



CENTER OF ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
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# BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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## **I. Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Turkmenistan deepen regional cooperation**

On December 13, 2022, the heads of state of Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Turkmenistan met in Ashgabat for the First Trilateral Summit. The presidents discussed key issues such as energy, trade, transportation, and regional security. This first Azerbaijan-Turkey-Turkmenistan trilateral summit was a significant event, given the current state of global energy markets. The energy and transportation ministers of these countries also held a separate meeting to explore the region's future energy and transportation potential and ways to enhance regional cooperation.

The Central Asia and South Caucasus region has the potential to be a reliable alternative source of energy for European markets. Turkmenistan, in particular, with its fourth-largest natural gas reserves in the world, could significantly impact the energy market in energy-hungry Europe. In 2021, Turkmenistan produced 79.3 billion cubic meters of natural gas, with 36.7 bcm being consumed domestically. Energy cooperation between Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Turkmenistan would enable Turkmenistan to export natural gas to not only traditional markets like Russia and China, but also to Europe.

The signing of the "Memorandum of Understanding on joint exploration and development of the Dostlug" field in the Caspian Sea last year marked a rapprochement between Baku and Ashgabat and signaled future cooperation. This agreement resolved the longstanding dispute between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan in the Caspian Sea and opened up new opportunities for wider regional cooperation. In addition, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkmenistan also signed a trilateral gas swap agreement last year under which Iran

annually delivers 1.5 to 2 bcm of Turkmen gas to Azerbaijan. As part of this deal, supplies of 5-6 million cubic meters of gas per day began on January 3, 2022. Iran receives Turkmen gas in the east of the country and then delivers an equivalent amount to Azerbaijan.

During the Ashgabat summit, two important issues were at the forefront of discussions. The first was energy cooperation between the three countries, which is crucial for future energy security and economic development. The completion of the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) played a major role in the energy rapprochement between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan became the first country to export Caspian natural gas to the European energy market bypassing Russia. The SGC, with all its segments, is a strategic interregional energy project that connects the Caspian region directly to Europe. The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) provide diversification for Turkish and European energy consumers, and energy cooperation with Azerbaijan opens up new opportunities for the Central Asia to export energy resources to Türkiye and Europe.

Türkiye's President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has noted that the Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline, which transports gas from Azerbaijan to Türkiye, has reached its capacity of 32 bcm. Additionally, the Trans Adriatic Pipeline transporting gas to Europe through Greece has also reached its limit of 6 bcm. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a new route to ensure a sufficient flow of natural gas in the region. This presents a significant opportunity for Türkiye to become a gas trade hub by using Turkmen gas to supply Europe with energy sources. This will allow Türkiye to meet the growing demand for natural gas and become a transit country.

Energy cooperation is also important for Turkmenistan, as it will increase the country's export options. In 2021, China was the main export route for Turkmenistan's natural gas with nearly 31 bcm/y, followed by Russia with 10 bcm/y. As Turkmenistan is highly reliant on natural gas exports, new energy markets are crucial for diversification. This will give Turkmenistan a stronger position in gas export negotiations with Russia and China. Furthermore, this process will incentivize the adoption of new technologies and the attraction of experts to Turkmenistan for the development of new gas projects.

Cooperation in the field of transport was another major topic discussed. Azerbaijan plays an active role in the East-West and North-South transport corridors. However, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has had a negative impact on the Northern Corridor. Additionally, EU and US sanctions against Russia have significantly affected international transport and cargo transportation. As a result, traditional trade routes have become less relevant, and the direction of East-West cargo transportation has changed, with a large volume of cargo being diverted from the north to the south. Following these sanctions, there has been an increase in the volume of cargo being transported along the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) or Middle Corridor.

The Lapis Lazuli corridor is a transportation route that aims to connect Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye. It was established through an agreement signed in 2017 by these countries, and in 2021, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Afghanistan signed a tripartite roadmap for further cooperation on the corridor. The Lapis Lazuli corridor is a significant part of the Middle Corridor and aims to increase

connectivity within the Eurasian region. It is composed of a multimodal, East-West route that begins in Afghanistan and passes through Turkmenistan, where it connects to ferries across the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan. From there, the route continues by rail to Georgia and Turkey, and potentially on to Europe. The ports of Alat and Turkmenbashi in the Caspian Sea are important for transporting cargo from Central Asia to Europe. The cooperation between Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Türkiye in the Lapis Lazuli corridor is important for the further development of transportation routes and for strengthening regional integration through increased trade.

The Middle Corridor has gained significant value due to the crisis in the northern corridor caused by the Russia-Ukraine war. Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Turkmenistan hold a strategic position in the region for transportation, energy, and trade corridors. Therefore, the Middle Corridor is a crucial project for Central Eurasia and complements the northern and southern alternatives as well as the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It also provides a faster and shorter connection to the Balkans, as well as Western and Northern Europe. Wider regional cooperation is essential for economic integration and access to the EU's single market.

Joint energy and transport projects will strengthen the geopolitical importance and economic development of all three countries. Turkmenistan's natural gas can fuel the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), which is an important source of energy for Europe and Türkiye. Cooperation between Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Turkmenistan will also support the Middle Corridor, a vital transportation route. Azerbaijan has already implemented strategically important transport projects such

as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway, Alat Free Economic Zone, and Alat port. It also has plans for new infrastructure projects in the Karabakh Economic Region, including the opening of the Zangezur Corridor, which will provide Türkiye with a direct route to the South Caucasus and Central Asia. In conclusion, regional economic integration and infrastructure connectivity are vital for stability and prosperity, and energy and transport projects across the region support this initiative.

## **II. Protests on the Lachin road against exploitation of Azerbaijan's natural resources**

Since November 2021, the government of Azerbaijan has repeatedly warned against engaging in illegal economic activities in the territories of Azerbaijan where the Russian peacekeeping contingent has been temporarily deployed. Armenia-registered companies and their subsidiaries, such as Base Metals CJSC, have been heavily involved in the mining of precious minerals and metals in the formerly occupied territories of Azerbaijan. The illegal exploitation and looting of Azerbaijan's natural resources has not only continued but has even increased since the end of the conflict, particularly at the Gizilbulag gold and Demirli copper-molybdenum deposits. This depredatory exploitation is severely damaging the environment, with thousands of hectares of forests being cut down and millions of tons of tailings accumulating in tailing dumps as a result of extensive mining activities. Hazardous leaks from these tailing dumps and ponds at the mining sites are polluting the occupied territories and destroying their fragile ecosystems. Although Azerbaijan has tried to settle the issue through negotiations, the Armenian side sought to derail the process by

ignoring the appeals, blocking access to the mining sites, and continuing illegal activities.

On December 3 and 7, 2022, Azerbaijan's authorities met with the command of the Russian Peacekeeping Contingent to discuss plans for monitoring and assessing the environmental impact of illegal exploitation at the Gizilbulag and Demirli reserves. On December 3, 2022, officials from the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan, the State Service for Real Estate Affairs under the Ministry of Economy of Azerbaijan, and the "AzerGold" Closed Joint Stock Company held a meeting with the command of the Russian peacekeeping forces stationed in Azerbaijan. At the meeting, the representatives requested an on-site inspection of the Gizilbulag and Demirli mines, monitoring, organization of natural resources inventory and property cadastral accounting, assessment of potential environmental damage and risks, including the impact on underground and surface water sources. As a result of this meeting, the Azerbaijani authorities prepared a road map. The two sides agreed on a visit by a delegation of Azerbaijani specialists, organized by the peacekeepers. However, this visit was intentionally disrupted by a group of people. On December 10, a delegation consisting of representatives of the Azerbaijani government, environmental civil society organizations, and media attempted to visit the mines mentioned in the earlier agreement. However, they were confronted by unidentified individuals and prevented from continuing their monitoring activities in these areas.

“The Azerbaijani side has repeatedly appealed to the command of the Russian peacekeeping contingent, which is deployed in the territories of Azerbaijan, to prevent illegal exploitation of

natural resources and eliminate its negative impact on the environment, but to no avail. According to the information obtained by Azerbaijan, the illegal exploitation and looting of natural resources, as well as the deterioration of the ecological situation are observed, especially in the Gizilbulag gold and Damirli copper-molybdenum deposits,” head of the Press Service Department of Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry Aykhan Hajizada underscored.

“Since December 3, the representatives of the relevant state institutions of Azerbaijan and the Russian peacekeeping contingent have held negotiations to determine the methods of the visit and monitoring of the Azerbaijani experts to the territory. Despite attempt by the Azerbaijani representatives on December 10 to visit these two areas in accordance with the agreement reached, where the natural resources are illegally exploited, they were prevented from visiting the area. Due to the fact that the Russian peacekeeping contingent did not take any action, a pre-planned action by local residents prevented the visit. Regarding this situation, Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a diplomatic note to the Russian side. In accordance with the agreement reached, it was once again called upon to ensure Azerbaijan's representatives' unhindered access to the mentioned deposits. It is unacceptable to obstruct such a visit or to impose any conditions. We stress the need for the Russian peacekeeping contingent, which is deployed in the territory of Azerbaijan in accordance with the trilateral statement of November 10, 2020, to strictly observe the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan in all its activities,” Hajizade pointed out.

Armenia has also continued to engage in illegal military activities in the territories of

Azerbaijan where Russian peacekeeping force is temporarily stationed. These activities include illegal military buildup, rotation of armed forces, illegal transfer of weapons and personnel, and other military provocations. One particularly dangerous aspect of these activities has been the transfer of new antipersonnel mines produced in 2021 (after the signing of the trilateral statement in November 2020) to these territories. These mines pose a significant threat to the large-scale restoration and reconstruction work taking place in the post-conflict period, as well as to the civilian population working in these areas and to the return of internally displaced persons to their homes. Since August of 2022, Azerbaijan has detected 2728 antipersonnel landmines produced in Armenia in 2021 in its sovereign territories.

All of these caused justified public discontent in Azerbaijan and led to peaceful protests along the Lachin road against the illegal exploitation of Azerbaijan's natural resources, the transportation of these resources to Armenia, and the abuse of the Lachin road, which was meant to be used only for humanitarian ends. Azerbaijan vehemently rejected the claims of the Armenian side about the alleged “blocking” of the Lachin road, the humanitarian disaster in the region, and the accusations of ethnic cleansing.

“The claims that the protests have resulted in the road’s closure are equally groundless and it is undeniable fact that vehicles belonging to the Red Cross and the Russian peacekeeping contingent stationed in the region have used the Lachin road without hindrance. Despite the appeals of the Azerbaijani side to the Armenian residents that the road is open and can be used according to the purpose of the trilateral statement, the fact that the provocateurs, who present themselves as

representatives of the Armenian residents living in Karabakh, prevent the population from using the road proves once again that it is precisely such people, who created a false impression of the protests in order to continue their illegal and dirty deeds. The accusations by Armenia that Azerbaijan is conducting deportations and ethnic cleansing in the region absurd, and such accusations are intended to cover up the systematic and consistent policy of ethnic cleansing committed by Armenians against Azerbaijanis in the 20th century," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted in its statement.

The government of Azerbaijan also pointed out that any questions on the passage through the road should be directed to the Russian peacekeeping contingent, emphasizing that Azerbaijan fulfills its obligations in full and strongly demands that Armenia also complies with its obligations. Azerbaijan also underscored that it is ready to facilitate humanitarian needs of all Armenian residents living on its territories.

Armenia's claims about "blockade" do not hold up to any scrutiny and is the result of the projection on the Armenian side. Armenia itself has refused to open transport and communication routes between the two countries, including railways and highways, as specified in the trilateral statements of November 10, 2020 and January 11, 2021. Armenia has delayed the process of providing coordinates for the construction of a highway that would allow unimpeded movement between mainland Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, as well as international transport between the two countries. Azerbaijan has made a constructive offer to move forward on a railway connection in an effort to resolve this impasse, but this offer has not been reciprocated by Armenia,

indicating that Armenia is not acting in good faith in these discussions.

Accusations of "ethnic cleansing" are also baseless and unfounded, especially considering Armenia's history of practicing state-sponsored policies of occupation and preventing the return of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijani IDPs to their homes and properties in the formerly occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is committed to granting equal rights and freedoms to all citizens, as outlined in its Constitution. The issue of the rights and security of Armenian residents living in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan is an internal matter for Azerbaijan. Increased dialogue and contacts between the central Azerbaijani authorities and local ethnic Armenian residents can help promote peaceful coexistence and should be encouraged and sustained. For example, during the construction of a new road bypassing the city of Lachin, there were contacts between the Azerbaijani side and local Armenian residents, and a large part of the construction process was carried out without the observation of the temporarily deployed Russian peacekeeping contingent. Additionally, direct contacts were established when Azerbaijani specialists visited and conducted technical monitoring of the Sarsang water reservoir in August 2022.

These events showcase that the revanchist forces in Armenia are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with these developments and will resort to all kinds of provocations to ramp up the tensions in the region. The emergence of shady businessman Ruben Vardanyan with questionable background in Karabakh region of Azerbaijan is also a clear indication of this. The role of certain third parties to embolden Armenia's revanchist behavior is also cause for serious concern, as it makes Armenia more

prone to resort to increased military provocations and hostile rhetoric.

There has been widespread support among international policymakers and observers for the Armenians, with claims of an impending "humanitarian disaster" and accusations that the Azerbaijani government instigated the protest on the Lachin road. However, a deeper examination of the issue reveals that the controversy surrounding the Lachin road has a complex history and wider implications. Lachin was the first region outside of the former Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous oblast to be occupied by Armenia in May 1992 during the conflict with Azerbaijan. Armenian nationalists, who sought to unite Azerbaijan's Karabakh region with Armenia through the "miatsum" (unification) movement in 1987-1988, saw the establishment of this road as a crucial strategic goal, using it to supply their military. In April 1993, Armenia launched an attack on Kelbajar, an Azerbaijani region located between the former autonomy and Armenia, in addition to attacking from Karabakh and Armenia proper.

Armenia has long claimed that it is facing the threat of genocide and ethnic cleansing, and has presented the Lachin road as a vital lifeline for humanitarian purposes. However, in reality, the conflict has led to the forced displacement of Azerbaijanis from both Armenia and Karabakh. Armenia has also encouraged illegal settlements in Lachin as part of its efforts to solidify its control of the region during negotiations with Azerbaijan for a resolution to the conflict. Azerbaijan has repeatedly raised concerns about ecological damage and resource exploitation by Armenian companies, such as Base Metals, in Karabakh. The issue of environmental protection played a significant role in the early stages of the conflict, with protests in Baku

over the destruction of a forest near Shusha by local Armenian authorities sparking a larger movement for national liberation. Subsequent investigations by the OSCE found widespread ecological devastation in occupied territories. After the 2020 war, Armenian settlers in Lachin burned homes and cut down trees as they withdrew in accordance with the ceasefire. The current concern over the Lachin road is not just about resource extraction or environmental damage, but also the use of the road for non-humanitarian purposes.

The government of Azerbaijan warned Armenia against illegally transferring landmines, military personnel, and munitions in violation of the Trilateral Statement. This has caused concern among Armenian nationalists that the Lachin road may fall under full Azerbaijani control. In response, Armenia is claiming that there will be a "humanitarian disaster" in an attempt to generate international pressure and keep the Lachin road under Armenian control. This would allow Armenia to continue illegally transporting military supplies and profit from the sale of illegally extracted natural resources. However, the Trilateral Statement reaffirms that the Lachin corridor is part of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territory and grants it security guarantees. Azerbaijan has a responsibility to ensure security for all of its citizens, including Armenians in the Karabakh region. If the use of the Lachin road poses a threat to Azerbaijan's national security, Azerbaijan is not legally obligated to allow it. Some international observers are skeptical of civilian activists in Lachin and do not recognize the strong support among the Azerbaijani public, including opposition parties, for the government to end the Armenian occupation and take control of Lachin. This was demonstrated on July 14, 2020, when the

Azerbaijani public demanded that the government take action.

Recently, the situation in Karabakh was worsened by the arrival of Russian oligarch of Armenian origin Ruben Vardanyan, who was appointed as "state minister" and disrupted efforts to begin a dialogue between local Armenians and the central authorities in Baku. Vardanyan, who has been sanctioned by the United States for money laundering, has connections with both Russian officials and Western liberals. The situation with the Lachin road involves three main issues: the immediate cause of the conflict, which includes ecological problems and the illegal exploitation of Azerbaijan's natural resources; the use of the Lachin corridor for military purposes in violation of the Trilateral Statement; and the obligation to open transportation links, as outlined in the Trilateral Statement. Azerbaijan allows passage through the Lachin road and allows Armenian and foreign trucks, such as Iranian ones, to use other roads through its territory, such as the Goris-Kafan route. However, Armenia has refused to create a passage from Azerbaijan to its exclave of Nakhichevan that passes through Armenian territory, as required by Article 9 of the Trilateral Statement, using various excuses.

The situation with the Lachin road highlights deeper issues: the absence of a formal peace treaty (rather than just a ceasefire) between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the current impasse in negotiations; the role of Russian peacekeepers; the influence of radicals among Karabakh Armenians and the presence of Ruben Vardanyan; and the actions of geopolitical players such as France and Russia.

Armenia has accused Azerbaijan of violating international law and being disinterested in peace and stability in the region. However,

Azerbaijan has remained committed to negotiating a peaceful resolution to the conflict with Armenia for 25 years, despite Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territory, the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of people from Azerbaijan, and mass killings. Azerbaijan proposed signing a peace treaty with Armenia after its victory in the 44-day Patriotic War and the liberation of its territories from occupation. Armenia's claims that Azerbaijan is violating the Prague and Sochi agreements and obstructing the peace process are unfounded. In fact, it is Armenia that is obstructing the peace process by refusing to discuss and resolve issues on the basis of mutual recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity, continuing to make territorial claims against Azerbaijan, and hindering the meeting between the leaders in Brussels and refusing to participate in the Moscow meeting of foreign ministers. Armenia's accusations of ethnic cleansing against Azerbaijan and its interpretation of historical documents and maps as territorial claims against Armenia are hypocritical and ignore historical facts. More than 200,000 Azerbaijanis were expelled from their native lands in present-day Armenia in 1988-1991. During the nearly 30-year occupation of internationally recognized Azerbaijani territories, Armenia implemented a policy of ethnic cleansing against more than 700,000 Azerbaijanis, including the brutal murder of 613 people in Khojaly in one night. Armenia's calls for the restoration of traffic on the Lachin road are motivated by concerns that protests against illegal economic activity will disrupt the supply of Armenian armed forces still not withdrawn from the territory of Azerbaijan in violation of the paragraph 4 of the Trilateral Statement and halt its illegal exploitation of natural resources, as well as obstruct its military provocations such as transportation of

landmines through the Lachin road in violation of the paragraph 6 of the Statement.

### **III. Azerbaijan and the EU boost green energy cooperation**

On December 17, the “Agreement on a strategic partnership in the field of green energy development and transmission between the Governments of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Hungary” was signed between the governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary in Bucharest. The agreement aims to utilize the renewable energy production potential in the Caspian and Black Sea regions, with Azerbaijan as the main source, and to diversify energy supply. The agreement includes the construction of a 1,100 km (685 mile) cable with a capacity of 1,000 MW that will run from Azerbaijan to Romania. This is part of the European Union's efforts to diversify its energy sources and reduce its reliance on Russia, particularly in the midst of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. The cable will be a key component of the strategic partnership in green energy development and transmission that has been established between the governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary. According to Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto, the European Commission has allocated 2.3 billion euros (\$2.4 billion) to support the construction of the cable, which will be the longest of its kind in the world.

According to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the EU's strategy of moving away from Russian fossil fuels and seeking out reliable energy partners is showing progress. “This agreement will bring the European Union closer to our partners in the South Caucasus region, and it will help both our regions achieve the clean energy

transition. Since the beginning of Russia's war, we have decided to turn our back on Russian fossil fuels and to diversify towards reliable energy partners, like the partners here around the table. And it is working. The European Union has been able to compensate the cuts in Russian pipeline gas,” President von der Leyen underscored at the signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding for the development of the Black Sea Energy submarine cable. The EU Commission President also stated that the EU is prepared to provide financial support for the Black Sea energy cable project, which will run between Romania, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, pending the results of a feasibility study. “The project holds a lot of promises. Now it is up to us to deliver on security of energy supply and on decarbonising our economies. This is why I very much look forward to the results of the feasibility study that is currently ongoing. We will be ready to support. Because we now have the possibility to support financially projects of mutual interest with our neighbouring countries. And the mutual interest is very clear and evident. Today, we can say that the two shores of the Black Sea have never been closer,” von der Leyen noted. The feasibility study will be completed by the end of 2023. President von der Leyen emphasized the importance of the cable in increasing the integration of renewables into the EU's energy mix and strengthening electricity interconnections. “The renewables are not only good for our planet, but they are also home-grown, create good jobs at home, independence and security of energy supply. And I am very glad that our agreement puts so much emphasis on the renewable energies,” von der Leyen pointed out. She also noted that the cable could help transform Georgia into an electricity hub and integrate it into the EU's internal power market, as well as aid in the

country's reconstruction and rebuilding of Ukraine's energy system. "The Black Sea electric cable is a new transmission route full of opportunities. This project could bring Georgia, a country with a European destiny, great benefits as well. It could transform the country into an electricity hub and integrate it in the EU internal electricity market. Finally, the Black Sea electric cable could also help bring electricity to our neighbours in Moldova and the Western Balkans, and of course to Ukraine – it will help start rebuilding Ukraine's energy system and the reconstruction of the country," President von der Leyen noted.

Speaking at the signing ceremony of the agreement on a strategic partnership in the field of green energy development and transmission in Bucharest on December 17, President Ilham Aliyev noted that "Today, we start to build another energy bridge from Azerbaijan to Europe. Our country is planning to become an important supplier of electric energy to Europe, mainly green energy. Azerbaijan's renewable energy potential is more than 27 gigawatts of wind and solar power onshore and 157 gigawatts of wind power in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea. Together with one of our country's strategic investors, we plan to implement 3 gigawatts of wind and one gigawatts of solar power by 2027, 80 percent of which will be exported. By 2037, we plan to create an additional capacity of at least 6 gigawatts," adding that "thus, only one global energy company is planning to invest in the creation of 10 gigawatts of green energy in Azerbaijan. Two days ago, the Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan signed a framework agreement with another global energy company. This company is planning to invest in the creation of up to 12 gigawatts of wind and solar energy in Azerbaijan. So, at least 3 gigawatts of additional transmission capacity should be

created for the first phase of Azerbaijani export."

On December 17, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan also met with President Klaus Iohannis of Romania in Bucharest. The two leaders discussed the strategic partnership between their countries, highlighting the importance of high-level visits and meetings between the two countries, and expressing their satisfaction with the close cooperation between their respective authorities. They also talked about the recently signed Agreement on a strategic partnership in the field of green energy development and transmission between the Governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary, noting its significance for Europe's energy security and praising Azerbaijan's contribution to the effort to supply Europe with green energy. They also discussed the transportation of Azerbaijani gas to Romania, the successful operation of SOCAR in Romania, and the possibility of increasing transport and communication opportunities between the two countries and along the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania route. The leaders also touched upon Azerbaijan's relations with the European Union and the ongoing negotiations on a new agreement between the two. On December 16, SOCAR and Romgaz also signed a contract on gas supply from Azerbaijan to Romania starting from 1st January 2023.

Additionally, the European Union (EU) announced that it will allocate at least 2 billion euros to Azerbaijan over the next five years as part of its Economic and Investment Plan for the Eastern Partnership (EaP). A high-level working group has been established to identify priority projects, and its first meeting took place on December 7 in Baku.

Natural gas is a valuable resource for Europe's renewable energy efforts as it can quickly fill in

for any decreases in solar or wind power and rapidly respond to sudden increases in demand. As a result, the inclusion of natural gas in the European Commission's classification of clean energy sources, as part of the EU's Green New Deal, has become crucial. The export of Azerbaijani natural gas to European energy markets via the Trans Adriatic Pipeline, a part of the Southern Gas Corridor, has therefore become essential for Europe's energy security in terms of diversifying its supply sources and routes.

Over the past few years, the EU and Azerbaijan have engaged in intense negotiations to explore the possibility of increasing the export of Azerbaijani natural gas to Europe and cooperation in the realm of green energy. These discussions have resulted in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic Partnership in the Field of Energy between the two parties on July 18, 2022. This MoU sets the foundation for the growth in the volume of exported natural gas and green energy from Azerbaijan to Europe, including an increase of at least 20 billion cubic meters per year by 2027. The MoU also provides new opportunities for the development of green energy to support electricity exports between the region and Europe.

It's worth noting that green energy, which comes from renewable energy technologies and is environmentally friendly, is a key component of the European Commission's REPowerEU plan published on May 18, 2022. This plan, which aims to save energy, produce clean energy, and diversify the EU's energy supplies, proposes increasing the target for renewable energy in power generation, industry, buildings, and transportation to 45% by 2030. Supporting green energy initiatives in Azerbaijan will therefore enhance the mutual benefits of this partnership.

Azerbaijan seeks to support projects related to renewable energy in order to diversify its energy production. In recent years, the country has started to focus on sustainable development in the energy sector through the creation of green energy zones and the gradual process of transitioning to cleaner energy sources. The goal of increasing renewable energy production in Azerbaijan is to support a sustainable energy future by generating more electricity from sources that are not finite. This process will also involve decreasing the use of fossil fuels, such as natural gas, in electricity production and increasing exports of such resources to Europe. To further these efforts, Azerbaijan has signed two major renewable energy projects with companies based in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The 240 MW wind power plant to be built by ACWA Power and the 230 MW solar power plant to be built by Masdar will contribute to the country's sustainable energy future and potential for exporting green energy. These projects will play a significant role in increasing the share of renewable energy sources in Azerbaijan's energy system to 30% by 2030.

In the context of cooperation on energy issues between the EU and Azerbaijan, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan attended a plenary meeting on the signing of the Agreement on Strategic Partnership on Green Energy in Romania on December 17, 2022. The Bucharest plenary meeting, which also included the participation of the heads of state or government of Romania, Georgia, Hungary, and the European Commission, demonstrates strong cooperation between Azerbaijan and its partners.

The recently signed document outlines possibilities for exporting electricity from Azerbaijan to southeastern Europe via an underwater electric cable under the Black Sea

from Georgia. As previously stated, Azerbaijan is very interested in developing renewable energy sources and providing its electricity to European energy consumers. During the event, President Aliyev emphasized the country's intention to become a major supplier of electric energy, primarily green energy, to Europe. Azerbaijan has a renewable energy potential of over 27 gigawatts of onshore wind and solar power, as well as 157 gigawatts of wind power in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea. In partnership with one of the country's strategic investors, there are plans to implement 3 gigawatts of wind and 1 gigawatt of solar power by 2027, with the majority being earmarked for export. The target for 2037 is to create an additional capacity of at least 6 gigawatts. These endeavors demonstrate Azerbaijan's aim to not only export natural gas, but also green energy to the European energy market.

The Azerbaijan-Georgia strategic project of connecting the South Caucasus and Europe, specifically the green energy deal, is of great significance for Romania and Hungary. These countries, particularly Hungary, largely depend on fossil fuels for their electricity mix, so imports from Azerbaijan will enable them to diversify their electricity production by reducing their reliance on natural gas. This diversification of the European Union's energy sources is especially crucial given the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the resulting sanctions against Russia, which have forced the EU to seek alternative sources for its energy needs.

Central and Eastern European countries, including members of the Three Seas Initiative (a coalition of 12 EU states), have already taken steps to diversify their energy imports by constructing new liquified natural gas terminals in Croatia and Poland with the goal of importing American gas. They have also

advocated for improved energy relations with the South Caucasus.

Overall, the significance of energy resources in the relationship between Azerbaijan and the West has grown, with various energy projects elevating Azerbaijan's geopolitical standing. By supporting green energy, Azerbaijan can balance its use of natural gas and renewable sources in electricity production, increasing the country's potential for electricity production and export. The EU, meanwhile, is working to accelerate the transition to green energy in support of sustainable development and energy conservation, as well as diversifying its energy supplies. The Black Sea submarine electricity cable project demonstrates the importance of regional cooperation in implementing strategic projects. A final peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia would allow Armenia to participate in interregional projects, which would contribute to the country's economic development and prosperity.

#### **IV. 2022: A Year in Review**

In 2022, under the direction of President Ilham Aliyev, the Republic of Azerbaijan pursued a foreign policy that was independent, open, and practical, and that prioritized the country's national interests. In a time of heightened tensions and emerging challenges in the international system, Azerbaijan's foreign policy sought to protect the nation's interests, maintain its territorial integrity, and create a positive external environment for its security and economic growth, all in accordance with international law.

##### ***Bilateral relations***

During 2022, the Republic of Azerbaijan took steps to strengthen its relationships with other

countries. The country celebrated the 30th anniversary of its diplomatic relations with many states, and organized events in Azerbaijan and those countries to mark the occasion. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs held exhibitions featuring photos and documents related to the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations with 19 countries, and the 25th anniversary with one country. In total, the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations was celebrated with 69 countries, and the 25th anniversary with two countries. As in previous years, Azerbaijan's relationships with its neighbors were a priority.

The country enjoyed strong, allied relations with Türkiye, which were further solidified by the ratification of the Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations, signed by the presidents of both countries in 2021, and which became law in February of 2022. Other notable events in the Azerbaijan-Türkiye relationship during the year included the participation of President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in various events in Azerbaijan, such as the "Teknofest Azerbaijan" festival and the opening of the Zangilan International Airport, and the working visit of President Ilham Aliyev to Ankara and his participation in the opening of the Rize-Artvin Airport and the Islamic Solidarity Games in Konya. The two countries also held the 10th meeting of their joint intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation in Baku on November 4, 2022.

Azerbaijan and Russia continued to cooperate in 2022. On February 22 of that year, the two countries signed the "Declaration on Allied Interaction." President Ilham Aliyev made official and working visits to Russia in February, October, and December of 2022, and a delegation led by Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin visited Azerbaijan in November. In April, the 20th meeting of the

intergovernmental State Commission on economic cooperation between the two countries took place in Baku, and there were also visits by the foreign ministers of both nations.

Azerbaijan has maintained a strong relationship with Georgia based on friendship and cooperation. There were high-level visits between the two countries and ongoing cooperation between their respective government agencies. In October 2022, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan made a working visit to Georgia, and in December, the 9th meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission on economic cooperation between the two countries was held in Tbilisi.

Azerbaijan also made efforts to develop its relationship with Iran on a mutual basis. In October 2022, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan met with President Sayyid Ebrahim Raisi of Iran at the VI Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia in Astana. In March of that year, the 15th meeting of the State Commission on cooperation between Azerbaijan and Iran in economic, trade, and humanitarian fields took place in Baku, and in July, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan made an official visit to Iran.

Azerbaijan had a very active and productive relationship with the friendly, fraternal countries of Central Asia in 2022. There were presidential visits between Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan, and intergovernmental commissions met with each of those countries. In 2022, the Presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan visited Azerbaijan, and the President of Azerbaijan visited Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In February of 2022, the 5th meeting of the Joint

Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation between Azerbaijan and Tajikistan took place in Dushanbe.

Azerbaijan also focused on its relationships with the United States, China, and European countries, particularly in South Eastern Europe where mutual interests were emphasized. President İlham Aliyev made visits to Italy, Bulgaria, Albania, and Serbia, and the leaders of Albania, Bulgaria, and Serbia visited Azerbaijan.

In 2022, Azerbaijan maintained cooperation with countries in Central, North and South America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia based on mutual interests in political, economic, and humanitarian fields. This included working visits and political consultations.

In 2022, Azerbaijan continued efforts to open new diplomatic missions. Orders were issued to establish the country's Embassy in Israel (Tel Aviv) and Albania, the Representative Office in Palestine (Ramallah), the Embassy in Kenya, and the Permanent Mission to the UN Nairobi Office. Azerbaijan also appointed an ambassador to its Embassy in the Holy See, which was established in 2021, as well as to its Embassies in Cuba (established in 2020) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (established in 2021). As of 2022, Azerbaijan had a total of 89 diplomatic missions abroad (66 embassies, 6 permanent missions, 9 consulates general, and 8 embassy and representative offices). During the year, Azerbaijan signed legal documents on a multilateral and bilateral basis with a number of countries, including 1 document with Iran and Russia, 6 documents with Türkiye and Turkmenistan, and 1 document with Georgia, Romania, and Hungary. In total, the country signed 150 documents with 27 countries.

### ***Multilateral cooperation***

2022 marked the 30th anniversary of Azerbaijan's admission to the United Nations. As in previous years, the country worked to achieve the goals of the UN Charter, which include international peace, security, and development. In March, an international conference on the 30th anniversary of the UN-Azerbaijan partnership was held in Shusha, and the UN flag was raised in the city for the first time. The conference, which was attended by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and the Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan, as well as UN officials, including the UN Resident Coordinator in Azerbaijan, focused on issues related to the post-conflict period, the restoration of liberated territories, and the partnership between Azerbaijan and the UN in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. During the year, Azerbaijan also hosted visits from the chairman of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, the UN Deputy Secretary General, the Director General of the UN Office in Geneva, the executive director of the UN Human Settlements Program, and other UN officials. Azerbaijan also presented a resolution titled "Missing Persons" at the 77th session of the UN General Assembly, and its draft resolution on the "Release of Women and Children Taken Hostage in Armed Conflicts, including those subsequently imprisoned" was again adopted by consensus at the 66th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. In April of 2022, the UN Human Rights Council unanimously adopted the resolution "Ensuring equal, affordable, timely, and universal access to vaccines against COVID-19," which was initiated by Azerbaijan and Ecuador.

In 2022, Azerbaijan successfully continued its chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement

(NAM). On May 26 of that year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Center for the Analysis of International Relations jointly organized a conference on "African heritage in the evolution of the Non-Aligned Movement" to highlight the special attention being paid by Azerbaijan's chairmanship to the African continent and to strengthen the Movement's cooperation with the African Union. The Baku Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement Parliamentary Network (NAM) was held on June 30-July 1, and the Youth Summit of the National Assembly took place on July 25-29. These events, hosted by Azerbaijan, resulted in the adoption of documents regulating the activities of the Youth Organization of the Non-Aligned Movement Parliamentary Network and the Non-Aligned Movement for the first time in history, as well as the adoption of logos and flags for these institutions, which marked important steps towards the institutionalization of the Non-Aligned Movement. During the Baku Conference of the NAM Parliamentary Network, the Speaker of the Milli Majlis, Sahiba Gafarova, was elected Chair of the NAM Parliamentary Network. The final document of the Youth Summit of the NAM, known as the Shusha Accord (Shusha agreement), was adopted at the Shusha segment of the event. On October 22, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Culture, the State Tourism Agency, and the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Azerbaijan organized an International Charity Fair in Baku in connection with the 30th anniversary of Azerbaijan-UN cooperation, which was also celebrated as the UN Day on October 24 and the third anniversary of Azerbaijan's chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement on October 26.

During the year, Azerbaijan placed a special emphasis on cooperation within the

framework of the Organization of Turkic States. The country actively participated in the work of the organization and proposed a number of initiatives. The 9th Summit of the Organization was held in Samarkand on November 11, 2022, and was attended by the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev. The Samarkand Declaration, which was adopted at the summit, among other things, expressed support for the normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia based on mutual recognition and support of each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of internationally recognized borders. The declaration also reaffirmed the readiness to contribute to Azerbaijan's post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reintegration efforts and expressed support for efforts to open the Zangezur corridor. On March 31, 2022, at an extraordinary meeting of the Permanent Council of Ministers of Culture of TURKSOY in Bursa, Türkiye, Shusha was declared the 2023 Cultural Capital of the Turkic World. On May 13-14, 2022, at the 8th Meeting of the UNESCO National Commissions of TURKSOY member countries, which was held in Bursa, it was decided to hold the 9th meeting in Shusha in 2023. At the IX Summit of the Organization of Turkic States in Samarkand on November 11, 2022, academician Shahin Mustafayev was elected President of the International Turkic Academy headquartered in Kazakhstan.

In 2022, Azerbaijan continued to cooperate with the European Union based on equal rights and mutual interests. The two sides held negotiations on the draft of a new bilateral agreement that would form the legal basis for future cooperation. On July 19, the 18th meeting of the Cooperation Council between the European Union and Azerbaijan was held in Brussels and attended by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. On October 6, the President of

Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, participated in the European Political Union Summit of the European Union in Prague and delivered a statement. On December 12, 2022, the Minister of Foreign Affairs participated in a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Eastern Partnership countries of the European Union as part of a working visit to Brussels. The meeting discussed the current situation and future directions of the Eastern Partnership, regional security, and the prospects of relations between the European Union and partner countries.

In 2022, Azerbaijan continued to cooperate with various international organizations, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Council of Europe (CoE), Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and League of Arab States (LAS). From January to April 2022, Azerbaijan also served as the chair of the OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation (FSC) in the field of trust-building and security in the military-political sphere, including issues of arms control and disarmament. During its chairmanship, Azerbaijan promoted dialogue and understanding within the OSCE on a range of topics, including mine action, post-conflict restoration work, and the role of non-European countries in security architecture.

In 2022, the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) continued their cooperation and strengthened their partnership. In March of 2022, the 48th session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers was held in Pakistan, during which four resolutions related to the consequences of the

Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan were adopted. These resolutions covered political, economic, and cultural issues, including the elimination of the consequences of the aggression, economic assistance to Azerbaijan, the destruction of historical and cultural monuments in Azerbaijan as a result of the aggression, and solidarity with the victims of the Khojaly massacre. In May, an agreement was signed between the government of Azerbaijan and the Islamic World Education, Science, and Culture Organization (ICESCO) to establish a regional office of ICESCO in Baku. In December, an action plan for deepening cooperation between Azerbaijan and ICESCO was signed.

In 2022, the partnership between Azerbaijan and NATO remained strategically significant and high-level dialogue and cooperation between the two continued. On February 15, 2022, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan had a phone conversation with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. On July 19, 2022, Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov met with Mr. Stoltenberg at NATO headquarters. Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia Javier Colomina visited Azerbaijan on April 28-29, 2022. During the year, Azerbaijan and NATO worked together to increase national capabilities and defense reforms in the context of international peace and security, and new partnership goals in this area were agreed upon.

In September 15-16, President Aliyev attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit in Samarkand as an honorary guest at the invitation of the President of Uzbekistan, marking an important development in Azerbaijan's cooperation with the SCO and further demonstrating the international community's recognition of Azerbaijan's growing role as a reliable partner in

maintaining international peace, security, and development. Additionally, on November 1, 2022, President Aliyev, as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, attended the 31st Arab League Summit in Algeria as an honorary guest.

In 2022, efforts were continued to support the candidacies of Azerbaijan for elective positions in international organizations. Azerbaijan was successful in a number of elections. It was decided that Azerbaijan will chair the Economic Cooperation Organization and the UN Special Program for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) for 2023 (for a period of 1 year). As a result of these successful campaigns, Azerbaijani citizens were elected to various leading international organizations, including the UN Human Rights Committee for 2023-2026, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) for 2023-2026, the OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) for 2022-2025, and the International Telecommunication Union Radio Regulations Board for 2023-2026. In addition, Azerbaijan was elected as a member of the International Telecommunication Union Council for 2023-2026 and Deputy Chairman of the UNESCO Committee on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Time of Armed Conflict.

### ***Connectivity, energy, and transportation***

For many years, Azerbaijan has initiated and taken practical steps to develop regional and global economic, energy, and transportation connections. This year, Azerbaijan further strengthened its role in ensuring international energy security and transit transportation. On July 18, a Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Partnership in the field of energy between the European Union and Azerbaijan was signed in Baku. The MoU expands the traditional energy partnership and includes

potential cooperation on green and renewable energy. The MoU, which aims to increase the capacity of the Southern Gas Corridor to 20 billion cubic meters by 2027, is an important step in diversifying the energy supply for the Western Balkans region. On October 1, the opening ceremony for the Greece-Bulgaria Gas Interconnector was held in Sofia, Bulgaria, and President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan attended the event. On December 16, the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) and Romgaz S.A. signed an agreement to supply gas from Azerbaijan to Romania. The agreement plans to transport natural gas to Romania through the Greece-Bulgaria Gas Interconnector starting in January 2023.

On December 17, a strategic partnership agreement was signed between the governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary in Bucharest. This partnership aims to utilize the potential for renewable energy production in the Caspian and Black Sea regions, with Azerbaijan as the main source, and to diversify the energy supply. Additionally, the European Union has announced that it will allocate at least 2 billion euros to Azerbaijan over the next five years as part of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Eastern Partnership. A working group has been established to identify priority projects, and its first meeting was held on December 7 in Baku.

Azerbaijan has also been working to strengthen its transit and transport capabilities through the development of international transport corridors, regional transport projects, and relevant agreements. On March 10-11, 2022, Azerbaijan and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding to create new communication links between the East Zangezur region of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, passing

through Iranian territory. On September 9, 2022, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Iran held their first trilateral meeting at the deputy prime minister level to discuss the development of the North-South International Transport Corridor and increasing its sustainability and competitiveness. The Baku Declaration signed at this meeting also emphasized the importance of opening and developing all economic and transport links in the region, including those connecting western Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

In addition to these efforts, Azerbaijan has also been using trilateral cooperation formats, such as Azerbaijan-Türkiye-Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan-Türkiye-Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan-Türkiye-Uzbekistan, as a new diplomatic practice. In 2022, the heads of state of Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Turkey held a trilateral summit on December 14 in the Awaza National Tourism Zone in Turkmenistan. Trilateral meetings between the ministers of foreign affairs and transport of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Türkiye were held on June 27 in Baku and November 25 in Aktau (with Georgia also participating), and a meeting between the ministers responsible for foreign affairs, economy, and transport of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Türkiye took place on August 2 in Tashkent.

On December 14, at the summit of the heads of state of Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Turkmenistan in Awaza, various documents were adopted in fields such as energy, trade, customs, transport, education, and culture. The leaders also discussed ways to strengthen the East-West Trans-Caspian transport corridor. In 2022, Azerbaijan also continued its efforts in the humanitarian field. The international community was informed about the global campaign "Peace for Culture," which was proposed by Azerbaijan with the

support of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and the Islamic World Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), and an agreement was signed with the Alliance on the implementation of the action plan for the "Peace for Culture" initiative for the period 2022-2027. At the 215th session of the UNESCO Executive Board, held from October 5-19, Azerbaijan's draft decision "Baku process: promoting intercultural dialogue and social inclusion for sustainable peace and development" was unanimously adopted.

Over the course of the year, Azerbaijan provided humanitarian aid and development support at the international level. The most recent admission period for educational grant programs covering a five-year academic span (2018-2022) for citizens of member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement has concluded successfully, with 40 students from 36 countries receiving full scholarships to study in Azerbaijan's higher education institutions. As a result, the total number of students from 90 different countries who have received full scholarships through these programs has reached 200 over the past five years. This year, aid was also provided to schools and special education centers in Iraq, Brazil, Ethiopia, and Uganda, and humanitarian aid was given to South Sudan, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Suriname, Pakistan, and Ukraine.

### ***Aid to Ukraine***

Humanitarian aid, including medication, medical supplies, medical equipment, food, and baby care products, has been sent to Ukraine since February 27th. This aid has been supplemented with power transformers and generators, the first batch of which arrived in Ukraine in December (totaling 1 million 422 thousand manats or more than 830 thousand

USD). Overall, Azerbaijan has provided Ukraine with around 30 million manats (17.5 million dollars) in humanitarian aid, weighing approximately 1000 tons. In addition, about 90 Ukrainian children who were affected by the war and lost their family members have been brought to Azerbaijan for medical and psychological rehabilitation.

Azerbaijan also provided financial support to global organizations such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Population Fund, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The "Fight against avoidable blindness" campaign, which is being implemented in African countries with the support of the Islamic Development Bank and other partners, was continued this year with the financial support of the Azerbaijan International Development Agency.

## **V. Azerbaijan's post-conflict diplomacy in 2022**

A priority for Azerbaijan in 2022 was the promotion of its interests within the context of the new realities emerging in the region, while also ensuring the country's territorial integrity and adherence to international law. As a result of the end of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which was declared by the leaders of both countries and Russia on November 10, 2020, one of the main goals of Azerbaijan's foreign policy was to establish relations with Armenia based on mutual recognition, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and state borders. Throughout the year, Azerbaijan's consistent efforts to advance the peace agenda were recognized by

the international community. As part of this, Azerbaijan engaged in direct bilateral negotiations with Armenia, with the support of international mediators and partners, based on the agenda promoted by Azerbaijan.

The normalization agenda between Armenia and Azerbaijan has three main components: the creation of a peace treaty to establish the foundations of bilateral relations, the delimitation of the state border, and the restoration of transport and communication links. In this regard, significant progress was made in 2022, including Azerbaijan's proposal to sign a peace treaty and the submission of basic principles for such a treaty to Armenia in February, a meeting between the delegations of both countries in Geneva on October 2nd that marked the start of practical negotiations on the peace treaty, the establishment of border delimitation commissions in both countries, and meetings between these commissions on a bilateral basis. In addition, the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia met on a number of occasions throughout the year, with the participation of various international leaders, including the President of the European Council and the President of France.

The leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia held a total of seven meetings throughout the year. These meetings took place on April 6th, May 22nd, and August 31st in Brussels with the participation of the President of the European Council, Charles Michel. They also met on February 4th in a virtual format, on October 6th in Prague with the participation of Charles Michel and the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, and on October 31st with the participation of the President of the Russian Federation in Sochi.

Throughout the year, the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia held three meetings: on July 16th in Tbilisi, on October 2nd in

Geneva, and on November 7th in Washington. Additionally, the Foreign Ministers of both countries had two direct phone conversations on April 11th and 23rd, and with the participation of the US Secretary of State on October 4th. There were also two meetings involving the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia: on May 12th in Dushanbe and on October 14th in Astana. Finally, the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia met with the US Secretary of State on September 19th in New York and on November 7th in Washington.

At the Brussels meeting on August 31, the leaders agreed to draft a peace treaty in order to progress the peace agenda and address border delimitation issues. In accordance with this agreement, Azerbaijan submitted the elements of a peace treaty to the other side on October 2, 2022. Two meetings (one in Geneva and one in Washington) were held to discuss this matter. The third meeting, scheduled to take place in Moscow on December 23, was cancelled as the Armenian side was not present.

During 2022, commissions on border delimitation and demarcation were established in both countries, which held three meetings: on the provisional border between the two states on May 24, another in Moscow on August 30, and a third one in Brussels on November 3.

Trilateral Working Group on opening of regional communications held its 10th and 11th meetings in Moscow on June 3 and on December 6, respectively.

The main topic of significance was the reaffirmation of the commitment made by the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia during their meetings on October 6th in Prague and October 31st in Sochi to recognize each other's

sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to peacefully resolve all disputes. This forms the basis for normalizing relations between the two countries, as stated in the basic principles proposed by Azerbaijan. Armenia's acceptance of this commitment was a significant achievement in the progress towards a post-conflict resolution this year.

As agreed upon in the Trilateral Statement, Azerbaijan has completed construction of the new Lachin road ahead of schedule. As a result, the city of Lachin and the villages of Zabukh and Sus in the Lachin district were liberated, and rebuilding of the village of Aghali in Zangilan was completed. In addition, throughout the year, measures have been taken to prevent illegal economic activities in the territories of Azerbaijan where Russian peacekeeping forces are temporarily stationed. The government of Azerbaijan has engaged in dialogue with the Russian peacekeeping contingent to address the illegal exploitation of natural resources in these territories, which has negative environmental consequences. On December 3rd and 7th, Azerbaijani authorities met with the command of the Russian peacekeeping force to establish protocols for monitoring and evaluating the environmental impact of the illegal exploitation of the Gizilbulag and Demirli reserves.

An agreement had been made, and a delegation of Azerbaijani specialists was organized by the peacekeepers to visit. However, a group of people intentionally disrupted the visit, which prompted a legitimate protest from the Azerbaijani society. In response, a group of civil society representatives organized a peaceful demonstration on the Lachin road to protest against the illegal exploitation of Azerbaijan's natural resources, the transportation of these

resources from Azerbaijan to Armenia, and the misuse of the Lachin road, which was supposed to be used only for humanitarian purposes. In an effort to prevent unfounded and biased accusations against Azerbaijan, diplomatic efforts were pursued.

Despite ongoing efforts within the relevant working group to restore transport links in the region and ensure smooth travel between mainland Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, as outlined in the Trilateral Statement of November 10, 2020, progress in this area has been hindered by the non-constructive position of the Armenian side.

The efforts to normalize relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the post-conflict period have been partially successful, but progress has not met expectations. This can largely be attributed to Armenia's lack of political will to take substantive steps towards normalization, as well as its contradictory and inconsistent stance, attempts to avoid implementing agreements and fulfilling obligations, and provocative actions that undermine normalization efforts. Additionally, the proposals for a peace agreement have tended to prolong the process rather than facilitate progress.

Efforts to raise awareness and address the realities that arose after the Patriotic War have been conducted through various bilateral, regional, and multilateral channels, including the UN, Non-Aligned Movement, OSCE, Council of Europe, European Union, NATO, GUAM, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Organization of Turkic States, and Economic Cooperation Organization. These efforts have focused on creating the necessary conditions for lasting peace, post-conflict restoration and reconstruction, and the return of IDPs in the region. Azerbaijan's Minister of Foreign Affairs

has provided detailed information on post-conflict realities and the steps taken towards sustainable peace in approximately 60 meetings during his 2022 visits and international events, as well as in meetings with foreign colleagues and officials during their visits to Azerbaijan. Foreign officials, parliamentarians, representatives of think-tanks, and journalists have visited the liberated territories, and evaluation missions by international organizations have been conducted. Foreign countries have also contributed to the restoration and reconstruction of these areas through specific projects.

During the year, work continued to expose the crimes committed by Armenia in the territories it occupied for 30 years. These crimes included the deliberate large-scale destruction of civilian infrastructure (urbicide), the destruction, falsification, and looting of cultural heritage (culturicide), the damaging of the environment and biodiversity (ecocide), and war crimes against the civilian population of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis taken as hostages and prisoners of war. Efforts were also made to determine the international legal responsibility of Armenia for these acts, clarify the fate of missing persons as a result of military aggression, and involve international experts in exhumation and identification work in mass graves.

In December, Azerbaijan submitted a new interstate complaint against Armenia to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the European Court of Human Rights, regarding the intentional and purposeful destruction of property, including hundreds of civilian houses and other residential areas, during Armenia's withdrawal from the city of Lachin and two neighboring villages in May-August 2022. Azerbaijan is seeking compensation,

reparation, restitutio in integrum, and other relief for the damage suffered due to gross human rights violations.

A detailed document containing all the facts related to the 30-year period of military occupation by Armenia has been finalized and will be submitted to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at the end of January 2023 as part of the legal responsibility measures against Armenia. On October 12, 2022, the ICJ rejected a petition filed by Armenia on September 16, 2022 regarding new temporary measures against Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is planning to take new legal responsibility measures against Armenia for damage to the environment and illegal exploitation of energy and natural resources at the beginning of 2023.

Azerbaijan has prioritized raising international awareness about the threat posed by landmines to peace and security, the violation of human rights and obstruction to socio-economic development caused by them, as well as the large-scale humanitarian demining operations being conducted to eliminate the landmine threat faced by the country. After the war, the number of landmine victims in Azerbaijan reached 276, of which 46 died. According to Azerbaijan's Mine Action Agency, over the past year, a total of 8,780 anti-

personnel mines, 4,133 anti-tank mines, and 14,000 unexploded ordnances have been detected and neutralized as a result of mine-clearing operations in the liberated territories. The agency also stated that engineer-sapper units have cleared more than 41,915 hectares of the area in the liberated territories of mines and unexploded ordnances.

Additionally, Azerbaijan has brought the challenges arising from the transportation of landmines produced in Armenia in 2021 to, and their planting in Azerbaijan, to the attention of the international community. Azerbaijan has also highlighted the legal and political responsibility of Armenia for the landmine problem faced by the country and sought international aid for humanitarian demining operations.

Azerbaijan has been active diplomatically in corresponding formats, including the "Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction." During the year, Azerbaijan also held a dialogue with international organizations, including the UN, European Union, NATO, and a number of countries, on cooperation to eliminate the landmine problem in the country.