



BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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I. Zelenskyy's visit to Azerbaijan opens new phase in bilateral cooperation

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy paid his first wartime visit to Azerbaijan on April 25, marking a significant expansion of bilateral ties between Kyiv and Baku beyond humanitarian and energy cooperation into the security and military-industrial spheres. During talks with President Ilham Aliyev in the city of Gabala, the two sides signed six bilateral agreements covering defense cooperation, energy, trade, humanitarian issues, and the development of joint military-industrial projects.

The meeting represented the seventh encounter between President Ilham Aliyev and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in just over four years, but unlike previous contacts, the Gabala summit produced a structured package of agreements and concrete operational commitments.

Security and military-industrial cooperation emerged as the central focus of the visit. Speaking at the joint press conference, Zelenskyy emphasized that security issues constituted the most important part of the agreements signed in Gabala. He also publicly confirmed for the first time that Ukrainian military specialists had already been deployed to Azerbaijan to assist with protection against drone and missile attacks and to share practical experience in defending critical infrastructure.

The military dimension of the partnership comes amid growing Azerbaijani concerns regarding unmanned aerial threats, particularly following drone incidents targeting the Nakhchivan exclave in March this year. Ukraine's experience in countering loitering munitions has become one of Kyiv's most valuable exports after years of sustained drone warfare. Ukrainian forces have developed extensive operational expertise in electronic warfare, interception techniques, and low-cost air defense methods, making Ukraine an increasingly attractive security partner for states facing similar threats.

President Ilham Aliyev framed the new cooperation as a long-term strategic opportunity for both countries, noting that military-technical cooperation and collaboration between the defense industries of Azerbaijan and Ukraine offer "significant prospects," adding that the two sides discussed potential joint production projects in detail. Ukraine's rapidly expanded defense-industrial ecosystem is likely to play an important role in this process. According to Ukrainian figures cited during the discussions, the country has increased the number of specialized defense companies from fewer than ten in 2022 to more than 500 focused on drone production today. Annual output reportedly rose from several thousand units in 2022 to approximately four million in 2025, with targets exceeding seven million units for 2026.

Alongside defense cooperation, the two countries reaffirmed their existing partnership in energy and humanitarian assistance. Zelenskyy thanked Azerbaijan for multiple rounds of energy aid, including generators, transformers, and other equipment used to stabilize Ukraine's damaged energy infrastructure. Humanitarian assistance from Azerbaijan to Ukraine since 2022 has reportedly exceeded \$45 million. During the visit, Azerbaijan also transferred passenger buses for frontline Ukrainian communities and agreed to expand rehabilitation and educational programs for Ukrainian children affected by the war.

Energy cooperation remained another important component of the talks. President Ilham Aliyev noted that SOCAR has operated in the Ukrainian market for years and stated that new opportunities now exist for joint investments and projects. Bilateral trade between the two countries has already surpassed \$500 million, with both sides expressing interest in expanding commercial ties further.

The political symbolism of the summit was also significant. Both leaders reiterated support for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Zelenskyy thanked Azerbaijan for consistently supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity, while

President Ilham Aliyev reaffirmed Azerbaijan's support for Ukraine and announced that the next meeting of the bilateral intergovernmental commission would take place in Ukraine.

Perhaps the most notable diplomatic development of the visit was Zelenskyy's proposal to use Azerbaijan as a venue for future trilateral talks involving Ukraine, Russia, and the United States. By publicly suggesting Baku as a possible negotiation platform alongside venues such as Istanbul and Geneva, Kyiv emphasized Azerbaijan's growing diplomatic relevance and its ability to maintain working relations with competing geopolitical actors simultaneously.

II. European political circles are fueling the campaign against the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process

Armenia's parliamentary elections on June 7 are shaping up to be far more than a routine domestic political contest. The vote has effectively become a referendum on Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's broader strategic course for the country: the normalization process with Azerbaijan, the implementation of the Washington Joint Declaration signed last year, the initialed 17-point peace agreement between Yerevan and Baku, the reopening of regional connectivity routes, and Armenia's gradual reduction of its long-standing dependency on Russia. Precisely because these elections carry such geopolitical weight, the campaign has increasingly become a battleground for competing external interests. Pressure on Pashinyan and on the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process is now coming simultaneously from several directions: from Russian political and media structures, from segments of the European political establishment reproducing revanchist narratives, and from diaspora-linked lobbying networks seeking to undermine the current peace framework.

Russian state-linked institutions, media outlets, and political figures have intensified criticism of the Armenian prime minister and have increasingly

framed the outcome of the former Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict as a national humiliation allegedly caused by Pashinyan's leadership.

Yet the pressure on the peace process is not coming only from Russia. A more uncomfortable reality for Brussels is that segments of the European political establishment have increasingly echoed narratives that strengthen hardline and revanchist currents inside Armenia at a particularly sensitive moment. A European Parliament resolution adopted on April 30 under the banner of "supporting democratic resilience in Armenia" formally welcomed the peace process and cooperation between Armenia and the EU. At the same time, however, parts of the resolution repeated language concerning alleged ethnic cleansing, cultural heritage claims, and the detention of Armenian individuals accused of wartime crimes that closely mirrors the rhetoric used by Armenian opposition groups campaigning against normalization with Azerbaijan. Similar parliamentary resolutions were later adopted in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Such resolutions effectively provide international political cover for forces seeking to reopen or reinterpret the outcome of the conflict at the very moment when both governments have formally moved toward a negotiated settlement. Azerbaijani officials responded sharply, summoning ambassadors and describing the parliamentary initiatives as provocations against the ongoing peace process.

A third layer of pressure has emerged through diaspora-linked lobbying and advocacy campaigns operating across European and international political institutions. Armenian diaspora organizations opposed to the current normalization process have intensified lobbying efforts against both the peace agreement and Pashinyan's government itself. One of the most visible figures associated with this campaign has been Luis Moreno Ocampo. Over recent years, Ocampo has repeatedly accused Azerbaijan of genocide and humanitarian crimes in Karabakh, allegations that have not been formally endorsed

by major international institutions dealing with the South Caucasus conflict. His statements nevertheless became widely used by Armenian lobbying groups in European and American political circles.

The controversy surrounding Ocampo intensified further after the publication of video interviews in which he described efforts to influence policymaking inside European institutions. According to the material referenced in the discussions, Ocampo stated that a former aide to ex-EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell was lobbying inside the European Parliament on behalf of his campaign in order to pressure senior EU officials. Even more directly, Ocampo's son Tomás reportedly stated that the objective of the broader campaign was "to remove Pashinyan."

The broader concern raised by these developments is not simply about lobbying activity itself, but about the convergence of several distinct political streams around a shared objective: portraying the peace agreement as illegitimate, framing Pashinyan as a national traitor, and preserving the logic of unresolved grievance in the South Caucasus. According to critics of these campaigns, the same narratives now circulate simultaneously through Russian political discourse, diaspora-funded advocacy structures, European parliamentary motions, and Armenia's domestic opposition environment.

On April 20, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan separately summoned the ambassadors of Belgium and the Netherlands to protest parliamentary resolutions adopted in both countries on April 16. According to the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry, the resolutions represented "yet another reckless attempt to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, as well as the ongoing peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia." The resolutions are based on unfounded assessments and demonstrate a deeply rooted anti-Azerbaijani bias. The timing of the resolutions was particularly interesting given that they coincided with recent contacts between the speakers of the Azerbaijani

and Armenian parliaments aimed at supporting normalization efforts.

For the European Union, this creates an increasingly visible contradiction. Brussels has invested substantial political and financial capital into Armenia over recent years, including through the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the EU civilian monitoring mission, initiatives targeting hybrid threats, and broader resilience and economic assistance packages. Yet some European political actors are simultaneously advancing narratives that, intentionally or otherwise, strengthen forces openly opposed to the current peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

III. International law does not automatically protect occupation-era structures

Since Azerbaijan restored its sovereignty over the formerly occupied Karabakh territories following the 2020 war and the 2023 anti-terror measures, allegations from some Armenian political groups and diaspora organizations concerning the destruction of Armenian cultural and religious heritage have remained a recurring feature of international discourse. Recent claims surrounding the demolition of several structures in Khankandi have once again revived baseless accusations that Baku is attempting to erase traces of Armenian historical presence in the region. These absurd accusations frequently omit the legal and historical context surrounding the structures in question. The buildings at the center of the latest controversy are often intentionally misrepresented internationally as "ancient" heritage sites. Available records, however, show that many of them are recent constructions erected during the years when the territories were under the occupation of Armenian forces. One example frequently cited in recent discussions is the Surb Hakob Church, which was built in 2007 during the occupation period. Other churches mentioned in the same context are similarly modern structures

rather than medieval monasteries or long-established historical monuments. This distinction is central to the legal debate surrounding the issue. The question is not whether religious or cultural monuments deserve protection in principle. International law clearly recognizes such protections. The more specific issue is whether structures erected under conditions internationally recognized as unlawful occupation automatically acquire the same legal status and protections as historically established cultural heritage.

One of the foundational principles relevant to this discussion is the international legal maxim *ex injuria jus non oritur* — law cannot arise from injustice. The principle holds that legal rights cannot emerge from unlawful acts. In practical terms, this means that territorial occupation resulting from the use of force cannot generate lawful derivative claims over structures, settlements, or institutions created during that occupation without the consent of the internationally recognized sovereign state.

Applied to Karabakh, this principle carries broad implications. The structures built during the occupation period — including churches, monuments, administrative facilities, and other permanent installations — were established in territories internationally recognized as Azerbaijani sovereign land and under conditions condemned by multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions. From this perspective, such structures do not automatically obtain protected legal status merely through the passage of time or through their religious function.

This interpretation also shapes Azerbaijan's argument regarding international cultural heritage law. Instruments such as the UNESCO 1954 Hague Convention were designed primarily to safeguard existing and lawfully constituted cultural property from destruction during conflict and occupation. Azerbaijani legal arguments maintain that these frameworks were never intended to legitimize or permanently protect structures established through the consequences of unlawful occupation itself.

The religious character of a building, according to this reasoning, does not fundamentally alter the legal assessment. Freedom of religion remains protected under international law, but such protections do not necessarily override questions related to sovereignty, territorial integrity, or unlawful construction. That is why it is very important to distinguish between the protection of legitimate historical heritage and the preservation of structures which are products of an internationally unlawful situation.

There is also the issue of the law of state responsibility. The end of an unlawful occupation creates obligations related to restoring legal and material conditions consistent with recognized sovereignty. From this perspective, the removal of structures erected during occupation is not cultural destruction, but part of the broader process of reversing the consequences of the illegal occupation.

It is also worth noting that the destruction of Azerbaijani cultural and religious sites during decades of Armenian occupation did not receive any international attention. According to Azerbaijan's Ministry of Culture, more than 400 cultural and religious monuments were damaged or destroyed during the occupation period, including most mosques in the territories previously under Armenian control. At the same time, an Armenian church in central Baku has remained preserved for decades as a protected architectural monument. Following the 2020 war, Azerbaijani authorities also funded restoration work on the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shusha. The preservation of Christian, Jewish, and other minority religious heritage sites across Azerbaijan is clear evidence against baseless claims of a state-driven policy of religious erasure.

IV. Revanchist rhetoric in Armenia risks undermining the peace process

In recent years, the normalization process between Azerbaijan and Armenia has created the most serious opportunity in decades to move beyond a

conflict that shaped the South Caucasus for nearly thirty years. Since 2020, the emergence of new geopolitical realities has gradually brought the sides closer to a potential comprehensive peace agreement. Ongoing discussions on border delimitation, the reopening of regional communications, and prospects for the establishment of diplomatic relations all indicate that a framework for long-term normalization is increasingly taking shape.

For both countries, the current period represents more than a diplomatic process. It is a strategic opening to institutionalize de facto peace through legally binding agreements capable of providing long-term regional stability, economic integration, and greater security. The principal task at this stage is to transform the fragile normalization process into a sustainable political and legal settlement.

At the same time, the peace process continues to face significant internal and external pressures, including the growing influence of revanchist forces within Armenia that remain reluctant to accept the post-2020 regional realities. Opposition rhetoric ahead of Armenia's upcoming parliamentary elections, combined with increasingly confrontational public statements by some Armenian political figures, has reinforced concerns that parts of Armenia's political class continue to prioritize confrontation over integration.

Revanchist discourse in Armenia poses risks not only to bilateral normalization but also to Armenia's own long-term development. Rather than focusing on regional connectivity and economic opportunities emerging after the conflict, these political currents continue to emphasize narratives centered on restoring the previous status quo. Such approaches undermine trust and complicate efforts to build a stable post-conflict order in the South Caucasus.

Recently, particular attention has gathered statements by Alen Simonyan. His calls for the release of former representatives of the separatist administration currently detained in Azerbaijan,

along with allegations concerning the alleged destruction of Armenian heritage in Karabakh, is inconsistent with the broader peace agenda officially supported by Yerevan. The individuals currently on trial in Baku are being prosecuted for concrete crimes under both Azerbaijani domestic law and international legal norms, including violations committed during the years of occupation.

Armenia bears responsibility for extensive destruction, ethnic cleansing, and violations of international humanitarian law during the occupation of Azerbaijani territories. The destruction of cultural and religious monuments, the displacement of Azerbaijani populations, and large-scale material damage across formerly occupied regions are evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Calls for the unconditional release of former separatist figures disregard the legal nature of the accusations against them and transform judicial issues into political instruments.

Within Azerbaijani society, questions have increasingly emerged regarding why Armenia itself has not faced broader international legal accountability despite the scale of destruction and displacement associated with the conflict. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan has so far maintained a pragmatic and restrained approach. This restraint, however, is not unlimited. Continued inflammatory rhetoric from Armenian officials could eventually undermine the political foundations necessary for normalization. In such circumstances, Baku possesses sufficient legal and political grounds to pursue broader international claims against Armenia and against individuals accused of grave offenses committed during the conflict.

At the same time Armenia's domestic political environment, particularly during an election period, creates incentives for populist and emotionally charged rhetoric. Yet, using the peace process as a tool of internal political competition carries long-term strategic risks for Armenia itself. Attempts to mobilize revanchist sentiment for

short-term electoral purposes may ultimately weaken Armenia's regional prospects and damage the fragile trust established through recent normalization efforts.

For Azerbaijan, the broader objective remains the establishment of a stable post-conflict regional order grounded in international law, mutual recognition of sovereignty, and regional integration. Azerbaijan's approach is centered on pragmatic normalization and long-term stability rather than renewed confrontation. At the same time, the sustainability of this approach depends on reciprocal political responsibility from Armenia and on avoiding rhetoric that could reopen the divisions of the past.

V. The landmine legacy of the occupation in Azerbaijan

April 4 marked International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. For many countries, it passed largely as a symbolic observance. For Azerbaijan, however, it reflects an ongoing reality that continues to shape daily life in territories emerging from decades of conflict and occupation.

The consequences of the Armenian occupation did not end with the cessation of active hostilities in 2020 and 2023. While the military phase of the conflict concluded with Azerbaijan restoring its sovereignty over territories that had remained under Armenian occupation for nearly three decades, the legacy of that period continues to define the post-conflict landscape in Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur.

In recent years, important progress has been made toward normalization between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Washington meeting on August 8, 2025, between President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan resulted in the initialing of a peace agreement alongside understandings on broader regional issues. The normalization process has produced visible practical results. Trade routes through Azerbaijan

to Armenia have gradually reopened. Azerbaijan has begun supplying petroleum products to Armenia, discussions on energy connectivity are advancing, and the two countries have initiated civil society dialogue under the "Peace Bridge Initiative." Perhaps most significantly, for the first time since independence, the Armenia-Azerbaijan border has remained free of major clashes and casualties for an extended period.

Yet despite the emergence of peace at the diplomatic and political level, the physical realities on the ground remain deeply dangerous. Large parts of the formerly occupied territories continue to be contaminated by landmines and unexploded ordnance planted during the years of occupation. Azerbaijan estimates that approximately 1.5 million mines were laid across Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur, affecting roads, agricultural land, forests, residential areas, and infrastructure corridors.

For Azerbaijan, landmines have become one of the most serious humanitarian and reconstruction challenges of the post-conflict period. Since the November 2020 ceasefire, more than 400 Azerbaijani citizens — including civilians, demining personnel, and returning residents — have been killed or seriously injured in mine explosions. Many of these incidents occurred not during combat, but during reconstruction work, agricultural activity, or attempts by formerly displaced families to return to their hometowns after decades away.

The contamination problem directly affects Azerbaijan's broader reconstruction and resettlement strategy. The territories liberated after the conflict suffered extensive physical destruction during the occupation period. More than 400 cultural and religious monuments were damaged or destroyed, including the overwhelming majority of mosques located in the occupied territories. Large sections of infrastructure, residential settlements, roads, and agricultural systems were also devastated.

In response, Azerbaijan has launched one of the largest reconstruction programs in its modern

history. Since 2020, the government has allocated more than 22 billion Azerbaijani manat — approximately \$13 billion — toward rebuilding infrastructure, transport corridors, airports, energy systems, and new residential settlements in the liberated territories. By the end of 2025, around 60,000 internally displaced persons had returned to these areas, with plans to increase that number substantially in the coming years.

However, every reconstruction project depends first on demining. Roads, schools, villages, electricity lines, and agricultural land cannot be restored safely until explosive contamination is removed. International experts estimate that fully clearing the affected territories could take up to three decades and cost approximately \$25 billion.

One of the most contentious issues between the two sides concerns minefield maps. Azerbaijan repeatedly argued that Armenia either failed or refused to provide complete and accurate minefield documentation following the end of the conflict. The absence of reliable maps significantly slows clearance operations and increases risks for both civilians and demining personnel.

Despite the scale of the challenge, Azerbaijan has made substantial progress in clearance operations. According to the Azerbaijan Mine Action Agency, by January 2026 approximately 2,483 square kilometers of contaminated territory had already been cleared of mines and unexploded ordnance. International support has also contributed to these efforts. Countries including Germany, Belgium, Italy, China, and the United Arab Emirates have provided assistance, while the European Union has contributed roughly €23 million toward demining activities.

Still, the scale of international assistance remains modest relative to the magnitude of contamination and reconstruction needs. While the diplomatic architecture of peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan is gradually taking shape, the physical legacy of the conflict continues to claim lives long after the fighting itself has ended.

For Azerbaijan, demining is not just a technical or humanitarian issue. It is the essential precondition for post-conflict recovery, resettlement, and long-term regional stabilization. The return of displaced families, the reconstruction of communities, and the broader normalization of the South Caucasus all depend on removing the hidden remnants of war embedded beneath the ground.