



# BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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## I. Khojaly genocide marks 30th anniversary

On February 26, Azerbaijan commemorated the 30th anniversary of the systematic mass killing of Azerbaijani civilians by Armenian troops in Khojaly town of Karabakh. To commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Khojaly genocide, the nationwide march was held in Baku. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva attended the march. The mass murder committed by Armenians in Khojaly on the night of 25-26 February 1992 became one of the bloodiest and most tragic pages in the history of Azerbaijan. On that tragic night, assisted by the Soviet Union's Khankandi-based 366th Guards Motor Rifle Regiment, the Armenian troops forcefully expelled 5379 inhabitants of the town and massacred 613 people – including 106 women, 63 children, and 70 elders. They were tortured and brutally killed. 1275 people were taken hostage and went through unspeakable torture. The fate of 197 of them, including 68 women and 26 children, still remains unknown. As a result of the massacre, 487 were injured, including 76 children, 8 families were completely destroyed, 130 children lost one and 25 children lost both parents. All these people were slaughtered, tortured and disabled only because they were Azerbaijanis. It was a carefully planned campaign with the aim to wipe out the entire Azerbaijani population of Karabakh.

The Khojaly Genocide was meticulously documented by journalists and later reported by international human rights organizations, including the Human Rights Watch, which described the mass killing as “the largest massacre to date in the conflict” between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The occupation of Karabakh by Armenia, involving unfathomable atrocities, gratuitous violence systemic

destruction of cultural heritage, places of worship, followed by campaigns of ethnic cleansing. The Armenian leaders, having realized that more than 700000 people based in this region would not be easily persuaded to flee and leave their homes to Armenia, decided to force them into it. This caught the Azerbaijanis off-guard, as they did not expect cruelty, let aside violence, from their Armenian neighbors, with whom they had lived side-by-side in friendships and often kinships for many centuries. Serzh Sargsyan, Armenia's President in 2008-2018, once admitted that this belief of the Azerbaijani people was the very reason, why the slaughter of Azerbaijanis in Khojaly happened. Sargsyan, who was the commander of breakaway Nagorno Karabakh's military forces in 1992, told Thomas de-Wall, current senior associate of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in an interview dated December 2000, when Sargsyan was Armenia's defense minister, that “before Khojaly, the Azerbaijanis thought that they were joking with us, they thought that the Armenians were people who could not raise their hand against the civilian population. We needed to put a stop to all that. And that's what happened.” The occupation of Khojaly, a strategically critical part of Karabakh and the town that hosted the only airport of the region, was a key step in Armenia's objective to seize the control over the region. This region remained under Armenian control for around three decades until the 44-Day War which both ended the occupation and opened new horizons for the re-establishment of peace between the two countries.

With the end of the 44-day war, which resulted in Azerbaijan's victory and liberation of the occupied territories, the Khojaly tragedy, recognized by increasingly growing number of states and world parliaments as a

genocidal act, has gained a new significance. So far, the national legislative bodies of 17 countries, as well as 24 States of the USA, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Organization of Turkic States have adopted a number of resolutions and decisions condemning the massacre of civilians in Khojaly and characterizing it as a crime against humanity and an act of genocide. In its judgment of 22 April 2010, the European Court of Human Rights arrived at an important conclusion with respect to the crimes committed in Khojaly, denouncing the behavior of those carrying out the atrocities as “acts of particular gravity which may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity”.

As Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed out in its statement on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Khojaly genocide, “The indiscriminate killings of civilians at Khojaly stemmed from a policy of ethnic hatred and racial discrimination against Azerbaijanis at the state level in Armenia. It led to the killing of innocent people based simply on their ethnicity. The crimes committed at Khojaly were an integral part of Armenia's policy of systematic violence against Azerbaijanis. The Khojaly massacre and other crimes committed by Armenia in the course of its aggression against the Republic of Azerbaijan, including war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, constitute serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. These include violations of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and others.”

The Khojaly genocide is the “Holocaust moment” of this conflict. It demonstrates very vividly why, in order not to let similar tragedies happen ever again, both nations must seize the peace and reconciliation opportunity offered by the trilateral statement of November 10, 2020, that concluded the 44-Day War. Unfortunately, Armenia still do not renounce its aggressive policy towards Azerbaijan and embrace peaceful co-existence in the region. Deliberately targeting the civilian population and civilian infrastructure of Azerbaijani cities such as Ganja, Barda, Terter during the 44-Day War, which are located at a considerable distance from the war zone, Armenia resorted to the same terror tactics as they had in 1992.

Just recently, President Ilham Aliyev once again reiterated that “our policy is very clear – whether it is related to the war, to the settlement of the past Karabakh conflict or to the future. We suggested that the two countries should recognize each other's territorial integrity, start work on the delimitation of borders, start the process of opening communications and sign a peace agreement. In other words, the signing of a peace agreement is not a 100 percent guarantee, but in any case it would greatly minimize the risk of war. However, we must also know that any peace agreement can be just a piece of paper for Armenia,” adding that “we have actually presented this peace agenda to them and made very clear proposals on delimitation, and if it happens, then demarcation. As you know, at the initial stage, Armenia did not respond, did not say yes or no. In other words, this shows again that the Armenian leadership does not have a clear vision of the future.”

## II. Azerbaijan demands accountability for missing persons

The fate of nearly 4000, missing persons, including 719 civilians, during the First Karabakh War of 1991-1994 is one of the most paramount concerns for Azerbaijan. On February 4, the virtual summit of President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan through the mediation of President Emmanuel Macron of France and the European Council President Charles Michel reaffirmed the absolute importance of relaunching the search for missing persons from the hostilities of the early 1990s. Paris announced its readiness to support Baku in the process of searching for missing people and provided financial assistance to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for its work in search of missing persons. The French embassy in Azerbaijan emphasized on its website that “like last year, France will continue to work in 2022 with the parties, particularly Azerbaijan, to help identify missing persons, with the assistance of the International Committee of the Red Cross.” Not all those reported missing among Azerbaijani population were immediately killed upon their capture by Armenians. Azerbaijan has evidence, at least partly corroborated by the International Committee of the Red Cross, that 267 Azerbaijani civilians (including 29 children; 98 women; 112 elderly people) were taken hostage and never released by Armenia. Reports in western media sources at the time, including an article in the Washington Post in 1994, suggested that those that had not been killed, were forced to work as slaves. Their fate has never been determined.

At the same time, Azerbaijan, based on the principles of humanism, returned eight Armenian servicemen to Armenia. Commenting on the transfer of Armenian

servicemen to Armenia, the French embassy said that it was a sign of goodwill and a step towards peace. The US Department of State also welcomed the return of Armenian servicemen, adding that efforts to “fully account for missing persons, including from the 1990s, are critical to lasting peace in the region.”

A few days after the February 4 summit, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, during his speech in the parliament, said that over the past year the remains of 108 Azerbaijanis who went missing in the first war have been handed over to Azerbaijan. While this announcement was made to emphasize the humanitarian qualities of the Armenian side, it is deeply shameful that Armenia waited for 30 years to return the dead bodies of those people whose families grieved all along this period. Nor was an effective investigation carried out by the Armenian authorities into the fate of missing persons, and this in flagrant breach of the country’s obligations under international law throughout the entire interwar period (1994-2020).

The Chief of the Press Service Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan Leyla Abdullayeva, answering the media's question regarding the Armenian Prime Minister's statement on the return of the remains of Azerbaijani missing persons, wondering what was the reason that Armenia waited for 30 years to provide any information about the 4,000 Azerbaijanis missing in the first Armenia-Azerbaijan war, pointed out that “the discovery of mass graves of Azerbaijanis in our liberated territories and the presentation of the evidences to the international community is among the reasons of the return of the remains of 108 out of the thousands of Azerbaijanis missing after 30 years,” adding

that “we would like to remind that immediately after the 44-day war, Azerbaijan, without waiting for the reciprocity of the Armenian side and while Armenia did not provide any information about thousands of Azerbaijanis who were missing in the first Armenia-Azerbaijan war, handed over more than 1700 bodies of Armenian soldiers to the opposite side, based on the principles of humanism.” The spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also underscored that “the Azerbaijani side keeps the issue of missing persons on the agenda as a matter of priority, and will not allow the Armenian side, which is directly responsible in this matter, to keep silence for another 30 years about the fate of more than 3,700 Azerbaijanis who went missing, as well as the places of mass graves.”

Vasif Huseynov, a senior advisor at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (Air Center), also noted that “while propagating all around the international media, opening lawsuits in international courts, consistently raising the fate of the Armenian sabotage group detained by the Azerbaijani side after the end of the Second Karabakh War, Armenia needs to show empathy and remember the fate of those thousands of Azerbaijanis who were taken hostage or killed in unclear circumstances in the early 1990s. In contrast, Azerbaijan immediately returned, without any preconditions, more than 1,700 dead bodies of the Armenian servicemen fallen during the 2020 war as well as more than 100 detainees since the end of the war,” adding that “it is now Armenia’s turn to provide accurate information about the burial sites of the missing persons and return their remains. For peace and reconciliation in the region, both sides need to cooperate in the identification of the burial places of nearly 4,000 Azerbaijanis still registered as missing,

investigate the circumstances of their death, and punish the criminals. This would greatly help the internationally-mediated efforts to overcome the hostile atmosphere and open a new and more peaceful chapter in Armenia-Azerbaijan relations.”

### **III. How anti-Azerbaijan bias in Western media undermines the chance for peace in the region**

A quick glance at various Western media outlets reveals ongoing bias in the framing of their coverage of the Azerbaijan-Armenian conflict. These biased analyses intentionally distort the reality of the three-decade-long Armenian occupation and do not objectively assess the facts on the ground. They also tend to be highly dismissive of the pain and suffering of the Azerbaijani side. Over the last few months, for example, the Foreign Policy magazine has published two articles about recent developments in the ongoing “lawfare” between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the first by Shella Paylan on allegations of war crimes by Azerbaijan and the second by Simon Maghakyan on whether Azerbaijan's “cultural desecration is racial discrimination.” Unfortunately, both events and the language of court judgements are cherry-picked in these two pieces, which resulted in deliberately and meticulously constructed propaganda materials, masquerading as objective studies.

Both pieces are focused on the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), over which Azerbaijan and Armenia initiated proceedings against each other and requested the Court to indicate provisional measures. Maghakyan’s article focuses on the ICJ’s provisional measures in the case of Armenia v. Azerbaijan but ignores the case of Azerbaijan v. Armenia,

despite the fact that the court considered both cases simultaneously. Armenia's appeal to the International Court of Justice was primarily aimed at persuading the court to order Azerbaijan to release “all Armenian prisoners of war, hostages, and other detainees in its custody who were taken captive during the September-November 2020 armed hostilities or their aftermath.” This request, however, was denied by the International Court of Justice. The ICJ also refused to use the term “prisoners of war/hostages”, insisted upon by the Armenian side. Utilizing instead the word “persons,” the ICJ denied Armenia’s request for “independent medical and physiological evaluations” of such persons. Maghakyan’s propaganda piece ignores the fact that the ICJ denied Armenia’s request for “right of access and enjoyment” of the heritage in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan that Armenia claims ownership over now.

The ICJ also rejected the request that would force Azerbaijan “to facilitate, and refrain from placing any impediment on, efforts to protect and preserve Armenian historic, cultural and religious heritage.” The ICJ denied the request to stop “alteration” of that “heritage”. If granted, this request would have hindered restoration work on Azerbaijani historic, religious, and cultural sites in the newly liberated territories. However, the ICJ limited itself to ordering the protection of cultural heritage from acts of vandalism and desecration, which Azerbaijan is doing anyway as part of its treaty obligations. Commenting on the decision of the International Court of Justice on provisional measures, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan noted that “Azerbaijan will comply with the measures indicated by the Court related to preventing racial discrimination, which reaffirm existing treaty

obligations that Azerbaijan takes seriously and is committed to upholding,” adding that “Azerbaijan will continue to uphold the rights of all people under international law, and to hold Armenia to account for its ongoing and historic grave violations of human rights.” Azerbaijan also welcomed the Court’s decision to fulfill Azerbaijan’s request for provisional measures in relation to Armenia’s incitement and promotion of racial hatred, including by hate groups operating in Armenia’s territory targeting Azerbaijanis. The Court has rightly ordered Armenia to urgently take action to prevent irreparable harm to the human rights of Azerbaijanis.

Robert Cutler, Senior Research Fellow and Director in the Energy Security Program at the NATO Association of Canada, in his article in *The National Interest*, also pointed out that “Azerbaijan did not make a similar request to the ICJ to protect cultural heritage. That is because it already has numerous claims against Armenia for the destruction of cultural and religious monuments in the formerly occupied territories. The claims have been lodged both at the ICJ and at the European Court on Human Rights.” Robert Cutler noted that “Armenia’s arguments may turn against it as they are open to counteraccusations of cultural destruction and racial discrimination. It is well documented that Armenian forces devastated the cultural heritage of all the eight districts that they occupied until 2020, including but not limited to the territory of the Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO).” Systemic campaigns of terror, oppression, and violence committed against the Azerbaijani population, which resulted in the ethnic cleansing of approximately 700,000 indigenous Azerbaijanis from Karabakh, coupled with the destruction of cultural, historic, and religious sites of the Azerbaijani

population, suggest that Azerbaijan's filing before the Court should succeed at the merits phase of the proceedings.

During the three decades-long occupation, the Armenian government engaged in cultural genocide, seeking to destroy and completely erase the Azerbaijani heritage and legacy of the region. Before the First Karabakh War (1988-1994), the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan was home to 706 historic and cultural monuments: 11 monuments of global importance (6 of them architectural and 5 archaeological), 240 of state importance (119 architectural and 121 archeological), and 455 of local importance (393 architectural, 22 archaeological, 23 parks and memorial monuments, and 17 decorative artworks). However, 22 museums containing more than 100,000 artifacts, 927 libraries possessing 4.6 million books, 85 music schools, 4 theaters, 2 concert halls, 4 art galleries, and 808 recreational venues were destroyed as a result of the Armenian occupation. According to recent estimates, within the newly liberated territories returned to Azerbaijan as a result of the Second Karabakh War, over 400 monuments have been destroyed. Apart from the decades-long destruction and desecration of Azerbaijani heritage, acts of appropriation of the Azerbaijani culture in these lands have also been part of a clearly targeted policy pursued by the Armenian occupying forces. Moreover, according to the Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan, "From 1988 to 1993, 900 settlements, 150 residential buildings, 7,000 public buildings, 693 schools, 855 kindergartens, 695 health-care facilities, 927 libraries, 44 temples, 9 mosques, 473 historical monuments, palaces and museums, 40,000 museum exhibits, 6,000 industrial and agricultural facilities, 160 bridges and other infrastructure facilities were destroyed in Karabakh."

Obviously, both Paylan's and Maghakyan's propaganda pieces omit to mention these facts since they do not fit the carefully constructed narrative about the reality on the ground. The only purpose of this narrative is to distort the reality of the three-decade-long Armenian occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan and undermine the possibility of achieving sustainable peace by destroying the chance for reconciliation in the region.

#### **IV. Azerbaijan sends humanitarian aid to war-torn Ukraine**

On February 26, Azerbaijan sent two aircrafts carrying humanitarian aid worth more than €5 million (\$5.6 million) to Ukraine amidst the ongoing war with Russia. In a post shared on his official Twitter account, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked President Ilham Aliyev for the humanitarian aid and medicines. In another post shared on his official Twitter account, Zelenskyy stated that President Ilham Aliyev instructed the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) in Ukraine to provide ambulances and vehicles of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine with fuel free of charge in all its 55 filling stations across 11 regions of Ukraine. At the same time, both Turkey and Azerbaijan offered their mediation efforts to help start negotiations between Ukraine and Russia. On February 24, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan Araz Azimov, in the special meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, stressed that "the current situation must be settled by peaceful diplomatic means in full compliance with the norms and principles of international law, including on the basis of the sovereignty of states, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, as well as the indivisibility of security in the OSCE area."

Azerbaijan has a deep historical and strategic ties with Ukraine. Just recently, on January 14, President Ilham Aliyev visited Ukraine at the invitation of the President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. During the visit between, six bilateral documents aimed at deepening and strengthening ties between Azerbaijan and Ukraine were signed. In his statement for the press following the ceremony of signing the documents, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “soon we will celebrate the 30th anniversary of our diplomatic relations, on 6 February. I must say that during independence, Ukraine and Azerbaijan have always supported each other, always supported each other's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty, and this support is reflected in the Joint Declaration we signed today.” President Ilham Aliyev also emphasized that “friendly ties bind our people together, and as you know, there is a great interest and respect for the culture of the Ukrainian people in Azerbaijan. This respect can also be seen in Baku. A monument to great Ukrainian son Taras Shevchenko was erected on my initiative in one of the central parts of Baku a few years ago, and both Baku residents and visitors to our city come to this park to have rest. At the same time, one of the largest squares in Baku is named after Ukraine. So these facts in themselves show that there is an excellent history of relations between our peoples, and we maintain these relations.”

#### **V. Azerbaijan continues to be a reliable partner for Europe**

On February 4, the 8th Ministerial Meeting of Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council was held in Baku with the attendance of two European Commissioners - Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi and Commissioner for Energy Kadri

Simson. In his speech at the meeting, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “after the completion of the Southern Gas Corridor, Azerbaijan managed to increase its export to international markets, including European markets. Last year Azerbaijani export of natural gas was 19 billion cubic meters, 8.5 to Turkiye, almost 7 billion to Italy and the rest to other members of the team – Georgia, Greece, Bulgaria.”

Touching upon the issue of Azerbaijan’s natural gas reserves, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that “the proven gas reserves of Azerbaijan are known. It's 2.6 trillion cubic meters, for the biggest is Shah Deniz – 1 trillion. I am sure there will be more. Because looking at our experience, with respect to oil and gas development, we always see bigger reserves than it was anticipated at the beginning of our journey due to new discoveries and also due to new technologies. Because today, technology in this area is rapidly developing. Therefore, I am sure the proven reserves of Azerbaijani gas will be even more. Shah Deniz, as I said, is already the main gas field in Azerbaijan and, so far, the only contributor to the Southern Gas Corridor, but other projects are also in the process. One of the biggest gas condensate fields - "Absheron" hopefully will start production very soon, maybe less than in one year. And it will increase, and it will be done in stages. "Absheron" stage 1 will produce 1.5 billion cubic meters, not a big amount, but I think it's substantial for some countries. And that can also satisfy our growing demands and also provide export opportunities. Another big field, which we hope will also produce good results, is "Babak" with estimated reserves of 400 billion cubic meters. "Umid" at least 200 billion cubic meters. And of course, we have big expectations from one of the oldest oil and



gas fields, Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli. Its deep gas section, which I hope will soon be also in operation. It is also hundreds of billions of cubic meters of gas that can be extracted, I think, within a short period of time. So, this is today our potential and having diversified gas transportation network connecting us to four countries, to four of our neighbors. Of course, after completion of the main export with Southern Gas Corridor, I think our plans will be implemented. But of course, we need to continue this teamwork. Southern Gas corridor project is over, but our job continues. I am sure that in a good spirit we will achieve new results.”

The European Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson also underscored that the Southern Gas Corridor is “a great engineering and policy achievement. We should not fail to acknowledge this every time we meet. It crosses six countries and stretches over 3 500 km, it is a lasting proof of what cooperation among partners can produce. Since last December, the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline can deliver almost 10bcm of gas to the European market. We all remember the difficulties and hurdles this project had to overcome. But today, even most of those who were skeptical are grateful that it is there,” adding that “reliable, competitive, affordable gas is making its way to South-Eastern Europe. Homes are supplied, buildings are heated and citizens receive the energy they need. And with rising energy prices and tightened gas supplies, the Corridor's role is strategically important for the EU, now more than ever.” Commissioner Simson emphasized that “in our view, the Southern Gas Corridor is a continuing success story. And of course, as for all success stories, this brings the question of its next stage, and whether the corridor can be expanded in its capacity or even extended geographically.”

In a post shared on his official Twitter account on February 15, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also thanked Azerbaijan “for increasing gas supplies [and] being a reliable energy supplier to Europe,” noting that he discussed “regional security [and] Russia's military build-up in [and] around Ukraine, including implications on energy markets” in a phone conversation with President Ilham Aliyev.

At the same time, while visiting Baku, Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi declared that a sizable financial package amounting to 2 billion euros was allocated to Azerbaijan within the framework of the economic investment plan. Previously, Baku criticized the EU for dismissing the massive financial needs for demining and reconstruction of the liberated Karabakh region in its newly-adopted investment plan for the Eastern Partnership countries. In July 2021, during Charles Michel's visit to the South Caucasus, it turned that the EU allocated substantially less aid for Azerbaijan (140 million euros) than Georgia (3.9 billion euros) and Armenia (2.6 billion euros). At the time, the EU did not present a convincing explanation for this discrepancy, which raised questions about the true nature and objectives of the investment package. However, allocation of a financial package of €2 billion to Azerbaijan, as part of the EU's economic investment plan, along with the expressed readiness of the EU to participate in the process of restoration and reconstruction in Karabakh, represent a major policy shift in the Union's engagement with the region. Commissioner Varhelyi said that the sides are considering the implementation of specific projects including those for the recovery and reconstruction process in Azerbaijan. Vasif Huseynov noted that “the EU's decision to support Azerbaijan's

economy and its reconstruction efforts in the Karabakh region is likely to have a positive impact on EU-Azerbaijan relations and the negotiations over the new framework agreement which the sides have been discussing since 2017,” adding that “in general, the EU’s reconsideration of its policies towards Armenia and Azerbaijan and its pursuit of a more balanced approach is likely to buttress the EU’s place in the post-war peace process and help it to play a more impactful mediating role. If successful, this promises to have larger regional, and possibly geopolitical implications, for the South Caucasus, since the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace negotiations have so far been pursued mainly through the sole mediation of Russia.”

#### **VI. Azerbaijan signs a declaration on allied relations with Russia**

On February 21, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev visited the Russian Federation at the invitation of President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. As a result of the visit, the Declaration on Allied Relations between Azerbaijan and Russian Federation was signed. During the meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, President Ilham Aliyev noted that the declaration “will definitely be very positive for our countries, our relations, and regional security. We appreciate and are strengthening the friendly and good-neighborly relations between our countries. The signing of the Declaration on Allied Relations is a good illustration of how hard we have worked in recent years and increased the potential for mutual cooperation. These are not just words and intentions but specific actions. The declaration is quite broad. It has more than 40 paragraphs. It covers the most important areas of our interaction and, as I

have already said, will be of great importance for the future of our bilateral relations.”

“There is a comprehensive legal framework between us – 245 documents have been signed. But the Declaration signed today is of particular importance among them. This Declaration brings our relations to the level of an alliance. It is both a great privilege and a great responsibility. We have been moving towards this day steadfastly for a long time, building up the potential for cooperation, building relations based on sincerity, good neighborliness, pragmatism, and taking into account mutual interests. Specific work on the Declaration on Allied Interaction began just over a year ago. And during this time, relevant expert groups of our countries agreed on a very extensive document consisting of 43 provisions and covering almost all the main areas of our activity,” President Ilham Aliyev noted.

President Ilham Aliyev also emphasized that “the document sums up the results of many years of joint work and opens up excellent prospects for the future,” adding that “there are very promising opportunities for increasing mutual investment. Today we also discussed in detail the possibilities of deepening cooperation in the transport sector, and not only in a bilateral but also in a multilateral, regional format, taking into account the new situation in the region - the new geopolitical realities.”

Touching upon the issue of the post-war situation in the region, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that “Given such a long-term confrontation – nearly 30 years – and huge losses that Azerbaijan had sustained, the fact that after a little over a year, Azerbaijan and Armenia are already involved in at least two international formats, namely, the working group at the level of vice-premiers of Russia,

Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as the "3+3 platform", which includes Russia, Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan and Armenia, is already an indicator of our intentions. Of course, we expect the Armenian side to fully comply with all the provisions of the Declaration of 9-10 November 2020 regarding the withdrawal of all Armenian armed forces from the territory of Karabakh, as well as the opening of communications between the main part of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, which is a legal obligation of the Armenian side. Unfortunately, work in this direction is progressing very slowly."

President Ilham Aliyev also underscored that "the new realities in the region, I am sure, will usher ample opportunities. Azerbaijan is set for a peaceful future. We don't need war, and we never needed it. The liberation of Azerbaijan's territories and restoring our territorial integrity by military means was a necessary measure. Our readiness to resolve this issue by political methods in the post-war period confirms our intentions."

## **VII. Azerbaijan banks on green energy**

During his speech at the 8th Ministerial Meeting of Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council, President Ilham Aliyev noted that "Azerbaijan actually is doing a lot with respect to its "green energy" policy," adding that "our "green energy" strategy is now in the final stage of not only assessment but also planning. We have a special program for liberated territories. Together with leading international companies, our energy ministry has already prepared a conceptual outlook for the "green energy" zone in Karabakh and East Zangazur. We have already made the international assessment of the potential of renewable sources in Karabakh and Eastern Zangazur, and preliminary figures are very

promising. It's about 7,200-megawatt potential in wind energy and more than 2,000-megawatt potential in solar energy." At the same time, Azerbaijan seeks to develop its green energy capacity not only to satisfy its growing internal energy consumption, but also as a way to create additional external sources of revenue by exporting electricity. Key sources of renewable energy in Azerbaijan are hydropower, wind, solar, biomass, and geothermal energy. The potential for solar and wind power generation is especially significant. The possibilities for wind-power development are very strong, especially on the Absheron Peninsula, the Caspian seashore, and islands in the northwest of the Caspian basin.

"We have a special program of assessment of the Caspian Sea, and initial figures show the technical potential. I would like to underline that the technical potential of the Caspian Sea is more than 150,000 megawatts. We have already got certain initial proposals from leading international energy companies with respect to the development of this potential. I think it will be very natural because, first, Azerbaijan has already proved itself as a reliable source of energy for many years. As I said, we export all kinds of energy resources. We have diversified electric lines within the country, connecting us with all our neighbors. We have export markets just next door and growing export markets. For instance, countries like Turkiye with a growing economy, with a growing population, I think it's a major market for us. Also, Iran is with the same growing population. I know about some plans with respect to building some electric lines under the Black Sea, connecting central Europe with our region and Azerbaijan as a supplier of electric energy with Georgia also can be a part of that. So, really we have a

big potential here,” President Ilham Aliyev noted.

At the same time, Azerbaijan is swiftly modernizing its electrical power grid network. On February 14, President Ilham Aliyev attended the opening ceremonies of the “Aghdam-1” and “Aghdam-2” substations, as well as the Digital Control Center of the Karabakh Regional Electric Network. The Aghdam-1 substation has been built within the modern power complex created in the center of the Aghdam region and includes three indoor distribution facilities. For connecting the Aghdam region to the general power system of Azerbaijan, 35 kilometers, 110-kilovolt high-voltage power line from the Khindiristan station was laid down. The production capacity of the “Aghdam-2” substation is the same as the Aghdam-1 substation, and it includes a micro-SCADA system for remote control. With the opening of these substations, the total number of substations that have been built in the liberated territories now stands at nine. Before that, on February 11, the “Gobu Energy Hub,” which includes a 330-kilovolt Gobu substation with a carrying capacity of 1,000 megawatts and a 385-megawatt Gobu Power Plant, was also opened. Founded in August of 2020, these stations were built in record time. For the first time in the history of Azerbaijan, these thermal power plants were designed by local specialists. The design works were carried out by the “Design and Research Energy Institute of Azenergy,” and the construction by a local company. The new substation was commissioned in accordance with the concept of a digital power system.

The Gobu Energy Hub has several important advantages. First of all, it will meet the growing demand for electricity in the country, especially in Baku and the Absheron Peninsula, and will reduce the capital’s

dependence on regional power plants. It will enable to maximize the stability of the electricity supply and minimize the risk of system accidents. It will also play an important role in the formation of the circular power supply system in the capital. A 108-kilometer transmission line was also built to connect the Gobu Power Hub to the general power system. Along with the mentioned stations, on February 8, the opening of the reconstructed 330-kilovolt Yashma substation took place. This station has strategic interstate importance as it connects Azerbaijan and Russia’s energy systems. During the reconstruction, distribution devices with a capacity of 330, 220, and 110 kilovolts were reconstructed, and three new autotransformers with a capacity of 250 megawatts each have been installed at the station. As a result, the total capacity of the substation increased to 750 megawatts.

Orkhan Baghirov, a leading advisor at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (Air Center), noted that “implementation of these new projects not only serves to meet the growing domestic demand but also enables Azerbaijan to increase its export capacity. Because of the realized projects in this area, in 2021, Azerbaijan produced 27 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity and exported 1.6 billion kilowatt-hours. In comparison to previous years, the volume of electricity exported in 2021 increased by approximately 20% compared to 2020 and 36% compared to 2017. Revenues from electricity exports amounted to \$69.34 million in 2021 and \$50.97 million in 2017.”

However, the construction of thermal power plants is not the only direction in which Azerbaijan is working to strengthen its energy security. Azerbaijan is also actively developing its renewable energy sector and has started several projects in this direction recently. On

January 13, a groundbreaking ceremony was held for the 240-megawatt “Khizi-Absheron” Wind Power Plant, which will be built by Saudi Arabia’s ACWA Power company. ACWA Power, partly owned by Saudi Arabia’s sovereign Public Investment Fund, will invest about \$300 million in the project. It is expected that the plant will be commercially operable in 2023 and will produce about 1 billion kWh of electricity per annum. Earlier in 2020, Azerbaijan’s Energy Ministry and ACWA Power signed an implementation agreement to develop, build, and operate a wind power park in Azerbaijan. The project’s power purchase agreement (PPA) spans over 20 years on a “Build Own Operate” basis.

Along with wind power, Azerbaijan is also working on projects to use its solar energy potential. For this purpose, in 2021, an implementing agreement for the establishment of the 230 Mw solar power plant with the UAE’s Masdar company was signed. This project is worth about \$200 million, and the PPA spans over 20 years. The new solar power plant, to be built in the Absheron district, will produce about 500 million kWh of electricity annually, which will save 110 million cubic meters of natural gas and reduce carbon emissions by 200,000 tons. In total, the Energy Ministry of Azerbaijan has signed memorandums of understanding to co-operate on renewable energy ventures with 11 large companies, including BP, Equinor, and Total, along with Masdar and ACWA Power. By implementing these projects, the Azerbaijani government aims to raise the share of renewable energy in total electricity generation capacity to 30% by 2030, doubling it compared to 2018.

Another important development is Azerbaijan’s plan to develop “green energy zones” in Karabakh. President Ilham Aliyev has declared the Karabakh and East Zangazur

economic regions green energy zones. These regions have great potential for renewable energy, especially hydro-energy. It should be noted that about 25 percent of Azerbaijan’s water resources rise in the Karabakh region, which creates favorable conditions for hydropower plants. In addition, the regions have potential for solar and wind power. According to preliminary calculations by the International Renewable Energy Agency, these regions have more than 4,000 MW of solar and up to 500 MW of wind-energy potential. Thus, the renewable-energy potential of these regions will allow the generation of electricity from these sources to supply the “smart cities and villages” that Azerbaijan is building in its liberated territories.

Given that 25% of Azerbaijan’s local water resources originate in Karabakh, it is an optimal area for using local rivers for the construction of hydropower stations (HPS). Before the occupation, more than 30 HPSs used to operate in Karabakh and most of them were destroyed. Thus, after liberation, Azerbaijan intensively worked on the restoration of these stations and building new ones. HPSs such as the 8 MW Gulabird station and Sugovushan-1 and Sugovushan-2 stations with a total capacity of 7.8 MW have already been reconstructed and put into operation. In coming years, Azenergy OJSC plans to reconstruct 11 HPSs in Kalbajar District and 12 in Lachin District, with a total capacity of 130 MW.

Azerbaijan also actively cooperates with international partners and investors for the development of the renewable energy sector in Karabakh. The Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan and BP have already signed an implementation agreement on a project to build a 240 Mw solar power plant in the Zangilan and Jabrail regions. By developing

the renewable energy sector, Azerbaijan aims to create a “green energy zone” in Karabakh.

As Orkhan Baghirov puts it, “implementation of these projects in the renewable energy sector, especially in Karabakh, will significantly affect the electricity production and export of Azerbaijan. With the record level of electricity production in 2021, Azerbaijan is becoming a very serious exporter of electricity in the region, and new

projects will further strengthen its position. Thus, in coming years, electricity production and renewable energy will become the new pillars of the energy security of Azerbaijan. It will enable Azerbaijan not only to strengthen its energy security, but also to achieve its Paris Agreement goal of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by 35% from 1990 to 2030.”