year, Azerbaijan leveraged its internal stability and sustainable development to respond decisively to global challenges. The nation's contributions to international aid, economic cooperation, and the successful hosting of globally significant events enhanced its international reputation. These efforts underscored Azerbaijan's position as a proactive and reliable actor in global diplomacy.

The return of the Gazakh villages without military confrontation reflects Azerbaijan's strategic use of political and diplomatic pressure. This outcome was made possible by the significant shifts in the balance of power following the Patriotic War of 2020 and subsequent operations in 2023, which decisively established Azerbaijan's sovereignty over Karabakh and East Zangezur.

The restoration of Karabakh and East Zangezur has progressed steadily, with 10,000 former internally displaced persons already resettled and over 30,000 people living and working in the liberated areas. Since 2021, Azerbaijan has allocated more than 19 billion manats for reconstruction efforts, creating infrastructure, social facilities, and new enterprises. These efforts are part of the "Great

Return Program," which remains a top priority. The government's commitment to restoring these areas demonstrates its dedication to reversing the damage caused by decades of occupation.

Azerbaijan's economy experienced robust growth in 2024, with a GDP increase of over 4 percent and notable expansions in the non-oil sector (6 percent) and non-oil industrial sector (7 percent). Foreign exchange reserves now exceed \$72 billion, while foreign debt has been reduced to just \$5.2 billion, a ratio of reserves to debt unmatched by most developed nations. These economic achievements enable Azerbaijan to implement extensive social programs, including a 7.5 billion manat allocation for social welfare initiatives in 2025.

The presidential election in 2024 reaffirmed the Azerbaijani people's trust in their leadership. This support has strengthened the government's resolve to continue its path of development, sovereignty, and independence. Despite external pressures and challenges, Azerbaijan has remained steadfast in its pursuit of national goals, including the restoration of territorial integrity and the establishment of a prosperous and secure future for its citizens.

Hosting COP29

One of Azerbaijan's most notable achievements in 2024 was hosting the 29th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29) in Baku. The event was a testament to Azerbaijan's leadership in sovereign climate diplomacy. Representatives from 196 countries and nearly 200 international and regional organizations attended the conference, which also featured participation from over 80 heads of state and government at the World Leaders' Climate Action Summit on November 12–13. The conference was widely regarded as a success due to its significant outcomes and impactful decisions, further enhancing Azerbaijan's stature on the global stage. COP29 highlighted Azerbaijan's commitment to addressing climate change and its ability to convene diverse stakeholders to tackle

pressing global challenges. The conference was a significant milestone in global climate diplomacy, attracting more than 72,000 participants, including heads of state, government officials, representatives from international organizations, and members of civil society. Despite the challenges posed by a complex geopolitical climate, COP29 demonstrated Azerbaijan's ability to lead on critical global issues and drive tangible progress in the fight against climate change.

Under Azerbaijan's presidency, COP29 pursued two central goals: the establishment of a New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance (NCQG) and the full operationalization of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement to enhance carbon markets. Both objectives were achieved, reinforcing Azerbaijan's diplomatic efforts and commitment to global climate action. The decisions taken during COP29 were groundbreaking, including mechanisms to operationalize the Loss and Damage Fund, the adoption of the Baku Adaptation Road Map, the launch of the Technology Implementation Program, and the introduction of the Baku Global Climate Transparency Platform to support the Enhanced Transparency Framework of the Paris Agreement. Additionally, the Baku Workplan for the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform emphasized the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in climate strategies. Collectively, these outcomes were branded by the United Nations as the Baku Climate Unity Pact, symbolizing the collaborative and ambitious spirit of the conference.

One of the most significant achievements of COP29 was the adoption of the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance. For the first time in the history of climate negotiations, this decision set a target to increase annual climate funding to developing countries to USD 1.3 trillion by 2035. The previous goal, set at the Copenhagen COP in 2009, aimed for USD 100 billion annually. This new decision not only tripled the target to at least USD 300 billion but also ensured equitable access to climate finance for Small Island Developing States

(SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Transparency and accountability measures were also integrated into this framework, addressing longstanding concerns over the use and distribution of climate funds.

The World Leaders Climate Action Summit, held on November 12 and 13, was a centerpiece of COP29. It featured high-level discussions on pressing climate issues and fostered dialogue among global leaders. Over the subsequent days, Azerbaijan collaborated with its governmental agencies and international partners to organize more than 100 events, reflecting a robust commitment to inclusive and comprehensive climate action. These events included representatives from 196 countries, over 200 international organizations, and nearly 2,000 non-governmental organizations. The active participation of 80 heads of state and government underscored the global importance of COP29 and its outcomes.

In addition to its substantive outcomes, COP29 showcased Azerbaijan's leadership on the world stage. The conference took place amid a tense geopolitical environment, rising skepticism about climate change in some political circles, and significant divisions between developed and developing nations. Despite these challenges, COP29 concluded successfully, setting a strong foundation for future international cooperation. Azerbaijan's presidency emphasized the importance of unifying diverse stakeholders to address common goals, positioning the country as a key actor in global climate governance.

The 14 global and seven regional initiatives announced as part of COP29's Presidency Action Agenda highlighted the multifaceted approach Azerbaijan brought to the conference. These initiatives sought to strengthen climate action, enhance sectoral coordination, and align human and environmental needs with sustainable development objectives. Azerbaijan's efforts to balance these priorities reflected a forward-looking vision that resonated with global and regional audiences alike.

The successful organization of COP29 in Baku will be remembered as a defining moment in Azerbaijan's international leadership and a crucial step forward in global climate diplomacy. By achieving historic agreements such as the New Collective Quantified Goal and promoting innovative mechanisms like the Baku Adaptation Road Map, Azerbaijan demonstrated a commitment to tackling one of the most pressing challenges of our time. The outcomes of COP29 reaffirmed the importance of collaborative efforts and set a new benchmark for future climate conferences, ensuring that the momentum generated in Baku will continue to influence global climate action for years to come.

Hosting International Events

Throughout the year, Azerbaijan hosted several high-profile international events, demonstrating its capacity for leadership and collaboration on critical global issues. Notable gatherings included:

- The Informal Summit of the Organization of Turkic States in Shusha.
- The 3rd International Conference on "Mitigating Environmental Impact of Landmines: Resource Mobilization for a Safe and Green Future."
- The 6th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, a cornerstone of the "Baku Process."
- The International Conference on "Increasing National and Global Efforts to Clarify the Fate of Missing Persons."
- Celebrations marking the 30th anniversary of Azerbaijan's accession to the NATO Partnership for Peace Framework.

Additionally, Azerbaijan continued its active participation as a member of the Non-Aligned Movement Chairmanship Troika, assumed leadership of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) for 2024–2026, and chaired the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM). The country also became a member of the Developing Eight Organization for Economic

Cooperation (D-8), further broadening its multilateral engagement.

Strengthening Regional Relations

Azerbaijan placed a strong focus on maintaining and enhancing ties with neighboring countries. High-level visits were conducted with Türkiye, Russia, Georgia, and Iran, and numerous meetings were held under bilateral and multilateral cooperation frameworks. Significant events, such as the trilateral meeting between the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and the Prime Minister of Pakistan in Astana on July 3, and the Foreign Ministers' meetings in Baku and Istanbul, highlighted Azerbaijan's commitment to fostering regional security, stability, and economic collaboration.

In Central Asia, Azerbaijan's engagement reached new heights. President Ilham Aliyev made four visits to Central Asian countries, while leaders from the region visited Azerbaijan ten times throughout the year. Landmark agreements were signed, including the "Declaration on Strategic Partnership" with Tajikistan in May and the "Treaty on Allied Relations" with Uzbekistan in August. These agreements elevated Azerbaijan's relationships with all Central Asian nations to the level of strategic partnership or alliance. The participation of President Ilham Aliyev as a guest of honor at the Sixth Consultative Meeting of Central Asian Heads of State in Astana on August 9 further underscored Azerbaijan's growing influence in the region.

Azerbaijan maintained strong ties with European nations, driven by shared strategic interests. President Aliyev's visits to Germany, Great Britain, and Italy, along with visits from leaders of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia to Azerbaijan, underscored mutual efforts to deepen cooperation. Noteworthy agreements included the Joint Declarations on Strategic Partnership with Slovakia and Bulgaria in May. High-level strategic dialogues were also held with Hungary and Latvia, while Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's state visit in May

strengthened ties further. Azerbaijan's participation in European political platforms highlighted its commitment to fostering meaningful partnerships.

Azerbaijan achieved significant progress in its relations with Asian nations, marked by the adoption of a "Joint Declaration on the Establishment of Strategic Partnership" with China at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit in July. President Ilham Aliyev's visit to Pakistan in July led to agreements expanding cooperation across various sectors, while agreements with the Maldives on visa exemptions and tourism cooperation highlighted Azerbaijan's growing ties in South Asia.

In the Middle East, Azerbaijan emphasized strategic partnerships, exemplified by President Ilham Aliyev's visit to Egypt and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the UAE in January. Despite the challenging geopolitical environment, Azerbaijan intensified diplomatic efforts regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and expressed support for Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty, offering humanitarian assistance to the Syrian population.

In 2024, Azerbaijan took significant steps to broaden its diplomatic network. New embassies began operating in Thailand and Oman, while the embassy in Iran resumed operations, bringing the total number of Azerbaijani diplomatic missions abroad to 92. In 2024, Azerbaijan demonstrated its commitment to enhancing international cooperation and diplomacy through the signing of 204 documents with 40 countries on both bilateral and multilateral levels. These documents reflected Azerbaijan's proactive engagement in diverse areas of mutual interest, ranging from political collaboration to economic and humanitarian partnerships.

Expanding multilateral engagement

In 2024, Azerbaijan continued to assert its role as a dynamic and committed participant in global peace, security, and sustainable development. Through extensive multilateral engagements and

strategic initiatives, the country strengthened its relationships within international organizations and advanced its diplomatic priorities on various global platforms. Azerbaijan demonstrated positive momentum in its relations with the United Nations. A key highlight was the visit of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to Baku during COP29, underscoring Azerbaijan's growing global influence. This year also marked the conclusion of Azerbaijan's four-year chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). At the 19th NAM Summit in Uganda, Azerbaijan handed over the chairmanship to Uganda while welcoming South Sudan as the newest member of the Movement—a testament to Azerbaijan's diplomatic efforts.

Azerbaijan prioritized its leadership roles within regional and international organizations. Within the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), the country hosted an informal summit in Shusha, where the Garabagh Declaration was adopted, emphasizing humanitarian demining efforts to facilitate the return of internally displaced persons. Azerbaijan also initiated key agreements on digital economy, green finance, and environmental action under the OTS framework.

Azerbaijan's engagement with the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) saw the adoption of the Mashhad Declaration at the 28th Council of Foreign Ministers and the inauguration of the Clean Energy Center in Baku. Azerbaijan also hosted the first ECO Tour Operators Forum and the third ECO Think Tanks Forum, further demonstrating its leadership in economic and environmental cooperation.

In the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Azerbaijan secured significant support for its initiatives, including resolutions acknowledging the plight of Azerbaijani refugees and addressing the consequences of Armenia's past aggression. Azerbaijan will host the 16th OIC Summit in 2026, reflecting the deepening collaboration between OIC member states.

Azerbaijan assumed the chairmanship of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-

Building Measures in Asia (CICA) for 2024-2026, focusing on connectivity, digitalization, and sustainable growth. The country also joined the Developing Eight (D-8) Organization for Economic Cooperation, marking the first expansion of the group since its inception in 1996. This membership highlights Azerbaijan's growing geopolitical significance and commitment to justice and international law.

Azerbaijan actively promoted its cultural heritage through UNESCO, achieving the inclusion of 24 Azerbaijani examples on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage lists. New nominations, such as the Ateshgah Temple, were submitted for inclusion in the World Heritage List. Azerbaijan also hosted a commemorative event celebrating the 950th anniversary of the "Diwan Lughat it-Turk," showcasing the Turkic world's contributions to global culture.

Azerbaijan's diplomatic efforts included hosting key international events and formalizing strategic agreements. As chair of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM), Azerbaijan focused on critical areas such as transport, trade, energy, and reconstruction in post-conflict regions. Within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Azerbaijan facilitated cultural and sports collaborations, with Lachin declared the CIS Cultural Capital for 2025 and Ganja named the CIS Sports Capital.

The year also marked Azerbaijan's growing role in military-political cooperation, including partnerships with NATO and events commemorating the 30th anniversary of Azerbaijan's accession to the Partnership for Peace. Azerbaijan signed the Country Programme Framework with the International Atomic Energy Agency for peaceful nuclear energy use and contributed to initiatives under the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to promote peaceful applications of chemical technologies.

Azerbaijan achieved electoral victories in international organizations, including membership

in the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for 2025-2027 and the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) for 2025-2028. These accomplishments reflect Azerbaijan's dedication to advancing international cooperation in critical fields.

Advancing Normalization Efforts with Armenia

In 2024, Azerbaijan prioritized building sustainable peace in the South Caucasus, focusing on normalizing relations with Armenia. Significant progress was made on the normalization agenda, emphasizing the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. By seizing historical opportunities for peacebuilding, Azerbaijan demonstrated its commitment to fostering stability and cooperation in the region. These efforts reflected the country's vision for a future rooted in mutual respect and shared prosperity. These efforts, underpinned by a consistent and systematic foreign policy, aimed to counter misinformation campaigns, safeguard Azerbaijan's national interests, and neutralize threats to its sovereignty. Direct bilateral negotiations formed the cornerstone of this strategy, demonstrating Azerbaijan's commitment to achieving lasting peace.

High-level meetings between President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of Armenia played a pivotal role in advancing normalization. Notable engagements included the February 17 meetings during the Munich Security Conference, facilitated by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, as well as bilateral discussions in Kazan on October 24, during the 16th BRICS Summit. These meetings provided a platform for dialogue and set the stage for subsequent negotiations at the ministerial level, focusing on the development of a bilateral agreement to formalize interstate relations.

Throughout the year, Foreign Ministers of both countries held five significant meetings in Berlin, Almaty, Washington, New York, and Istanbul, under various international frameworks – on 28-29 February in Berlin, on 10- 11 May in Almaty, on 10

July in Washington on the sidelines of the Summit dedicated to the 75th anniversary of NATO, on 26 September in New York within the framework of the high-level week of the 79th session of the UN GA, and on 18 October in Istanbul within the framework of the “3+3” meeting. These discussions yielded considerable progress, significantly narrowing the range of unresolved issues in the proposed agreement. Additionally, the return of Azerbaijani villages—Baganis Ayrim, Ashagi Eskipara, Xeyrimli, and Gizilhajili—to Azerbaijani control, coupled with the delimitation and demarcation of a 13-kilometer stretch of the state border, marked a tangible outcome of these negotiations. This agreement, the first of its kind, underscored the potential for resolution through dialogue and bilateral cooperation.

A critical step forward was the establishment of regulations for the border delimitation commissions, which laid the groundwork for continued progress in demarcating and stabilizing the border. These measures not only fostered practical cooperation but also highlighted Azerbaijan’s commitment to advancing normalization in a structured and transparent manner.

The return of the Gazakh villages without military confrontation reflects Azerbaijan’s strategic use of political and diplomatic pressure. This outcome was made possible by the significant shifts in the balance of power following the Patriotic War of 2020 and subsequent operations in 2023, which decisively established Azerbaijan’s sovereignty over Karabakh and East Zangezur. Armenia’s eventual compliance was a recognition of Azerbaijan’s military and political strength. However, Armenia’s ongoing militarization and arms buildup, despite its past military defeats, remain a concerning development. Azerbaijan has repeatedly warned Armenia against pursuing policies that threaten regional stability, emphasizing the need for peace and cooperation in the South Caucasus.

Armenia’s reluctance to amend constitutional and legal provisions containing territorial claims

against Azerbaijan raised questions about its commitment to the normalization agenda. Additionally, Armenia’s efforts to sustain the defunct Minsk Group institutions of the OSCE, despite their irrelevance in the current geopolitical context, further complicated the process. The rapid militarization of Armenia, supported by external forces, alongside baseless smear campaigns targeting Azerbaijan on international platforms, created additional challenges.

In response to Armenia’s large-scale armament efforts, Azerbaijan has significantly increased its military budget for 2025 to a record 8.4 billion manats. This decision underscores the necessity of maintaining military superiority in the region to deter potential threats. Azerbaijan continues to advocate for peaceful coexistence while remaining prepared to defend its sovereignty and regional security.

Despite these hurdles, Azerbaijan successfully countered anti-Azerbaijani initiatives and misinformation campaigns, including those exploiting the hosting of COP29 in Baku. Through consistent and decisive measures, Azerbaijan ensured the continuation of the normalization process within the framework of its agenda, demonstrating resilience against external pressures.

Azerbaijan’s foreign policy remained firmly rooted in its core principles: ensuring sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the security of its people. These objectives formed the foundation of its normalization efforts and its broader cooperation with international actors. Looking ahead, Azerbaijan remains committed to principled and consistent actions to address ongoing challenges and to foster stability and prosperity in the region. As negotiations progress, Azerbaijan’s determination to uphold its national interests and achieve a comprehensive resolution will remain unwavering.

Holding Armenia legally accountable

In 2024, Azerbaijan continued its concerted efforts to address the crimes committed by Armenia

during the nearly 30-year occupation of its territories. These efforts aimed to establish Armenia's international legal responsibility for violations of Azerbaijan's sovereignty, environmental degradation, and other acts of destruction and harm.

One of the significant developments occurred on January 12, when the first procedural meeting in the inter-state arbitration filed by Azerbaijan against Armenia under the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) took place at the Permanent Court of Arbitration. This case centers on Armenia's breaches of Azerbaijan's sovereign rights over its energy resources, including the unlawful exploitation of renewable energy in the liberated territories. On November 19, Azerbaijan filed its Statement of Claim, presenting detailed evidence of Armenia's violations under the ECT and fundamental principles of international law. Azerbaijan seeks redress for these breaches and accountability for the damages inflicted on its energy resources.

In addition to addressing energy-related violations, Azerbaijan also pursued legal action under the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats. On April 12, a procedural meeting was held at the Permanent Court of Arbitration for this arbitration claim. Azerbaijan demanded that Armenia be held accountable for the large-scale destruction of biodiversity and environmental harm caused during the occupation. Financial compensation was sought for the environmental damage inflicted on Azerbaijan's territories.

Efforts to address human rights violations were also a focus of Azerbaijan's legal strategy. From April 15 to 26, hearings were conducted at the UN International Court of Justice (ICJ) regarding Armenia's preliminary objections to jurisdiction in the ongoing proceedings related to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. On November 12, the ICJ issued a decision rejecting Armenia's attempts to exclude claims about landmines and booby traps planted during the occupation.

Importantly, the Court determined that allegations of ethnic cleansing and other illegal activities by Armenia during its occupation of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territory would be examined in detail.

These legal initiatives reflect Azerbaijan's determination to hold Armenia accountable for its actions in accordance with international law. By pursuing cases at multiple international legal bodies, Azerbaijan not only seeks justice for the harm caused but also aims to establish clear precedents that reinforce its sovereignty and promote adherence to international norms. These efforts underscore Azerbaijan's commitment to addressing the legacy of occupation and securing redress for its people and territories.

Continuing Humanitarian and Development Assistance

In 2024, Azerbaijan actively expanded its global humanitarian and aid activities, reflecting its commitment to addressing international challenges and fostering global solidarity. Responding to requests from foreign states and international organizations, Azerbaijan coordinated aid efforts with various state bodies, delivering assistance to nations and communities in need. A significant highlight of Azerbaijan's humanitarian initiatives was the launch of the "Heydar Aliyev-International Education Grant" program. Established by President Ilham Aliyev, this program facilitated the admission of foreign students from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), as well as individuals with ethnic, historical, and cultural ties to Azerbaijan. For the 2024/25 academic year, 100 students from 35 countries were awarded scholarships to pursue their studies in Azerbaijan, contributing to the strengthening of educational and cultural ties.

Azerbaijan also reinforced its commitment to global cooperation through financial contributions to key international organizations, including the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the

UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), the OIC, and the UN Library and Archives in Geneva.

As part of its COP29 presidency, Azerbaijan provided targeted support to Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and SIDS, highlighting its dedication to inclusive climate action. Financial assistance was allocated for organizing the 4th UN International Conference on SIDS in Antigua and Barbuda in May and the LDC Group's Climate Change Strategy and Ministerial Meeting in Malawi in August. On August 27, Azerbaijan signed a Joint Declaration with the United Nations in Tonga, pledging USD 10 million over five years to fund climate action projects in SIDS, further cementing its role as a leader in global climate diplomacy.

In Africa, Azerbaijan supported training for the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement and continued its collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) under the “Alliance to Fight Against Avoidable Blindness” initiative. These efforts aimed to promote economic integration and improve healthcare outcomes in African Union member states.

Azerbaijan remained steadfast in its support for countries affected by crises. Following the devastating earthquake in Türkiye in 2023, Azerbaijan allocated financial aid for restoration and reconstruction efforts in the impacted region, reinforcing its strong ties with its neighbor.

Humanitarian assistance to Ukraine also continued, with the total aid provided for restoration, reconstruction, and humanitarian needs reaching approximately AZN 70 million (USD 40 million). This support underscored Azerbaijan's commitment to alleviating the suffering caused by the ongoing conflict and contributing to Ukraine's recovery.

Throughout 2024, Azerbaijan extended aid to a diverse range of countries, including Bosnia and

Herzegovina, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Grenada, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua and Barbuda, Vietnam, Yemen, Jordan, Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Albania, Zimbabwe, Tajikistan, Gambia, and Uganda. These efforts reflected Azerbaijan's role as a reliable partner in global development and humanitarian assistance.

Boosting Economic Ties

In 2024, Azerbaijan made significant strides in economic diplomacy, strengthening its economic relations on both regional and global scales. This year marked intensified efforts to expand export opportunities, promote foreign investment, and engage international partners in key economic initiatives, particularly in the restoration and reconstruction of liberated territories. These activities reflected Azerbaijan's commitment to fostering sustainable economic growth and international cooperation. Azerbaijan prioritized bilateral measures to diversify its export markets and encourage foreign investment. Efforts were directed toward engaging foreign companies in the large-scale restoration and reconstruction efforts in territories previously affected by conflict. Investment cooperation was further expanded with key partners in Central Asia and the Gulf, signaling Azerbaijan's growing role as a regional economic hub.

Significant developments included a business forum with the United Arab Emirates, where discussions focused on trade and investment opportunities. Energy agreements with Uzbekistan highlighted collaboration in the energy sector, while strengthened relations within the Azerbaijan-Saudi Arabia Joint Business Council underscored a shared commitment to economic partnership and innovation.

During the COP29 conference, Azerbaijan showcased its leadership in economic and environmental sustainability. At Azerbaijan's initiative, the launch of the Trust Fund for the UN Special Program for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was announced, aiming to enhance

economic integration and sustainable development in the region.

Additionally, Azerbaijan hosted the presentation event for the Clean Energy Center for the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) region. This center, part of the UNIDO's Global Network of Regional Sustainable Energy Centers (GNSEC), will serve as a hub for advancing clean energy projects and technologies in the ECO region. The initiative highlights Azerbaijan's commitment to addressing global energy challenges through regional cooperation and innovation.

Azerbaijan continued to play a pivotal role in regional energy and transport cooperation. Key projects such as the "Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor" and the "Solidarity Ring" facilitated enhanced connectivity and trade across the region. On November 13, Azerbaijan hosted a landmark event where the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan signed the "Agreement on Strategic Partnership in the Development and Transmission of Green Energy." This agreement underscored a shared commitment to sustainable energy development and highlighted Azerbaijan's leadership in regional energy collaboration.

III. Azerbaijan Joins the D-8

On December 19, 2024, the Republic of Azerbaijan achieved a significant milestone by becoming a full member of the Developing Eight Organization for Economic Cooperation (D-8) at its 11th Summit held in Cairo, Egypt. This historic development marks the first expansion of the D-8 since its establishment and highlights Azerbaijan's growing stature in the global arena.

Azerbaijan's membership in the D-8 is a testament to the successful and determined foreign policy led by President Ilham Aliyev. Under his leadership, the country has consistently sought to strengthen its international partnerships while emphasizing justice and adherence to international norms and principles. Azerbaijan's membership comes as a

culmination of efforts that began with its initial participation in the D-8's 9th Summit in Istanbul in 2017, where President Ilham Aliyev attended as a special guest.

The representation of Azerbaijan at the 11th Summit by Prime Minister Ali Asadov underscores the nation's commitment to deepening engagement with the organization and its member states. Azerbaijan's inclusion reflects the trust and recognition it has garnered within the global Muslim community and beyond.

The D-8, also known as the "Islamic Eight," is a bloc of Muslim-majority nations with significant economic potential and influence. Founded on June 15, 1997, in Istanbul, the organization aims to foster economic development, trade cooperation, and regional integration among its members: Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Türkiye. With its headquarters in Istanbul, the D-8 represents over 60% of the global Muslim population, emphasizing the shared goals of stability, prosperity, and collaborative growth.

Azerbaijan's strategic location as a bridge between East and West, along with its rich cultural, religious, and civilizational heritage, positions it as a valuable addition to the D-8. Its historical role as a hub for Islamic culture and commerce aligns with the organization's objectives of promoting Islamic solidarity, advancing economic integration, and countering challenges such as Islamophobia on a global scale.

Azerbaijan's accession to the D-8 signals its intention to actively contribute to the organization's goals and principles. As a nation committed to fostering security, stability, and prosperity in the broader region, Azerbaijan will work to advance initiatives in key sectors such as trade, transportation, communication, and economic cooperation. The country's emphasis on justice and adherence to international law aligns with the D-8's foundational principles, further solidifying Azerbaijan's role as a reliable partner within the organization.

The membership also highlights Azerbaijan's growing influence and credibility as an economic and political actor. By joining the D-8, Azerbaijan is poised to leverage its capabilities to enhance collaboration across a wide range of sectors, benefiting not only member states but also regional and global stakeholders.

Azerbaijan's integration into the D-8 will serve as a catalyst for strengthening Islamic solidarity and promoting Islamic values worldwide. Its efforts to foster mutual understanding and cooperation among Muslim nations are particularly critical in the context of contemporary challenges, including combating Islamophobia and addressing socio-economic disparities.

The country's active participation in the D-8 is expected to yield long-term benefits for the region, with Azerbaijan playing a key role in bridging gaps between cultures and fostering dialogue among nations. This aligns with its broader vision of acting as a unifying force in both regional and global contexts.

Azerbaijan's membership in the D-8 marks a new chapter in its diplomatic journey, reflecting its aspirations to be a proactive and influential player in the international community. The unanimous decision by D-8 member states to welcome Azerbaijan underscores the shared recognition of its potential to contribute meaningfully to the organization's objectives.

As Azerbaijan embarks on this new path, its focus on economic development, regional cooperation, and the promotion of shared values will undoubtedly leave a lasting impact. By aligning its national priorities with the goals of the D-8, Azerbaijan reaffirms its commitment to fostering a more interconnected, stable, and prosperous world for all.

IV. Azerbaijan assumes chairmanship of CICA

On December 17, 2024, Azerbaijan hosted the 7th meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). Conducted online, this meeting was a landmark occasion as Azerbaijan officially assumed the Chairmanship of CICA for the 2024–2026 term. The event brought together high-level representatives from 27 member states, as well as leaders from three observer states and eight partner international organizations, all of whom underscored the critical importance of collaboration within the framework of CICA.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov addressed the Ministerial Council, expressing gratitude to the member states for their confidence in Azerbaijan's leadership. He underscored that Azerbaijan's Chairmanship comes at a pivotal time when multipolarity is reshaping global dynamics, and multilateralism is facing significant challenges. Against this backdrop, he highlighted the unique role of CICA in fostering unity, cooperation, and shared responsibility among Asian nations. The overarching theme guiding Azerbaijan's Chairmanship—"Stronger CICA – Connectivity, Digitalization, and Sustainable Growth in Asia"—reflects a vision that prioritizes actionable goals to ensure tangible progress for the organization and its members.

Azerbaijan has laid out a robust agenda for its leadership term, with a focus on three main areas. The first is the transformation and institutional development of CICA to ensure the organization remains adaptable and effective in addressing emerging challenges. The second is the promotion of sectoral cooperation by implementing confidence-building measures that strengthen trust among member states. The third is the establishment of greater synergy between CICA and other international and regional organizations, a move designed to expand the organization's reach and impact. Minister of Foreign Affairs

Jeyhun Bayramov emphasized that these priorities would serve as a foundation for Azerbaijan's efforts to reinforce CICA as a platform for dialogue and cooperation.

A key aspect of Azerbaijan's Chairmanship will be the organization of over 20 significant events in 2025, spanning all five dimensions of CICA. These events will address a wide range of critical issues, including the enhancement of regional transportation corridors to improve connectivity, the development of small and medium-sized enterprises to bolster economic growth, and the adoption of sustainable agricultural and environmental practices to address food security and climate resilience. Cybersecurity initiatives will also be prioritized, alongside efforts to empower youth and advance educational opportunities. The protection of cultural heritage, the promotion of tourism, and initiatives in humanitarian mine action will further underscore Azerbaijan's commitment to addressing diverse challenges faced by the region.

In his address, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov also stressed the importance of increasing CICA's international visibility. Azerbaijan plans to achieve this by expanding the organization's network of partnerships with global and regional entities. This strategic focus is aimed at elevating CICA's role in addressing contemporary challenges and ensuring its continued relevance in a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape.

The meeting also featured a presentation by CICA Secretary General Kairat Sarybay, who delivered a report on the achievements of the Conference under Kazakhstan's Chairmanship from 2020 to 2024. This retrospective highlighted the progress made during Kazakhstan's tenure, setting a solid foundation for Azerbaijan to build upon during its leadership.

Several important documents were adopted at the Ministerial Council, signaling a renewed commitment to CICA's mission. These included a commemorative statement marking the 25th

anniversary of the Declaration on the Principles Guiding Relations among CICA Member States, as well as decisions on the implementation of confidence-building measures. An amended version of the CICA Catalogue of Confidence-Building Measures was also approved, alongside a memorandum establishing a partnership network of leading universities among member states. These measures collectively represent a step forward in enhancing cooperation and building trust among the diverse nations that comprise CICA.

Azerbaijan's Chairmanship is poised to steer the organization through an era of significant change and opportunity. By prioritizing connectivity, digitalization, and sustainable growth, Azerbaijan aims to strengthen regional bonds and ensure that CICA remains a vibrant and effective platform for addressing shared challenges. This leadership role also reinforces Azerbaijan's commitment to fostering dialogue, trust, and cooperation across Asia, ensuring that the region moves forward with a sense of unity and shared purpose.

As Azerbaijan takes on this responsibility, it brings with it a vision rooted in collaboration, innovation, and a deep commitment to the principles of multilateralism. The steps outlined for the next two years promise to leave a lasting impact on CICA and its member states, advancing a more interconnected, secure, and prosperous Asia.

The growing urgency of climate change, coupled with Europe's efforts to reduce its dependence on Russian gas, has significantly increased the global demand for renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydropower. Against this backdrop, cooperation between Azerbaijan and Türkiye in the field of green energy has assumed a critical role in shaping the region's energy landscape. This partnership represents a strategic evolution in their collaboration, reflecting their shared commitment to addressing environmental challenges and meeting the demands of a shifting global energy paradigm.

V. Expanding green energy cooperation between Azerbaijan and Türkiye

Historically, Azerbaijan and Türkiye have worked together in the oil and natural gas sectors, creating a strong foundation for energy cooperation. However, recent developments have seen this collaboration extend into electricity and renewable energy. Plans are now being developed to facilitate the export of electricity generated from renewable sources in Azerbaijan to Türkiye and, from there, to Europe. This initiative not only supports the broader global transition to sustainable energy but also strengthens the economic and political ties between the two nations.

The partnership in the electricity sector has roots dating back to the early 2000s. Initially, Azerbaijan imported electricity from Türkiye, but by 2006, this arrangement reversed as Azerbaijan transitioned to becoming an electricity exporter. By 2013, electricity exports were formalized under the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Türkiye Energy Bridge Project, which provided a framework for stable and reliable energy exchange. Infrastructure improvements, such as power lines connecting Nakhchivan to İğdır, have further solidified this connection, ensuring consistent energy supply across the region.

In recent years, this relationship has deepened, driven by a combination of global and regional factors. The global push towards renewable energy as a solution to climate change has placed greater emphasis on sustainable energy sources. Azerbaijan, while a leading producer of oil and natural gas, has adopted a strategic approach to developing its renewable energy capacity. This commitment is evidenced by its 2022 memorandum of strategic energy cooperation with the European Union, which identified renewable energy as a key area of focus. Moreover, the liberated territories of Azerbaijan have revealed substantial renewable energy potential, further underscoring the strategic value of green energy initiatives in the region.

Türkiye's growing energy needs have also played a critical role in strengthening this partnership. The country's expanding economy and population have resulted in a sharp increase in electricity demand, which has tripled over the past two decades. This growing need has made Türkiye an important market for Azerbaijan's renewable energy exports. Recognizing the importance of this relationship, the two nations have established a framework for collaboration that includes agreements on energy trade, infrastructure development, and regulatory alignment.

Azerbaijan has made significant strides in its renewable energy strategy, establishing the Renewable Energy Resources State Agency in 2020 with ambitious goals to increase the share of renewables in its energy mix. The agency aims to transform the liberated territories into "Green Energy" zones, utilizing the country's substantial potential, estimated at 135 GW onshore and 157 GW offshore. Partnerships with leading international companies, including BP, Masdar, and Total Energies, have accelerated these efforts, facilitating the development of wind and solar energy projects across the country.

One notable initiative is the creation of a 1,500 MW renewable energy facility in Nakhchivan, combining wind and solar power. This project underscores the broader strategy of positioning the region as a hub for green energy production and export. Recent agreements between Turkish Electricity Transmission Inc. and AzerEnerji OJSC aim to develop the necessary infrastructure to support these exports, further reinforcing the energy ties between the two nations.

The regional and global implications of this partnership are profound. Azerbaijan and Türkiye are not only addressing their respective energy needs but are also contributing to broader efforts to combat climate change. Their cooperation was highlighted at the COP29 climate conference in Baku, where discussions focused on joint projects to supply renewable energy from Azerbaijan to Türkiye and Europe. These efforts are complemented by regional initiatives such as the

Istanbul Energy Forum, where Türkiye, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Bulgaria discussed the role of a green energy corridor in reducing carbon emissions and enhancing energy security.

A strategic renewable energy corridor connecting the Caspian Sea to Europe is also under consideration, including plans for the Zangezur corridor. This initiative would solidify the role of Azerbaijan and Türkiye as key players in the global energy market, linking the Caspian and Black Sea regions to Europe. By integrating green energy into their existing energy cooperation, the two nations are adapting to the demands of a rapidly evolving energy landscape while positioning themselves as leaders in sustainable development.

The collaboration between Azerbaijan and Türkiye represents a pivotal step in addressing the challenges of climate change and ensuring energy security. By leveraging their respective strengths, these nations are laying the groundwork for a future that prioritizes renewable energy, economic resilience, and environmental sustainability. Through their combined efforts, they are setting an example for regional and global energy partnerships, demonstrating the transformative potential of green energy in fostering sustainable growth.

VI. The erosion of Azerbaijan-U.S. relations in recent years

Relations between Azerbaijan and the United States have encountered significant challenges in recent years, marked by growing mistrust and policy disagreements. Once characterized by mutual cooperation and strategic partnership, particularly during key periods of shared interests, the bilateral relationship has deteriorated due to a combination of diplomatic, political, and policy disputes.

A central point of contention has been the Biden administration's decision to reimpose sanctions under the 907 Amendment of the Freedom Support Act of 1992. Originally introduced during

the early 1990s, the amendment bars U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan. While annual waivers of the amendment had been granted since 2002, largely in recognition of Azerbaijan's logistical support for U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, the Biden administration rescinded the waiver. The move was deeply unjust. The amendment has been a one-sided policy tool influenced by Armenian lobbying efforts. Its original enactment ignored Azerbaijan's experience as the victim of aggression during the First Karabakh War. The withdrawal of the waiver has only reinforced the perception in Azerbaijan that its strategic value to Washington is viewed through a transactional lens.

Further exacerbating tensions have been U.S. statements on human rights and governance in Azerbaijan. On December 11, 2024, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken issued a statement critical of Azerbaijan's human rights record, prompting a strong rebuke from Baku. Aykhan Hajizada, Director of the Press Service Department of Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, rejected Blinken's remarks as biased and unwarranted interference in Azerbaijan's internal affairs, pointing out that Blinken's double standards have paralyzed America's policy in the South Caucasus.

"Unfortunately, due to the intervention of the U.S. State Department led by Secretary of State Blinken in the internal affairs of Azerbaijan during the last 4 years, the period in question is considered lost years for Azerbaijan-US relations, which were remembered for friendship and cooperation within many periods. It is well known that Antony Blinken's double standards in relation to the current situation of human rights in our country has paralyzed the South Caucasus policy of the United States as a whole," Director of the Press Service Department of Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed out.

Nonetheless, both Azerbaijan and the United States have a shared interest in restoring their partnership. Energy cooperation, regional stability, and countering common threats are areas where mutual benefits have historically been evident.

Azerbaijan's frustrations with the transactional nature of U.S. foreign policy underscore the importance of a more consistent and balanced engagement. For Washington, rethinking its approach to the South Caucasus could enhance its credibility and influence in a region of growing strategic significance. As both nations look to the future, the possibility of mending their strained relations remains. The challenge lies in moving beyond past grievances and finding common ground to address shared challenges. By doing so, Azerbaijan and the United States can reinvigorate their partnership and contribute to a more stable and prosperous South Caucasus.

VII. Azerbaijan supports peace and stability in Syria

Azerbaijan has reiterated its commitment to promoting peace and stability in Syria, emphasizing its firm stance on respecting the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty. As regional developments unfold, Azerbaijan has been closely following the situation in Syria, actively engaging in consultations with its strategic partner, Türkiye, to explore avenues for constructive engagement and assistance.

Azerbaijan views the restoration of peace and stability in Syria as essential following the collapse of the Bashar al-Assad regime and the prolonged civil conflict. The Azerbaijani government underscores the importance of resolving Syria's challenges in alignment with the will of its people, advocating for solutions achieved through inclusive domestic political dialogue.

In a demonstration of solidarity, Azerbaijan has expressed its readiness to work alongside Türkiye and other like-minded partners to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis affecting the Syrian population. Although Azerbaijan does not currently maintain an embassy in Syria, the government has been proactive in determining the number and location of Azerbaijani citizens residing in Syria. These efforts are part of a broader

initiative that began in 2020 to repatriate Azerbaijani citizens from Syria through Türkiye.

This approach reflects Azerbaijan's commitment to both its citizens and the broader regional stability. Humanitarian support remains a cornerstone of Azerbaijan's foreign policy, and its partnership with Türkiye underscores a shared vision of supporting Syria during this critical period.

Looking toward the future, Azerbaijan has expressed hope for the normalization of relations with Syria once stability is achieved. The Azerbaijani government envisions a partnership based on mutual respect, friendship, and cooperation, paving the way for closer bilateral ties in various spheres.

Azerbaijan's forward-looking approach highlights its dedication to regional stability and its willingness to contribute to peace-building efforts, remaining a steadfast supporter of the Syrian people and their aspirations for a stable and prosperous future.

VIII. Azerbaijan advocates for multilateralism at the OSCE Ministerial Council

At the 31st Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, H.E. Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, delivered a statement emphasizing Azerbaijan's unwavering commitment to multilateralism and regional stability. The Minister outlined pressing challenges facing the OSCE and highlighted significant advancements in the normalization process between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov began by acknowledging the efforts of Ian Borg, the outgoing OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, and extended his best wishes to Finland's incoming Chairperson, Minister Elina Valtonen. The Minister noted the challenging global context in which the Council convened, citing the erosion of trust in multilateralism due to violations of international

law and selective interpretations of commitments. Minister Jeyhun Bayramov also called attention to the alarming rise in ethnic and religious intolerance, such as Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, urging OSCE participating States to uphold their commitments to combat discrimination. The Minister underscored the enduring importance of the OSCE's founding principles, particularly respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of borders. He reaffirmed Azerbaijan's dedication to these norms as the foundation for security, peace, and constructive dialogue.

In addressing the OSCE's internal challenges, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov called for more effective resource allocation and the resolution of structural issues, such as the appointment of the Secretary General and other executive positions. The Minister emphasized that OSCE resources must focus on activities that garner consensus and meet pressing needs. Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov also argued for the dissolution of obsolete OSCE structures related to the former Minsk process, which Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov described as financially unjustifiable and irrelevant in the current context.

Turning to the Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization process, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov highlighted the significant strides made since the previous Ministerial Council meeting. Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov noted that peace has been essentially established following the restoration of Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, creating new conditions for interstate normalization. The two countries have successfully completed portions of their border delimitation through bilateral dialogue, and a joint regulation for border commissions has entered into force to guide further efforts. Progress has also been made on a draft bilateral agreement.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov stressed that these achievements demonstrate the efficacy of direct bilateral negotiations, a method

consistently advocated by Azerbaijan. However, the Minister also pointed to persistent challenges, particularly Armenia's need to fully implement its commitment to respect Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Armenia needs to remove territorial claims embedded in its Constitution and legislative acts. Sustainable peace requires unequivocal recognition of each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity. There is a historic opportunity for Azerbaijan and Armenia to move beyond confrontation and establish lasting good-neighborly relations. Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov reiterated Azerbaijan's determination to finalize the normalization process and called on Armenia to demonstrate reciprocal political will and responsibility, urging the international community to avoid actions that could provoke tensions or undermine the ongoing process.