

BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

Table of contents

- I. **Azerbaijan marks 100th anniversary of birth of National Leader Heydar Aliyev**
2
- II. **Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia engage in peace talks in Washington**
5
- III. **The 5th trilateral meeting of President Ilham Aliyev, President Charles Michel, and Prime Minister Pashinyan in Brussels**
6
- IV. **The trilateral meeting of President Ilham Aliyev, President Vladimir Putin, and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Moscow**
9
- V. **President Ilham Aliyev visits Lachin on the Independence Day of the Republic of Azerbaijan**
10
- VI. **Azerbaijan and Lithuania look to enhance bilateral relations**
16
- VII. **Azerbaijan and Israel continue to strengthen bilateral ties**
19
- VIII. **Baku Energy Week: Connecting leaders in energy and green technology**
22

I. Azerbaijan marks 100th anniversary of birth of National Leader Heydar Aliyev

On May 10, Azerbaijan commemorates the centennial birth anniversary of Heydar Aliyev, the architect and founder of modern independent Azerbaijan, and the national leader of the Azerbaijani people. Foreign policy, rooted in national interests, stands as a vital method to ensure the security, growth, and prosperity of a nation. Azerbaijan's remarkable recovery from a crisis-ridden period can be largely attributed to the leadership of Heydar Aliyev, who, upon his return to power in 1993, employed a strategic foreign policy approach. Despite daunting challenges, including a war waged by Armenia, geopolitical complexities, and internal issues, Heydar Aliyev's foreign policy, characterized by pragmatism and a long-term strategic vision, propelled Azerbaijan to become a respected member of the international community. Heydar Aliyev's resurgence as Azerbaijan's leader in the summer of 1993 marked a turning point for the nation's foreign policy. Recognizing the importance of aligning foreign policy with national interests, Heydar Aliyev adopted a thoughtful approach to navigate through multifaceted challenges. By prioritizing the nation's interests above all else, Heydar Aliyev laid the foundation for Azerbaijan's recovery and growth on the global stage. Heydar Aliyev's foreign policy demonstrated resilience, tact, and pragmatism, allowing Azerbaijan to effectively combat numerous adversities. One of the remarkable qualities of Heydar Aliyev's foreign policy was its deliberate avoidance of adventurism and political risk-taking. Rather than engaging in impulsive actions, Heydar Aliyev's approach emphasized pragmatism and wisdom. This measured approach ensured that

Azerbaijan's national interests were protected, promoting stability and long-term growth. By prioritizing strategic decisions over short-term gains, Heydar Aliyev cemented Azerbaijan's status as a reliable and respected player in international affairs. Through skilled diplomacy, Heydar Aliyev successfully showcased Azerbaijan's potential and secured vital partnerships and alliances.

The main objectives of Heydar Aliyev's foreign policy revolved around safeguarding and strengthening Azerbaijan's independence, neutralizing various threats, promoting the state's interests, and bolstering its position in the international arena through integration. Additionally, ensuring territorial integrity and eliminating Armenian aggression were prioritized, especially during the challenging and complex period in which Heydar Aliyev assumed power. Notably, Heydar Aliyev's foreign policy gained even greater realism through strategic diplomacy. Diplomacy, as one of the primary tools for implementing foreign policy, played a crucial role in protecting the nation's interests within the international system. Statistical data on official visits, meetings, and signed agreements serve as compelling evidence of his diplomatic engagements. For instance, during his first term in office from 1993 to 1998, Heydar Aliyev visited 33 countries a remarkable 79 times, participated in 232 events, and signed 431 documents. Heydar Aliyev's foreign policy encompassed several key goals. First and foremost, he sought to establish friendly relations with all nations, with a particular emphasis on regional power centers. One of the standout features of Heydar Aliyev's diplomatic approach was forging successful partnerships with numerous power centers. This multi-vector approach to foreign policy aimed to mitigate risks associated with

aligning with one particular regional power. This strategy enabled Azerbaijan to maintain relations with many power actors on the global stage without becoming overly dependent on a single power center. By actively engaging in international integration processes, he aimed to enhance Azerbaijan's standing on both global and regional fronts.

Heydar Aliyev successfully implemented a multi-vector foreign policy in the South Caucasus, which had a stabilizing and advantageous impact on Azerbaijan and the entire region's political and security environment. The essence of a multi-vector foreign policy was reflected in Heydar Aliyev's presidency from 1993 to 2003, as Azerbaijan developed relations with all major global power centers, neighboring and non-neighboring states, based on mutual benefits. Heydar Aliyev placed particular emphasis on cultivating strong ties with Türkiye, a brotherly nation with shared ethnic heritage, history, and spiritual kinship. In 1994, Heydar Aliyev made his first official visit to Türkiye, signing agreements across various sectors, including the "Agreement on the Development of Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation." Under Heydar Aliyev's leadership, the strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Türkiye significantly strengthened, progressing from rhetoric to practical collaboration. Heydar Aliyev's political and diplomatic legacy played a vital role in advancing this partnership, ultimately leading to the current level of an official alliance between Azerbaijan and Türkiye.

During the early years of Azerbaijan's independence, Heydar Aliyev paid special attention to relations with Russia, even in the face of major tensions and contradictions. Heydar Aliyev's approach to Russia was guided

by a nuanced understanding of the prevailing geopolitical landscape, the pursuit of mutual interest reconciliation, the preservation of independence, the protection of crucial national interests, and the establishment of Azerbaijan as an equal partner. Throughout his presidency, Heydar Aliyev frequently engaged in working and official visits to Russia, with his most significant visit occurring in July 1997. During this visit, the two countries signed a pivotal agreement titled "On Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Security." This agreement played a key role in shaping the trajectory of Azerbaijan-Russia relations. Another noteworthy event was the official visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Azerbaijan in January 2001, which also had a significant impact on bilateral ties. Heydar Aliyev's strategic approach to relations with Russia demonstrated his astute diplomatic skills and his commitment to safeguarding Azerbaijan's interests while pursuing avenues for cooperation. Despite the complexities and challenges surrounding the relationship, Heydar Aliyev recognized the importance of engaging with Russia and worked diligently to foster a productive and balanced partnership. His efforts were instrumental in improving bilateral relations and creating a foundation for mutually beneficial cooperation between Azerbaijan and Russia.

One of the key pillars of Heydar Aliyev's foreign policy was the Western vector, which encompassed his efforts to strengthen relations with prominent Western nations while considering both our national interests and regional geopolitical dynamics. As a perceptive political figure, Heydar Aliyev recognized the significance of the West's geopolitical and geo-economic interests in the South Caucasus. He understood that engaging with the West was crucial for reinforcing our

independence and mitigating the potential negative impacts of regional power centers. Several significant geostrategic initiatives implemented between 1994 and 2003 played a vital role in bringing our country closer to the Euro-Atlantic region and increasing the geopolitical appeal of the South Caucasus for the West. Notable examples include the "Contract of the Century," the "Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline," and the promotion of the "Great Silk Road" concept. These initiatives bolstered Azerbaijan's position and fostered closer ties with Western countries. Among the crucial aspects of Heydar Aliyev's multi-vector foreign policy, relations with the United States held immense importance. As the foremost political, economic, and military force in the world, the United States represented a significant partner for Azerbaijan. Heydar Aliyev identified three key areas of focus for Azerbaijani-US relations: political-diplomatic, economic-energy, and security cooperation. These areas of development paved the way for the elevation of bilateral relations to the level of a strategic partnership. During his first official visit to the US in August 1997, President Heydar Aliyev signed a Joint Statement titled "On American-Azerbaijani Relations." This declaration explicitly recognized the Republic of Azerbaijan as a strategic partner of the United States, underscoring the importance of their alliance. Furthermore, this visit saw the signing of several significant agreements, outlining future cooperation in various fields and further strengthening the bond between the two countries.

Another major objective of President Heydar Aliyev's foreign policy was to strengthen relations with European countries. In particular, his efforts to engage with France, the UK, and Germany yielded significant progress and marked a new phase in these

relationships. Notably, Heydar Aliyev's first official visit to France took place in December 1993, shortly after assuming the presidency. During this visit, he signed the Paris Charter and the "Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Understanding" with France. Azerbaijan's signing of the Paris Charter marked a crucial step towards joining the European Common Security System. In February 1994, Heydar Aliyev made official visits to Germany and Great Britain, forging important agreements and contracts that formed the foundation of bilateral relations with these European nations. Throughout the mid-1990s, President Heydar Aliyev also undertook various trips to other European countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, Belgium, Poland, Norway, and the Netherlands, further solidifying Azerbaijan's connections in the region.

The Asian direction was equally significant in Heydar Aliyev's foreign policy strategy. Azerbaijan's Asian vector encompassed relations with countries in the region, including Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, India, Israel, as well as political and economic powers like China and Japan. Heydar Aliyev actively promoted political, economic, and cultural ties with these Asian states, demonstrating his commitment through official and working visits. Heydar Aliyev's comprehensive multi-vector foreign policy strategy played a pivotal role in safeguarding the national interests and security of our young and independent state within the international system. By establishing the Azerbaijani model of a balanced and multi-vector foreign policy, Heydar Aliyev laid the groundwork for the successful implementation of foreign policy for years to come. It is worth emphasizing that Heydar Aliyev's profound political and diplomatic legacy played a

significant role in our historic victory in the 44-Day War and in securing a deserving position within the complex global order.

Heydar Aliyev's legacy in foreign policy and diplomacy remains a testament to the efficacy of a well-thought-out and pragmatic approach. By considering the country's interests, strategic alliances, and global dynamics, he navigated Azerbaijan through a transformative period, securing its position on the international stage and advancing its core objectives. The diplomatic expertise demonstrated by Heydar Aliyev not only solidified Azerbaijan's place in the world but also serves as a valuable example for future leaders to emulate when shaping their own foreign policies.

II. Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia engage in peace talks in Washington

The foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Jeyhun Bayramov and Ararat Mirzoyan, engaged in a four-day peace negotiation from May 1 to 4. These talks were facilitated by United States Secretary of State Anthony Blinken in Washington, with Blinken personally attending the opening and closing sessions while the rest of the discussions were conducted bilaterally between the two countries' delegations. During the negotiations, Mirzoyan and Bayramov also met with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan. This round of talks, which lasted the longest since the 44-Day War in 2020, marked the third ministerial meeting mediated by the United States between Armenia and Azerbaijan since September 2022. Previous meetings took place on September 19 and November 8 of last year in New York and

Washington, DC, respectively. Additionally, in the same period, the United States facilitated a meeting between Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan, Head of Foreign Policy Affairs Department of the Presidential Administration Hikmat Hajiyev and Armenian Security Council Secretary Armen Grigoryan in Washington on September 27, 2022, and another meeting between President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in Germany on February 18.

This indicates an important trend in the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. While the European Union took over the lead mediation role after Russia's involvement declined due to its invasion of Ukraine, Brussels has struggled to continue the process due to various issues, including controversies surrounding France's attempt to join the summit of the two leaders along with European Council President Charles Michel. Similar to the failed summit in December 2022, Brussels also could not bring President Ilham Aliyev and Pashinyan together in March of this year, despite preliminary agreements made during the US-mediated meeting in Munich.

Therefore, the recent meeting of the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers in Washington demonstrates an increased role of the United States as a mediator in the peace process between Yerevan and Baku. The meeting took place amidst stalled communication between the two sides, stemming from disagreements over the contents of the peace treaty and Azerbaijan's establishment of a border checkpoint along the Lachin road on April 23. Several days before the ministerial meeting, Pashinyan stated that Armenia fully recognizes Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Pashinyan

acknowledged that his country needs to unequivocally declare that it has no territorial claims against Azerbaijan, emphasizing that this principle is essential for Armenia's statehood. At the same time, Azerbaijan expressed pessimism about the current state of negotiations, highlighting Yerevan's attempts to question Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and incorporate Karabakh into a peace agreement.

On May 3, speaking at the 4th international conference on "Shaping the Geopolitics of the Greater Eurasia: From Past to Present to Future," organized by ADA University to mark the 100th anniversary of National Leader Heydar Aliyev in Shusha, President Ilham Aliyev noted that he was less optimistic about the signing of the peace agreement because of Armenia's attitude towards the issue. Pointing out that Yerevan responded to Baku's latest comments about the peace treaty text only after more than 40 days, just prior to the ministerial meeting in Washington, President Ilham Aliyev noted that "I am less optimistic because of those comments which we received. As I said several days ago, after waiting for more than 40 days, where we saw that almost 95% of the comments were the same as the previous one. So again, attempts to put under question the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, again attempts to incorporate, in some way, the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh into a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, again attempts to cross out our proposal of combating jointly against terrorism, extremism, radicalism and separatism. Armenians kept everything but crossed out separatism. So, that means they will again trigger separatism in Azerbaijan. That reduced our optimism, but again we will see because this session of negotiations is different from the previous one. They were

ongoing for the last couple of days and may last for a couple of days more. And our idea was that they should come up with some result. If not, it will be a big disappointment."

Despite the positive signals that were interpreted as Armenia's willingness to reach an agreement in Washington, the ministerial meeting concluded without any official document, joint press statement, or visible agreements on specific issues. During the closing session, Blinken mentioned that the two sides had engaged in discussions on challenging matters and had made tangible progress towards a durable peace agreement. He expressed optimism, stating that they were close to reaching an agreement. However, it remains unclear whether Blinken's reference to "tangible progress" indicated a genuine step forward in the peace process or was merely political rhetoric. Similar claims of progress were made after the Munich meeting on February 18, but no significant breakthrough was observed in the subsequent weeks. In their respective statements following the talks in Washington, Ararat Mirzoyan and Jeyhun Bayramov noted that they had made progress in mutual understanding on certain articles of the draft bilateral Agreement on Peace and Establishment of Interstate Relations. However, they acknowledged that divergent positions on key issues still remained.

III. The 5th trilateral meeting of President Ilham Aliyev, President Charles Michel, and Prime Minister Pashinyan in Brussels

On May 14th, President Ilham Aliyev held a meeting with President of the European Council Charles Michel and Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan in

Brussels. After the meeting, President of the European Council Charles Michel issued a statement affirming that substantial advancements had been achieved towards a peace agreement. "Our exchanges were frank, open and result-oriented. They focused on progress on the path towards Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization. The leaders shared a common willingness for a South Caucasus at peace. I commend their respective efforts. Together, we reviewed all issues on our agenda," Michel said in his statement, adding that "[f]ollowing the recent positive talks held in the United States on the peace treaty, the momentum should be maintained to take decisive steps towards the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan."

Michel said that "the leaders agreed on the resumption of the bilateral meetings on border issues" and "confirmed their unequivocal commitment to the 1991 Almaty Declaration and the respective territorial integrity of Armenia (29,800 km²) and Azerbaijan (86,600 km²)." On the issue of connectivity, Michel noted that "the sides made clear progress in their discussions aimed at unblocking transport and economic links in the region. Positions on this topic have now come very close to each other in particular on the reopening of the railway connections to and via Nakhchivan."

The trilateral summit between Armenia and Azerbaijan, following the mediation efforts of the United States, has sparked optimism for a potential peace treaty. This positive development came in the wake of several high-level meetings, including those between the foreign ministers of both countries and a subsequent ministerial meeting in Moscow. While progress has been made on key issues,

there are challenges, both geopolitical and revanchist in nature, that could potentially derail the negotiations and prolong the disputes.

The encouraging state of the peace talks has received affirmation from all three mediators involved: the United States, the European Union, and Russia. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in his statement, expressed confidence that the two sides are on the verge of reaching an agreement. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the potential to bridge the gap and achieve a common vision for a peace treaty. Lavrov's remarks came after the trilateral ministerial meeting in Moscow on May 19. Overall, the significant milestone was reached during the summit in Brussels on May 14, where Armenia and Azerbaijan officially recognized each other's territorial integrity, thereby implying Yerevan's acknowledgment of the Karabakh region as part of Azerbaijan.

The re-opening of transportation routes between the two countries has also witnessed progress. Michel and Lavrov confirmed that the parties are nearing a final agreement in this area, with the railway networks being the first to be agreed upon. Notably, the recent Moscow meeting unveiled the reactivation of the trilateral format involving the deputy prime ministers of Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. This format, initiated during a summit of the three countries' leaders in January 2021, convenes regularly to discuss proposals for connectivity and cooperation. The revitalization of this format, along with Russia's ongoing mediation role, ensures that Russian interests are considered in the reopening of transportation routes and any comprehensive peace deal. The Kremlin aims to secure its influence in the region by

deploying forces along the Zangezur Corridor, as outlined in the tripartite statement of November 10, 2020. Furthermore, Russia seeks to maintain a presence in the Karabakh region post-peace agreement. Therefore, Russian leaders' repeated emphasis on building the peace deal based on the trilateral statements agreed upon by Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan serves the goal of safeguarding Russian influence. The absence of a similar document signed by the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders under the Western track of negotiations only strengthens the Kremlin's position. Lavrov reiterated this stance at the tripartite meeting in Moscow on May 19, stating, "There is no alternative to the trilateral statements by the leaders of Armenia, Russia, and Azerbaijan regarding the settlement of the situation."

During a separate meeting with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, Lavrov explicitly emphasized Russia's historical role in the region and its significant interests at stake, asserting that their allies are aware of this fact. Just two days before this meeting, Lavrov criticized the West in an interview, accusing it of attempting to persuade Armenia to expel Russian military bases and border guards from the country in favor of relying on the United States for defense. He described this move as a blatant provocation. Such confrontations among the mediators present a substantial challenge to the peace process. Observers increasingly believe that without accommodations between Western and Russian interests, it is less likely that the negotiations will yield a peace treaty with long-lasting practical implications.

Another challenge stems from the presence of revanchist societal and political groups in Armenia that vehemently oppose any peace

deal recognizing Azerbaijan's sovereignty over the Karabakh region. A parliamentarian from the ruling Civil Contract Party, Hakop Aslanyan, exemplifies this sentiment. Following the summit in Brussels on May 14, Aslanyan stated in an interview that acknowledging Azerbaijan's territorial integrity does not imply acceptance of the Karabakh region as part of Azerbaijan. Drawing a parallel with Kosovo, he argued that while Serbia's territorial integrity was recognized, Kosovo eventually gained independence. Moreover, the Armenian legislative documents themselves present a challenge due to their inclusion of territorial claims against Azerbaijan. The Declaration of State Sovereignty of Armenia, regarded as a foundational document of the modern Armenian state and referenced in the Armenian Constitution, as well as a 1992 resolution by the Supreme Council, contain references to Yerevan's territorial claims over the Karabakh region. The 1992 document explicitly prohibits any international or domestic document recognizing Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan.

The ongoing peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan have shown positive dynamics and progress, particularly with regard to the re-opening of transportation routes. However, several challenges remain that could impede the negotiations. The existence of revanchist political groups in Armenia opposing the recognition of Azerbaijan's sovereignty over the Karabakh region and the inclusion of territorial claims in Armenian legislative documents are significant obstacles. Additionally, tensions between Western and Russian interests in the region add complexity to the peace process. Therefore, it is increasingly evident that achieving a lasting and impactful peace treaty in the South Caucasus will require accommodation among

the mediating parties. Only through such compromises can the negotiations bear fruit and establish sustainable peace in the region.

IV. The trilateral meeting of President Ilham Aliyev, President Vladimir Putin, and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Moscow

On May 25, a trilateral Summit of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan was held in Moscow on the sidelines of the Eurasian Economic Union summit. This meeting took place after extensive talks between the foreign ministers in Washington in early May, the political leaders of both countries met in Brussels on May 14, reactivating the trilateral meetings facilitated by the EU. Russia repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with the Western-mediated peace talks in the past. Previously Russia made it clear that it will only support a peace deal agreed upon with Moscow and based on the tripartite ceasefire agreement brokered by the Kremlin in 2020. Pashinyan's working visit to Moscow before the summit further highlighted Russia's enduring influence in the peace process.

The Moscow summit held on May 25, similar to the previous year's Sochi summit, aimed to reaffirm Russia's role as a mediator between the two sides and ensure that no treaty would be signed without considering Russia's regional interests. On May 19, during a separate meeting with Armenia's foreign minister on the sidelines of the Moscow-mediated ministerial meeting between Baku and Yerevan, Russia's Sergei Lavrov clearly expressed these views. He emphasized that

"Russia has a historical role in this region and significant interests at stake. I am confident that our allies are aware of this." The Kremlin has consistently expressed dissatisfaction with the "intervention" of the West in the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. From Russia's perspective, the mediation efforts of the EU and United States are viewed as attempts to encroach on its "sphere of influence" and diminish its role in the region. Although President Putin stated after the trilateral summit that Azerbaijan and Armenia were making progress toward resolving their long-standing conflict despite difficulties, the question remains whether the Russia-West rivalries and their respective interests have potential negative implications for the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process overall. In this context, Moscow regards the trilateral statements signed by the leaders of Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan on November 10, 2020, January 11, and November 26, 2021, as significant legal instruments to safeguard Russia's interests in a potential peace treaty. The Kremlin spokesperson emphasized the absence of any alternative legal framework for the settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, thus underscoring the importance of these tripartite documents in Moscow's view.

Speaking at the international conference in Shusha on May 3, President Ilham Aliyev touched upon the optimal format of the negotiations between the two countries and the role of mediators in the process, noting that "I think that the best way how to come to an agreement is direct negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia without any mediator and without facilitator or spoiler." President Ilham Aliyev noted that "before the Russia-Ukraine War, we have seen the attempts of the former Minsk Group co-chairs to reengage again. We were actively against that. Because

our position was that the Minsk Group failed and, from 1992 until 2020, produced no result. The actual result was negative. Because we clearly understood at the end of the so-called negotiations, during the times of occupation, that the Minsk Group co-chairs simply wanted to keep the situation unchanged. In other words, to keep the status quo, which was very comfortable for them and for Armenia, but not comfortable for us,” adding that “therefore, if you want to help, please concentrate on a peace agreement and persuade Armenia to be constructive. Any of these countries, I mean, now, the United States and Russia, because after France took a unilateral pro-Armenian position, it actually deprived itself of any kind of mediation. It is absolutely clear and not only due to the so-called recognitions of separatists in Karabakh but also other very open anti-Azerbaijani statements and actions in the United Nations, in Francophonie and in other formats. The public statements of politicians isolated France from being a mediator. A mediator must at least pretend to be neutral. If you are not neutral in your soul, you at least have to pretend that you are neutral. They did not even try to do that. So, now we see these efforts from the United States and from Russia, you probably know that the next round of negotiations is supposed to take place between the ministers of the two countries – Armenia and Azerbaijan - in Russia this month. There is a European format of President Charles Michel, who several times convenes meetings on the level of country leaders. So, I think that may continue.” At the same time, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “but again I think direct negotiations between the two countries will be more useful and helpful. I think that we need to go in that direction. Of course, if Armenia also is ready to do it.”

V. President Ilham Aliyev visits Lachin on the Independence Day of the Republic of Azerbaijan

On May 28, President Ilham Aliyev met with the people who returned to the city of Lachin. In his address, President Ilham Aliyev extended his heartfelt congratulations to the people of Lachin and the entire nation for the significant achievements and the momentous return of the native residents to their hometown. The timing of this meeting on May 28 held profound symbolic meaning, as it coincided with Azerbaijan's Independence Day. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that the independent state of Azerbaijan has strengthened its global standing and demonstrated its capability to achieve remarkable results. The revitalization and transformation of the city of Lachin serve as a testament to the strength of Azerbaijan's independence. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that within a short span of seven to eight months, a substantial part of the city has been rebuilt and is now ready to accommodate its returning inhabitants. The president acknowledged the arrival of the first 20 families and expressed his anticipation for many more to join them by the end of June. It is projected that approximately 4,000 people, or even more, will reside in Lachin during the initial phase of resettlement.

A remarkable accomplishment has been realized through the construction of 700 buildings, comprising 620 individual residential structures, nine apartment buildings, and a total of 144 apartments. Consequently, the city of Lachin can accommodate a total of 764 families. President Ilham Aliyev, however, emphasized that this is only the beginning of their ambitious program. The Master Plan for the city of Lachin has been prepared and will

be unveiled shortly, outlining the vision for the second phase of development. This indicates that more people will have the opportunity to settle in Lachin by the end of the year.

Parallel to the reconstruction efforts, the establishment of essential facilities is underway. A medical center is being prepared, and a school will be ready to welcome students for the new academic year. Additionally, numerous enterprises are being planned, with agricultural and industrial parks already in the works. These initiatives will create over 1,100 job opportunities, ensuring a sustainable economy for the region. President Ilham Aliyev assured the audience that comprehensive conditions for both living and working in Lachin are being created. The city has truly transformed into a remarkable and aesthetically pleasing destination, harmoniously blending modernity and natural beauty.

President Ilham Aliyev reflected on his previous commitment to turning Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur into paradises following the liberation of Azerbaijan's native lands from invaders. The vivid picture he painted of Lachin as a paradise fully embodies this vision. The mesmerizing nature, majestic mountains, and exquisite buildings exemplify the meticulous efforts made to create a comfortable living environment, showcasing the remarkable achievements of Azerbaijan.

President Ilham Aliyev's speech not only celebrated the achievements in Lachin but also highlighted the enduring spirit and determination of the Azerbaijani people. It demonstrated Azerbaijan's commitment to rebuilding and developing its territories, while providing hope and optimism for a bright and prosperous future. The reconstruction of Lachin serves as a shining example of

Azerbaijan's determination to turn adversity into opportunity, solidifying the nation's strength and resilience.

President Ilham Aliyev further emphasized that the ongoing extensive construction work in the newly liberated areas, including Lachin, signifies the commitment of Azerbaijan to rebuild and create flourishing cities and villages. He highlighted his participation in the groundbreaking ceremony for the newly established villages in Kalbajar and Lachin districts, underscoring that extensive construction efforts are underway throughout all the liberated territories.

President Ilham Aliyev reiterated that these developments exemplify the determination of the Azerbaijani people to reclaim and rebuild their homeland. For three decades, the enemy had persistently sought to destroy Azerbaijani cities and villages, leaving them in ruins and preventing the people from returning to their rightful homes. However, within just two and a half years, the first group of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has been resettled in the villages of Aghali and Talish, with the city of Lachin serving as the third place of residence for the former IDPs. By September of this year, the village of Zabukh will also be completely rebuilt, ensuring the return of its inhabitants. The villages of Zabukh and Sus, liberated on the same day as Lachin, are undergoing intensive reconstruction efforts, reflecting the determination to restore normalcy and provide favorable living conditions for all citizens.

President Ilham Aliyev acknowledged the profound tragedy inflicted upon the people of Lachin and Azerbaijan as a whole when the region fell under occupation. He highlighted the significance of the occupation, as it created a geographical link between Armenia and the

former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. The occupation of Lachin occurred in May 1992, a mere ten days after the fall of Shusha, and less than a year after Azerbaijan had restored its independence. This marked the beginning of the enemy's open aggression against Azerbaijan, an act that would have lasting consequences and inflict immense suffering on the Azerbaijani people.

Despite these adversities, President Ilham Aliyev stressed that Azerbaijan's determination remained unshaken. The successful military operation that led to the liberation of Lachin and other territories demonstrated the strength, resilience, and indomitable spirit of the Azerbaijani nation. The return of the people to their homeland signifies the restoration of justice and the reclaiming of their rightful place in Lachin and other liberated areas. The extensive reconstruction efforts in Lachin exemplify the commitment to creating a prosperous future and providing the citizens with dignified living conditions. The reclaiming of Lachin from occupation serves as a testament to the unwavering determination of the Azerbaijani people to rebuild their nation and secure a brighter and more prosperous future for all.

President Ilham Aliyev continued his speech by reflecting on the turbulent period in Azerbaijan's history following the occupation of Kalbajar and Lachin. He highlighted that in April 1993, Kalbajar fell under occupation due to the treacherous actions of certain forces that were vying for power. This unfortunate event took place during a time when Azerbaijan, although an independent country, faced numerous challenges and was unable to conduct an independent policy. The nation was grappling with economic, political, and

military crises, as well as internal conflicts and struggles for power.

President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that the destructive processes at that time had cast doubt on Azerbaijan's newly gained independence. The country was weak and powerless, facing an array of complex issues. However, he emphasized that the situation changed after the ascension of Great Leader Heydar Aliyev to power. It was under his leadership that Azerbaijan began its journey towards development. The President drew attention to the ongoing celebrations commemorating the 100th anniversary of Great Leader Heydar Aliyev, which began this month and will continue throughout the year. He attributed the country's progress and transformation to the visionary leadership and steadfast commitment of Heydar Aliyev. Under his guidance, Azerbaijan has asserted itself as a stable and dynamic nation, gaining respect and recognition on the international stage.

President Ilham Aliyev noted that following the occupation of Lachin, Kalbajar, and Shusha, the Armenian armed forces had gained a significant strategic and military advantage. This advantage allowed them to further occupy Azerbaijani lands. However, the president emphasized that the recent successful military operations and the subsequent liberation of these territories have turned the tide in Azerbaijan's favor. The restoration of territorial integrity, including the liberation of Lachin, signifies Azerbaijan's determination to liberate its lands and reaffirms the nation's strength and resilience.

President Ilham Aliyev's speech shed light on the challenging period Azerbaijan faced following the occupation of Kalbajar and Lachin. He emphasized the transformative

leadership of Great Leader Heydar Aliyev and the subsequent progress achieved by Azerbaijan. The ongoing celebrations honoring Heydar Aliyev's centennial anniversary serve as a reminder of his significant contributions to the nation's development. President Ilham Aliyev also highlighted the recent military victories and the restoration of territorial integrity, symbolizing Azerbaijan's resilience and determination to liberate its occupied lands.

President Ilham Aliyev continued his speech by acknowledging the long-standing efforts made to resolve the occupation through negotiations. The president highlighted his commitment to peaceful negotiations for nearly two decades, but it became evident that Armenia had no intention of voluntarily relinquishing the occupied lands. Despite their claims and proposals to return some districts, they insisted on retaining control over Lachin and Kalbajar indefinitely. President Ilham Aliyev made it clear that Azerbaijan could never accept such an arrangement, emphasizing the principle of restoring the country's territorial integrity in its entirety. President Ilham Aliyev reiterated that the liberation of Azerbaijani territories became possible through the heroism of the victorious Azerbaijani Army. He acknowledged that while a negotiated solution would have been preferable, Azerbaijan had to be prepared for any scenario. The relentless pursuit of liberation and the unwavering determination of every Azerbaijani citizen ultimately brought the day of liberation closer. President Ilham Aliyev expressed his gratitude to the Azerbaijani people for their contribution to the liberation and the sacrifices made to achieve this goal.

During the negotiation process, Azerbaijan focused on strengthening its economy and achieving economic independence. Today, Azerbaijan stands among the few nations in the world that are economically self-reliant. The country's political power has also increased, and it is now considered a key player in regional security and development. Azerbaijan's influential stance on global issues is recognized and respected internationally. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the importance of a strong and capable army. The Armed Forces of Azerbaijan demonstrated their strength and resilience during the 44-Day War, bringing the enemy to their knees and expelling them from Azerbaijani lands. Additionally, President Ilham Aliyev expressed pride in the younger generation. These courageous and educated young individuals played a significant role in liberating the lands that had been under occupation. President Ilham Aliyev acknowledged the sacrifices made by the martyrs and expressed condolences, vowing that their heroism would never be forgotten.

President Ilham Aliyev continued his speech by highlighting the significance of the period following the 44-Day War. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that after the war, the mediators involved in the conflict were left uncertain about their future roles. Meanwhile, Armenia found itself in a state of helplessness after the defeat. In contrast, President Ilham Aliyev noted that Azerbaijan once again demonstrated leadership and initiative in shaping the post-war reality. The results achieved after the 44-Day War laid the foundation for the current situation. Azerbaijan took a firm stance, declaring that the services of the OSCE Minsk Group were no longer necessary. President Aliyev advocated for the signing of a peace treaty between

Azerbaijan and Armenia based on the principle of territorial integrity.

Through deliberate and calculated steps, Azerbaijan successfully attained its objectives in the territories under the temporary control of the Russian peacekeeping mission in Karabakh. The establishment of a border checkpoint on the Azerbaijan-Armenia border on April 23 represented the momentous step on the territorial integrity issue. Although territorial integrity had already been restored as a result of the 44-Day War, the border checkpoint was the last point where uncontrolled movement existed between Armenia and the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, and vice versa. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that movement now is under complete control of Azerbaijan.

President Ilham Aliyev's remarks underscored Azerbaijan's proactive role in shaping the post-war landscape, rejecting the outdated mediation process, and securing its territorial integrity. By setting up the border checkpoint and establishing control over the movement between Armenia and the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan solidified its position as a decisive force in determining the region's future. President Ilham Aliyev's speech highlighted the transformational nature of the 44-Day War and the subsequent steps taken to consolidate Azerbaijan's achievements and establish lasting peace and stability in the region.

“As a result of this, after the second Karabakh war, we created a new reality both on the Azerbaijan-Armenia border and in the territories under the control of the Russian peacekeeping forces, and by establishing a border checkpoint, we forced Armenia to repeat what we said. I said this after the second Karabakh war – a peace treaty

between Azerbaijan and Armenia is possible if they say: Karabakh is Azerbaijan! Only three to four years ago, they were saying that “Karabakh is Armenia” and believed that they could keep our lands under occupation forever. They believed that we, the Azerbaijanis, would come to terms with this situation. I said no and we would never come to terms with that. I told them, their patrons and those who support them today that we would never come to terms with that. Life has once again shown that we do what we say. The statement made by the Armenian leadership a few days ago is actually a repetition of what I said a few years ago: ‘Karabakh is Azerbaijan!’” President Ilham Aliyev noted.

“Now, after Armenia has recognized our territorial integrity, there are practically no serious obstacles in the way of a peace treaty. I am sure that if Armenia does not cheat again and does not change its position, a peace treaty can be signed in the near future. If it is signed, it is very good, but even if it is not signed, the state of Azerbaijan cannot face any problems because of that. Because we are the stronger side, we are the ones who have a strong position at the negotiating table, we are the ones who have a strong position on the border. Even if the peace treaty is not signed, we will live comfortably and safely,” President Ilham Aliyev added.

Throughout the negotiations, Azerbaijan faced various pressures and threats, with some exerting considerable effort to make them accept the occupation. However, Azerbaijan's resolute stance prevailed. The President made it clear that there could be no compromise, and the idea of returning only five districts while accepting the perpetual occupation of two districts was unacceptable. Azerbaijan was

not willing to compromise on a single village, and they proved this through their actions.

President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the significance of the border checkpoint established on April 23, which should serve as a lesson to the Armenians living in the Karabakh region today. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that some still rely on external support and believe that someone will fight a future war on their behalf. President Ilham Aliyev dismissed such notions as nonsense, emphasizing Azerbaijan's determination during the 44-Day War. President Ilham Aliyev noted that the events of the past two and a half years should serve as a wake-up call for them to abandon their misguided dreams and come to live under the flag of Azerbaijan.

“The book “Miatsum” is closed, the book of separatism is closed. The dream of independence follows the path of the status. As for the status, we sent it to where it belongs during the second Karabakh war. Therefore, there is only one option left – to obey the laws of Azerbaijan, be a loyal and normal citizen of Azerbaijan, throw the false state attributes in the trash, and dissolve the “parliament” – as if there is a “parliament” there, as if there is a president, as if there is a minister, all this is funny. We are simply being patient. However, everyone knows perfectly well that we have all the opportunities to carry out any operation in that region today. Therefore, the “parliament” should be dissolved, the element calling himself “president” should surrender, all “ministers”, “deputies” and others should give up their positions. Only in that case can a concession be made to them. Only in that case can we talk of an amnesty,” President Ilham Aliyev noted.

“I should also state that international organizations have actually completely agreed

with our position of late. I already see this during various meetings. Why do they agree with us? Because we are right and because we don't depart from our position. This is why no one talks about independence, autonomy or anything else these days. The latest messages we have been receiving are what will be the fate of the leadership there. Are they liable to an amnesty or not? I say that it is necessary to look at that. First, we sent a delegation there. My representative went and held the first meeting with them and then we invited them to Baku to talk. They refused to do that. After that, we invited them to Baku for the second time, i.e. representatives of the Armenian minority living in Karabakh. They refused that too. There will be no third invitation. Either they will bend their necks and come themselves or things will develop differently now. Therefore, they can count on an amnesty only if they voluntarily put aside all their false duties and apply for Azerbaijani citizenship. We will look at that. My word is final, and everyone knows that both in Azerbaijan and the rest of the world, including Armenia. We do what we say. Not a single word of ours, as they say, has been left in the air and never will be in the future either. If I say that amnesty can be an option, they should not miss this opportunity. They have missed many opportunities, a number of opportunities, and each time, as they say, we had to knock them over to bring them to their senses,” President Ilham Aliyev added.

President Ilham Aliyev expressed his deep concern over the mistreatment and sentencing of two Azerbaijani soldiers who had inadvertently crossed into Armenian territory. He explained that after the Second Karabakh War, Armenia and Azerbaijan had reached an agreement regarding such incidents, acknowledging the high possibility of

individuals getting lost, especially in harsh winter conditions. According to the agreement, individuals who strayed into the other side's territory were to be returned within two days at most. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that Azerbaijan had been abiding by this agreement, detaining and interrogating individuals for a maximum of two days before returning them safely, both civilians and soldiers.

However, in this particular case, President Ilham Aliyev denounced the brutal treatment inflicted upon the Azerbaijani soldiers who had gone astray. They were subjected to severe beatings, handcuffed, humiliated, and filmed during the beating. Furthermore, they were arrested, sentenced to 11 years in prison, and denied a fair trial with legal representation or media presence. President Ilham Aliyev vehemently criticized this illegal and unjust treatment, stating that such a court proceeding was unacceptable.

During the trilateral meeting in Brussels on May 14, President Ilham Aliyev expressed his strong objection to this violation of the agreement. The president demanded the immediate release of the Azerbaijani soldiers, warning Armenia of the consequences if they continued to break the agreement. President Ilham Aliyev stressed that as long as Armenia maintained its legal independence, even if not de facto, and as long as the concept of Armenia's borders was accepted in a certain sense, they should abide by Azerbaijan's terms. The president made it clear that if Armenia refused to engage in the delimitation process, Azerbaijan would determine the border on its own terms. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that Azerbaijan had the capability to enforce its position, asserting that

no external forces or individuals would come to Armenia's aid in this matter.

“Therefore, the delimitation should be conducted on our conditions, i.e. on the basis of fair conditions. The peace treaty should be based on international conditions, our road to Nakhchivan should be opened, and representatives of the Armenian army still rooted in Karabakh should be removed from there. These are our conditions. I am saying these conditions here in the city of Lachin so that everyone can see that we are here today and we will be here forever. Let them know that we can see Armenian villages from here. We can see those villages, so they shouldn't forget about that,” President Ilham Aliyev underscored.

VI. Azerbaijan and Lithuania look to enhance bilateral relations

On May 21, President Ilham Aliyev arrived in Lithuania for an official visit. During the visit, President Ilham Aliyev has held a meeting with President of the Republic of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda in Vilnius. In a press statement delivered during a meeting with President Ilham Aliyev, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda expressed his enthusiasm for further strengthening the bilateral cooperation between Azerbaijan and Lithuania. The visit to Vilnius by President Ilham Aliyev marked a significant milestone in the ongoing efforts to deepen economic, educational, and diplomatic ties between Vilnius and Baku. President Nausėda's speech highlighted the positive developments and future prospects of this growing partnership. President Nausėda inaugurated the second Lithuanian-Azerbaijani business forum, underscoring its potential to generate ample economic opportunities. This

platform is poised to facilitate robust collaboration in various sectors, fostering mutual growth and prosperity. The Lithuanian and Azerbaijani governments have signed agreements on cooperation in fields such as environment, youth, and law enforcement, heralding a new era of bilateral relations. President Nausėda expressed Lithuania's support for the development of a partnership between the European Union and Azerbaijan. He emphasized the need to explore new avenues for strengthening their strategic alliance within the framework of the Eastern Partnership program. The president also lauded the energy cooperation between the European Union and Azerbaijan, citing its positive impact on the European energy market and the security of winter energy supplies. The Lithuanian president emphasized the need to confront Russia's aggression, particularly in light of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. President Nausėda called for joint efforts to prevent Russia from evading sanctions and stressed the importance of supporting Ukraine until a peaceful resolution is achieved.

President Nausėda concluded his speech by expressing gratitude for President Aliyev's visit and expressed confidence in the enduring friendship between Lithuania and Azerbaijan. The strengthening of bilateral relations and the bonds of cooperation will pave the way for a prosperous future, underpinned by shared values and common goals.

President Nausėda's speech during the meeting with President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the significant strides made in Lithuanian-Azerbaijani relations. The commitment to bolster economic cooperation and the support for strategic partnerships underscored the determination to create a

brighter future for both nations. Through continued collaboration and diplomatic efforts, Lithuania and Azerbaijan can build a robust partnership that fosters growth, stability, and peace in the region. President Ilham Aliyev expressed confidence that the collaborative efforts of business organizations from both countries would contribute to an increase in trade turnover. President Ilham Aliyev underscored the mutual interest existing between Lithuania and Azerbaijan, emphasizing that a Lithuanian-Azerbaijani business forum was successfully conducted in Baku during President Nausėda's official visit to Azerbaijan in May of the previous year.

The leaders engaged in a comprehensive discussion on regional issues during the meeting. President Ilham Aliyev provided an update on the ongoing peace talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Despite the protracted occupation of Azerbaijani lands by Armenia, lasting nearly 30 years and resulting in the displacement of one million Azerbaijanis from their ancestral homes, President Ilham Aliyev expressed hope that the peace negotiations would ultimately lead to lasting stability in the Caucasus region. The occupied territories, which constituted approximately 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory, suffered extensive damage, including the destruction of vital infrastructure, buildings, and historical sites. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the necessity of a peace treaty based on international norms and principles, underlining Azerbaijan's commitment to constructive efforts aimed at achieving this paramount goal.

The European Union-Azerbaijan relations were highlighted as a crucial component of the bilateral cooperation between Lithuania and Azerbaijan during the meeting between

President Ilham Aliyev and Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda. President Ilham Aliyev expressed gratitude to Lithuania for its endeavors in developing these relations, emphasizing their significance in strengthening the partnership between the two countries.

President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on strategic partnership in the field of energy between the European Commission and Azerbaijan, which took place two months after President Nausėda's visit to Azerbaijan. This memorandum has been successfully implemented, and notable progress has been made regarding the transportation of Azerbaijani natural gas to European markets. The volume of exported gas has been increasing annually and is expected to continue growing.

Renewable energy development was also a topic of discussion during the meeting, with both leaders acknowledging the parallel efforts of Lithuania and Azerbaijan in this field. Both countries attach great importance to renewable energy and expressed optimism regarding future bilateral cooperation in this area.

President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the shared responsibility of Lithuania and Azerbaijan in creating more convenient transportation and communication opportunities across the Eurasian continent. The connectivity between the two countries and continents necessitates concerted efforts to address the emerging geopolitical realities in the world. Recognizing the increasing volume of transit cargo passing through Azerbaijan's territory, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the role of modern infrastructure in facilitating transportation routes that connect the Caspian Sea and the

South Caucasus with Baltic Sea countries. Through joint efforts and the implementation of connectivity projects, successful cooperation in this field is anticipated.

During the visit, an Azerbaijan-Lithuania business forum with the participation of President Ilham Aliyev and President Gitanas Nausėda was held in Vilnius. Addressing the business forum, Lithuania's Minister of Economy and Innovation, Aušrinė Armonaitė, highlighted the importance of Azerbaijan as a key partner for Lithuania in the South Caucasus region. The minister expressed Lithuania's keen interest in further strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries. Aušrinė Armonaitė emphasized the multifaceted nature of trade between Lithuania and Azerbaijan, and emphasized Lithuania's desire to encourage mutual foreign direct investments. She also highlighted the ample opportunities for expanding collaborative projects and expressed Lithuania's willingness to share its best practices, expert knowledge, and success stories with Azerbaijan. In response, Azerbaijan's Minister of Economy, Mikayil Jabbarov, noted the presence of a mechanism for safeguarding investments and avoiding double taxation between the two countries, which has positively influenced investor activity. Mikayil Jabbarov discussed Azerbaijan's efforts in diversifying its economy, citing a doubling of non-oil and gas exports over the past four years. He emphasized the significant positive impact of transitioning to alternative energy sources on Azerbaijan's economy.

During the visit, a ceremony of signing Azerbaijan-Lithuania documents was held with the participation of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and the

President of the Republic of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėda in Vilnius.

Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan Mukhtar Babayev and Minister of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania Simonas Gentvilas signed the “Agreement on Cooperation in Environmental Protection between the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania.”

Minister of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Azerbaijan Farid Gayibov and Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania Monika Navickienė signed the “Agreement on cooperation in the field of Youth Policy between Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania.”

Prosecutor General of the Republic of Azerbaijan Kamran Aliyev and Prosecutor General of the Republic of Lithuania Nida Grunskienė signed a “Program on Cooperation for 2024-2025 between Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Lithuania.”

The discussions held during the visit reaffirmed the successful cooperation between Lithuania and Azerbaijan as strategic partners. President Ilham Aliyev expressed confidence that the visit would provide a significant boost to this partnership, further enhancing cooperation in various areas of mutual interest. The shared commitment to strengthening European Union-Azerbaijan relations, advancing renewable energy development, and improving transportation and communication links between the two countries and across the

Eurasian continent demonstrates the depth and potential of their bilateral cooperation. The meeting between President Ilham Aliyev and President Nausėda serves as a testament to the strong bilateral relations between Lithuania and Azerbaijan. Their discussions encompassed various crucial topics, ranging from economic cooperation to regional peace initiatives. The commitment to enhancing strategic partnership and working towards a peaceful resolution of the longstanding conflict exemplifies the dedication of both countries to promoting stability and progress in the region. As Azerbaijan continues its efforts to rebuild formerly occupied territories, the international community, including Lithuania, plays a vital role in supporting and facilitating these endeavors based on principles of justice and international law.

VII. Azerbaijan and Israel continue to strengthen bilateral ties

On May 30, President of the State of Israel Isaac Herzog arrived in Baku for a two-day official visit. President Ilham Aliyev and President Isaac Herzog had a productive one-on-one meeting. Both leaders expressed contentment with the progressing bilateral relations between their respective nations across various domains. They particularly highlighted the significance of President Herzog's visit to Azerbaijan, acknowledging its potential to further enhance and broaden the ties between the two countries.

President Ilham Aliyev welcomed Israeli President Isaac Herzog to Azerbaijan, emphasizing the close partnership between the two nations. The visit not only solidified the existing bilateral ties but also opened up new avenues for cooperation. President Ilham

Aliyev expressed his delight in hosting President Herzog and highlighted the active political dialogue between Azerbaijan and Israel. During the official visit, the leaders of Azerbaijan and Israel had the opportunity to address crucial issues on their bilateral agenda. One significant development was the opening of the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Israel. This step elevated relations between the two nations to a higher level. When examining the economic aspect of their relationship, President Ilham Aliyev noted that the trade turnover between Azerbaijan and Israel has already exceeded 1.7 billion US dollars, which is a substantial amount. However, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the importance of diversifying the trade turnover in the coming years. President Ilham Aliyev expressed optimism that joint projects between the two nations will contribute to a more balanced trade turnover. While Azerbaijan has been a reliable supplier of crude oil to Israel, he highlighted the need to move beyond the energy sector and explore new areas of collaboration.

The discussions between the presidents also focused on expanding cooperation in the energy field. Azerbaijan sees great potential for investment projects, interconnectors, and collaborative ventures in third countries. By capitalizing on these opportunities, both nations can strengthen their energy sectors and foster mutually beneficial economic growth. Furthermore, President Ilham Aliyev and President Herzog explored plans and ongoing initiatives in the areas of irrigation and agriculture. Israel's impressive achievements in these fields serve as a source of inspiration for Azerbaijan. President Ilham Aliyev expressed a desire to utilize Israel's positive experiences to increase the productivity of

Azerbaijan's agricultural sector and diversify its export market.

Another area of cooperation that President Ilham Aliyev highlighted in his speech is cybersecurity. He expressed his satisfaction with the active communications that have commenced between Azerbaijan and Israel in this field. Recognizing the significance of cybersecurity as an integral part of national security, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the valuable experience of Israeli companies in this domain. Azerbaijan looks forward to benefiting from this expertise, particularly in terms of training the younger generation and providing the necessary education to achieve their cybersecurity goals and safeguard their nation against threats.

Addressing the topic of threats, President Ilham Aliyev also touched upon the longstanding cooperation in the defense industry. Azerbaijan has had access to modern Israeli equipment for many years, which has facilitated the modernization of its defense capabilities. This partnership has been instrumental in protecting Azerbaijan's statehood, values, national interests, and territorial integrity.

Tourism was another topic of discussion during the meeting. President Ilham Aliyev expressed his desire to enhance the level of mutual tourism traffic between Azerbaijan and Israel. Currently, there are only four flights per week, which President Ilham Aliyev deemed insufficient. Instructions were given to increase the number of flights not only on a seasonal basis but also on a permanent basis. Additionally, efforts will be made to provide more presentations on the capabilities and facilities in Israel, aiming to attract more tourists from Israel and enlighten them about the centuries-long Jewish community's life in

Azerbaijan. This community is a valuable asset for the country, with its members actively contributing to Azerbaijan's modern development. President Ilham Aliyev acknowledged the significant role played by the Jewish community in Azerbaijan's struggle for independence, territorial integrity, and intercultural peace. He also highlighted the important role of Azerbaijani representatives living in Israel in bridging the gap between the two nations. While Azerbaijan has diaspora organizations around the world, it is predominantly in Israel that these organizations consist of people of Jewish origin. This fact further reinforces the deep historical and cultural ties between Azerbaijan and Israel. The centuries-long history of interaction, friendship, and mutual support serves as a solid foundation for the bilateral strategic cooperation between the two countries.

President Herzog extended his appreciation to President Ilham Aliyev for his hospitality and extended an invitation for President Ilham Aliyev to pay a state visit to Israel, emphasizing the reciprocal nature of their relationship. President Herzog described the visit as a dream come true for himself and the people of Israel, underscoring its importance in strengthening bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Israel. He acknowledged the deep-rooted connections between the two nations, which trace back to the Jewish heritage in Azerbaijan. Jewish communities have contributed significantly to Azerbaijan's story over the past century, exemplifying the unique relationship between Jews and Muslims and the potential for dialogue and cooperation.

Highlighting Azerbaijan's status as a Muslim country, President Herzog applauded the

exceptional love and affection between the Azerbaijani and Israeli people, noting the power of their partnership in driving positive change in the world. He commended the ceremony witnessed between the ministers of health from both countries as a testament to the extensive cooperation they share in various fields.

President Herzog acknowledged Azerbaijan's growing impact on the global stage, particularly in the energy sector. He recognized Azerbaijan's contributions to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, emphasizing its potential to influence regional and global security dynamics. Iran's actions and the need to address them were also discussed extensively during the visit.

Looking to the future, President Herzog expressed his optimism about developing cooperation in academia, sciences, agriculture, and numerous other fields. He commended President Ilham Aliyev's vision for Azerbaijan and his commitment to enhancing the relationship between the two nations.

In conclusion, President Herzog expressed heartfelt gratitude for the warm welcome and declared that his visit to Azerbaijan would serve as a milestone in upgrading the relationship between Azerbaijan and Israel. As both countries celebrate significant milestones, with Israel marking 75 years of independence and their bilateral relations reaching 30 years of strength, the visit solidified the bonds between the two nations and paved the way for further cooperation and growth.

During the visit, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Ministry of Health of the State of Israel signed a cooperative plan for the period of 2023-2028

in the fields of health and medical science. The signing ceremony witnessed the participation of President Ilham Aliyev of the Republic of Azerbaijan and President Isaac Herzog of the State of Israel. The agreement was formally sealed by Minister Teymur Musayev of the Republic of Azerbaijan's Ministry of Health and Minister Moshe Arbel of the State of Israel's Ministry of Health and Interior.

The meeting between President Ilham Aliyev and President Isaac Herzog not only reaffirmed the strong partnership between Azerbaijan and Israel but also paved the way for deeper collaboration in various fields. The opening of the Azerbaijani Embassy in Israel and the discussions on diversifying trade, expanding energy cooperation, and improving agricultural productivity demonstrate the commitment of both nations to forging a fruitful and multifaceted relationship. As they move forward, Azerbaijan and Israel are poised to strengthen their ties and leverage each other's strengths to achieve shared success.

VIII. Baku Energy Week: Connecting leaders in energy and green technology

From 31 May to 3 June, Azerbaijan hosted the esteemed Baku Energy Week – the most prestigious energy event in the Caspian region. The Baku Energy Week brought together three major events: the 28th International Caspian Oil & Gas Exhibition (Caspian Oil & Gas), the 11th Caspian International Power and Green Energy Exhibition (Caspian Power), and the 28th Baku Energy Forum. The Baku Energy Week serves as a platform for various companies hailing from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Canada, China, Finland, France, Georgia,

Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Monaco, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Türkiye, the UAE, the UK, Ukraine, the USA, and Uzbekistan to come together. A total of 320 companies from 35 countries participated in the events held within the framework of the Baku Energy Week. The Baku Energy Week is traditionally held with the support of the Ministry of Energy and the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR). The General sponsor of the event is SOCAR, while the sponsors include the renowned companies like Abu Dhabi Port, ACWA Power, Ansaldo Energia, AZEL SYSTEMS, Azeri M-I Drilling Fluids, AZFEN, Baku Steel Company, bp, Caspian Drilling Company, Caspian Marine Services, Equinor, EP Absheron, Global Energy Azerbaijan, GL, Inpex, KOLIN Construction, MASDAR, Tekfen, TotalEnergies, Turkish Petroleum, Uniper, Ural Steel. Boston Consulting Group is the intellectual partner of the Baku Energy Forum. Improtex Motors, representing the BMW brand, will present a new electric car model at the forum. The event is organised by Iteca Caspian and its international partners - CEM FZ LLC, ICA Events.

Geoffrey R. Pyatt, Assistant Secretary of the Department of State Bureau of Energy Resources (ENR), and UK Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Azerbaijan Baroness Emma Nicholson also participated in the 28th annual Baku Energy Week. Assistant Secretary Pyatt engaged in meetings with Azerbaijani government officials to discuss matters pertaining to energy security and explore opportunities for enhancing the utilization of renewable energy sources. Assistant Secretary Pyatt also met with President Ilham Aliyev. During the meeting, Assistant Pyatt expressed

appreciation for the significance of Baku Energy Week and commended Azerbaijan for its leadership role in ensuring energy security in Europe. President Ilham Aliyev acknowledged the importance of Geoffrey Pyatt's participation in the event and expressed gratitude for the continuous support of the US government towards Azerbaijan's energy initiatives. The President highlighted the longstanding active cooperation between Azerbaijan and the US in the energy sector, emphasizing the successful implementation of large-scale joint projects. Notably, President Aliyev highlighted the US government's support for the TAP (Trans-Adriatic Pipeline) project. The meeting also involved discussions on Azerbaijan's contributions to regional energy security and the rapid progress of projects aimed at developing the renewable energy sector within the country. During the meeting, Azerbaijan's pivotal role in stabilizing energy supply was emphasized. The participants also discussed Azerbaijan's significant efforts in establishing sustainable transit and transportation opportunities for both energy and non-energy products, particularly as part of the Middle Corridor initiative.

The Baku Energy Week featured discussions of Caspian region-wide petroleum projects and regional energy security issues. The main topics of the exhibition included oil and gas field development, oil and gas production and transportation, pipeline safety systems, refining and gas processing, construction and installation operations in the energy sector, innovative technologies, financial and legal services, and the chemical industry, among others. The Baku Energy Week also held discussions on various topics related to the transition period, including global energy security and the significant role of Azerbaijan's

energy sector in maintaining European energy security and balance. Additionally, a dedicated round table session examined scenarios for the new energy order, exploring subjects such as the global energy transition process and strategies to facilitate it amidst energy crises. The event focused on the potential of renewable energy sources in the Caspian region, their utilization possibilities, the development of renewable energy infrastructure, and the implementation of green energy projects.

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev attended the official opening of the 28th International Caspian Oil & Gas Exhibition (Caspian Oil & Gas) and the 11th Caspian International Power and Green Energy Exhibition (Caspian Power) within the framework of the Baku Energy Week at the Baku Expo Center. President Ilham Aliyev addressed attendees at the Baku Energy Week, expressing gratitude to the organizers and highlighting the significance of the event. The president noted that the Caspian Oil and Gas exhibition has been instrumental in showcasing Azerbaijan's potential to international investors for almost three decades since its inception in 1994. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the pivotal role played by the contract of the century in transforming the country's fortunes and paving the way for a prosperous future. President Ilham Aliyev noted that “back in 1994, it was just the beginning of Heydar Aliyev’s oil strategy,” adding that “this year, we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founder of the independent Azerbaijan.”

President Ilham Aliyev drew attention to the challenging circumstances Azerbaijan faced at the time, with the recent conclusion of the First Karabakh War and the signing of a

ceasefire agreement. Azerbaijan was a newly independent nation with a short track record of sovereignty, limited international awareness, and ongoing transformation from a Soviet system to a market economy. Furthermore, President Ilham Aliyev underscored the adverse conditions for attracting investments, including the occupation of Azerbaijani territories, a large population of refugees, and a civil war. Convincing partners to invest in Azerbaijan required extensive efforts, and some of these partners, such as BP and members of the first consortium, have remained steadfast allies for nearly three decades. The absence of export pipelines and outdated civilian infrastructure posed additional challenges. In this context, the signing of the contract of the century in 1994 emerged as the crucial step towards success, sustainable development, economic independence, and ultimately, political independence for Azerbaijan. This landmark agreement not only transformed the country's situation but also attracted significant investments, fostering economic stability and laying the foundation for a prosperous future.

President Ilham Aliyev's speech at the Baku Energy Week emphasized the transformative impact of the contract of the century signed in 1994. Despite the challenging circumstances Azerbaijan faced at the time, the strategic vision and determination of the National Leader of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev propelled Azerbaijan towards a path of economic and political independence. It served as a testament to Azerbaijan's resilience and its commitment to harnessing its energy resources for the benefit of its people and the international community.

President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the support of the United States and the United Kingdom

in Azerbaijan's efforts to develop its resources in the Caspian Sea. The president underscored the pivotal role of oil and gas in the country's development, particularly in building energy transportation infrastructure that has transformed the energy map of Eurasia through the establishment of oil and gas pipelines. This progress has significantly enhanced energy security for Azerbaijan, making it a crucial component of the country's national security agenda.

President Ilham Aliyev expressed his satisfaction at the presence of representatives from the European Union (EU) and emphasized the successful implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on a strategic partnership in the energy field signed between Azerbaijan and the EU in Baku last July. The energy dialogue between Azerbaijan and the EU has already commenced, and both parties are actively involved as co-chairs of the Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council. This council, which convenes annually in Baku, serves as a vital platform for coordinating efforts related to the Southern Gas Corridor. President Ilham Aliyev highlighted that despite the successful completion of the Southern Gas Corridor, new challenges and tasks remain, and ongoing cooperation with the EU is instrumental in addressing them.

President Ilham Aliyev underscored Azerbaijan's aspiration to be at the forefront of the renewable energy sector and emphasized the country's commitment to not be left behind in the enormous transformation process occurring in the energy sector. President Ilham Aliyev expressed his delight in witnessing the presence of companies involved in renewable energy production at the event and anticipated an increase in their

numbers in the future. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that Azerbaijan, together with its partners, has made significant investments in oil, gas, and gas fields, and the Southern Gas Corridor stands as a historic achievement. This integrated pipeline system, spanning 3,500 kilometers, plays a crucial role in ensuring energy security and diversification.

President Ilham Aliyev's speech at the Baku Energy Week underscored the support of the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as the fruitful partnership with the European Union. Azerbaijan's commitment to renewable energy and its significant achievements in the oil and gas sectors, particularly the successful establishment of the Southern Gas Corridor, were highlighted as key elements in ensuring energy security, promoting diversification, and contributing to the nation's overall development agenda.

President Ilham Aliyev reiterated the importance of energy security and highlighted the need for diversification of both routes and sources. He emphasized the collaborative efforts of companies, countries, and international financial institutions in achieving this goal. The president expressed pride in the recognition of Azerbaijan as a reliable partner by high-ranking officials of the European Union, emphasizing its role as a pan-European gas supplier.

President Ilham Aliyev pointed out the increased cooperation between Azerbaijan and European countries since the previous Baku Energy Week. He highlighted significant milestones, including the signing of the MoU on a strategic partnership in the energy field between Azerbaijan and the European Commission in July. The president confidently stated that Azerbaijan aims to double its gas supply to the European Union market by 2027,

a target that is considered realistic. He noted the substantial increase in gas supply from Azerbaijan to Europe, with 8 billion cubic meters in the previous year and a projected 12 bcm for the current year, accounting for nearly half of the country's total exports. President Aliyev expressed optimism about the potential to increase gas exports to a minimum of 20 bcm by 2027, with the major gas field Shahdeniz and the anticipated Absheron gas field playing crucial roles. He hinted at the expectation of good news regarding the first gas production from the Absheron field in the near future. The president further highlighted Azerbaijan's strategic partnership with BP in the production of deep gas from the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli (ACG) projects. He revealed plans to have the first gas production from this venture by the end of the following year. Additionally, President Ilham Aliyev mentioned the existence of several other fields with the potential to produce additional volumes of gas.

President Ilham Aliyev also emphasized the importance of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources in Azerbaijan's energy dialogue with the European Union. By focusing on energy efficiency measures and utilizing renewable energy sources, Azerbaijan aims to conserve gas currently used for electricity production and redirect it to international markets.

President Ilham Aliyev's speech at the Caspian Oil and Gas Exhibition highlighted the collaborative efforts to enhance energy security through diversification of routes and sources. The president expressed confidence in Azerbaijan's role as a reliable gas supplier to Europe and shared the country's plans to increase gas exports significantly in the coming years. He also emphasized the engagement

with strategic partners and the potential for expanding gas production from various fields, while also emphasizing the importance of energy efficiency and renewable energy in the country's energy strategy.

President Ilham Aliyev continued his speech by highlighting significant developments in Azerbaijan's gas supply and renewable energy sectors. He mentioned the inauguration of the Greece-Bulgaria gas interconnector as a notable event from the past year, which marked the commencement of gas supply from Azerbaijan to Bulgaria. President Aliyev expressed confidence that this would lead to further opportunities for gas supply to neighboring countries, with Romania already being part of their cooperation format. He shared the plan to expand gas supplies to Hungary and Serbia by the end of the year through the completion of planned interconnectors. This expansion in gas supplies would significantly broaden Azerbaijan's geography of gas exports.

Turning to the topic of green energy, President Ilham Aliyev mentioned an important event that took place in Bucharest in December. During the event, an agreement on green energy and transmission was signed, with the participation of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Hungary, Romania, and the President of the European Commission. President Ilham Aliyev expressed confidence that this agreement would develop into a global project, attracting more countries and companies to participate. The steering committee for this project has already held its first meeting and agreed that it would be an integrated project encompassing offshore wind energy production in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea, transmission lines, and a subsea cable under the Black Sea.

President Ilham Aliyev revealed that the project is in the finalization phase of the feasibility study. He stated that they believe this project has the capacity to transport a minimum of 4 gigawatts of green energy to European markets, serving as an additional contribution from Azerbaijan to the global renewable energy landscape.

President Ilham Aliyev continued his speech by highlighting another significant event, the Solidarity Ring ceremony initiated by the President of Bulgaria in Sofia. This project involves Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia and aims to establish additional interconnectors. President Aliyev emphasized that this project further solidifies Azerbaijan's role as a Pan-European gas supplier, as recognized by high-ranking officials of the European Union.

The president highlighted the growing demand for Azerbaijani gas, noting that over ten countries have approached Azerbaijan in the past year and a half, expressing their interest in increasing or initiating gas supplies. President Ilham Aliyev expressed Azerbaijan's commitment to meeting the needs of their friends and aligning investments with market opportunities. The president stressed the importance of international financial institutions supporting these projects, as their assistance plays a crucial role in their successful implementation.

President Ilham Aliyev then shifted the focus to the transition to green energy, acknowledging that some international financial institutions have halted financing for projects based on fossil fuels. He called for a realistic approach to these issues, emphasizing that natural gas supplies are essential for ensuring the required level of energy security. The president highlighted the critical role that

natural gas plays in the current energy landscape, as it offers a cleaner and more sustainable alternative to other fossil fuels.

President Ilham Aliyev's speech highlighted the Solidarity Ring project and Azerbaijan's commitment to meeting the growing demand for its gas supplies. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the need for support from international financial institutions and stressed the significance of natural gas in providing energy security while acknowledging the ongoing transition to green energy.

President Ilham Aliyev concluded his speech by emphasizing Azerbaijan's significant potential in renewable energy. He highlighted the immense potential of 157 gigawatts of green energy in the Caspian Sea, in addition to the onshore potential. The president mentioned that two contracts have already been signed with international investors, enabling the production of nearly 500 megawatts of renewable energy within the next year or a year and a half.

Furthermore, President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the total of 25 gigawatts worth of contracts and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) signed for investments in green energy in Azerbaijan. While he acknowledged that signing an MoU does not guarantee an agreement, he expressed confidence in the leading global renewable energy companies involved, indicating a high probability of these MoUs transitioning into agreements. Even if only half of the signed MoUs are implemented, it would exceed Azerbaijan's current domestic consumption by twice the amount. Additionally, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the intention to utilize a

substantial volume of natural gas currently used for electricity production to supply their partners.

President Ilham Aliyev outlined the necessary steps for further development, including the expansion of the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP). The president stressed the importance of unimpeded access to other European pipeline systems, such as the trans-Balkan pipeline system, and the need for more interconnectors in Europe. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the coordination of these efforts and the need for substantial investments to ensure that the additional gas extracted in response to Europe's growing demand finds its consumers.

In conclusion, President Aliyev emphasized the importance of continued teamwork and collaboration. The president mentioned that despite the completion of the Southern Gas Corridor project, the Advisory Council on the Southern Gas Corridor will continue its annual meetings in Baku every February to accommodate new participants, ideas, and plans. President Ilham Aliyev expressed confidence that successful implementation of their plans thus far would lead to future success. President Ilham Aliyev's speech showcased Azerbaijan's immense potential in renewable energy and their commitment to expanding their green energy sector. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the need for coordination, investments, and access to pipelines and interconnectors to ensure the successful integration of renewable energy into the European energy landscape.