



CENTER OF ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
BEYNÖLXALQ MÜNASİBƏTLƏRİN TƏHLİLİ MƏRKƏZİ

FEBRUARY-2025

BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

Table of contents

- I. Azerbaijan takes the lead in strengthening interconnectivity among Turkic states
2
- II. Khojaly Genocide 33 years later
3
- III. France continues to push false narratives against Azerbaijan
4
- IV. Armenia's accusations are meant to cover up its crimes against humanity
5
- V. Azerbaijan seeks justice for ecological devastation during decades of Armenia's occupation
6
- VI. Armenia's leader manipulates facts to mask aggressive militarization
6
- VII. Baku suspends activities of Rossotrudnichestvo in Azerbaijan
7

I. Azerbaijan takes the lead in strengthening interconnectivity among Turkic states

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, geopolitical dynamics have shifted significantly, altering regional alliances and economic strategies. In response, Azerbaijan has prioritized diplomatic engagement with Central Asian nations, strengthening regional connectivity through direct, high-level interactions. This commitment was exemplified by President Ilham Aliyev's visits to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in 2022, followed by an important state visit to Tashkent in 2024, which marked a new level of geopolitical and economic alignment between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. These engagements have led to agreements covering key sectors such as defense, trade, and infrastructure, reinforcing Azerbaijan's role in fostering regional cohesion.

Azerbaijan's strategic location in the South Caucasus, combined with its economic potential and deep-rooted cultural ties with other Turkic nations, solidifies its central role within the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). Positioned at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Azerbaijan serves as a crucial transit hub for energy resources, linking major producers and consumers. This geographic advantage has strengthened its influence in regional energy security and fostered economic collaboration with neighboring states. Beyond its energy sector, Azerbaijan has actively pursued economic diversification, focusing on sectors such as advanced technology, transportation, and tourism. These initiatives have enhanced trade and infrastructure development among OTS members, further integrating Azerbaijan into regional economic frameworks.

The Middle Corridor Initiative (MCI), a transformative regional effort under the OTS, has gained momentum amid shifting geopolitical dynamics and evolving global trade demands. This extensive transport route, spanning Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the South Caucasus, and Türkiye, has emerged as a key transit alternative, enhancing trade flows and mitigating disruptions caused by

instability along traditional routes. OTS member states have worked collectively to modernize and optimize this corridor, with Azerbaijan playing a leading role in advancing critical infrastructure projects and streamlining regulatory procedures. In July 2024, during the Informal Summit in Shusha, OTS leaders reinforced their commitment to enhancing the Middle Corridor, culminating in the Garabagh Declaration, which emphasized digitalization, environmental sustainability, and improved logistics to strengthen trade efficiency.

Further strengthening these ties, President Ilham Aliyev's visit to Astana in 2023 resulted in the signing of agreements to establish a Supreme Interstate Council, enhancing political and economic cooperation with Kazakhstan. Azerbaijan's growing collaboration with Kazakhstan is especially significant in the context of connectivity along the Middle Corridor, a crucial component of Baku's broader strategy to diversify export routes. Azerbaijan's proactive foreign policy, combined with its geographic access to both Anatolia and Central Asia, positions it as a key facilitator in interregional infrastructure projects.

Over the past few years, Azerbaijan has made substantial investments in overland transit corridors, recognizing their importance in overcoming logistical and regulatory challenges in the Silk Road region. In close coordination with Türkiye and Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan has significantly modernized its transportation infrastructure, including railways, highways, and ports. These efforts have been critical to expanding connectivity along the East-West trade route and reinforcing Azerbaijan's position as a vital link in regional and global trade networks. The OTS has prioritized intergovernmental agreements to harmonize customs regulations, streamline administrative procedures, and implement innovative logistics solutions, further strengthening regional economic ties.

Azerbaijan has also led the development of major regional transportation projects, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway, the Port of Baku, and the Alat Free Economic Zone. Particular emphasis has

been placed on enhancing maritime logistics along the Caspian Sea, with strategic investments in Trans-Caspian transport infrastructure and partnerships with key ports in Kazakhstan. These developments are expected to increase trade flows and strengthen Azerbaijan's role as a central hub in Eurasian trade. As part of broader regional cooperation, Azerbaijan has participated in sister port agreements with Aktau and Samsun to optimize maritime connectivity and facilitate cargo movement across the Caspian and Black Seas.

Beyond infrastructure, Azerbaijan has played a crucial role in humanitarian cooperation within the OTS framework. Following the 2023 earthquake in Türkiye, President Ilham Aliyev proposed the first-ever Extraordinary Summit of the Heads of State of the OTS to coordinate regional disaster relief efforts. The summit focused on enhancing emergency response mechanisms and strengthening humanitarian coordination, reflecting Azerbaijan's commitment to regional solidarity. These initiatives have led to the establishment of aid coordination centers and emergency response funds, reinforcing the bloc's ability to manage future crises effectively.

Azerbaijan's leadership within the OTS extends beyond economic and humanitarian efforts. The country has hosted key initiatives such as the Turkic Academy and the Turkic Council Youth Platform, highlighting its commitment to cultural and political collaboration. Additionally, its strong diplomatic ties with influential regional actors such as Iran and Russia have strengthened its ability to advocate for the strategic priorities of the OTS, further cementing its role as a central player in regional affairs.

By leveraging its geographic advantages, economic initiatives, and historical connections, Azerbaijan continues to drive regional cooperation within the OTS. Its leadership in energy transit, infrastructure development, and humanitarian assistance underscores a comprehensive approach to fostering stability and integration among Turkic nations. As a bridge between Europe and Asia, Azerbaijan remains a key architect of regional

connectivity and a crucial force in shaping the future of the Turkic world.

II. Khojaly Genocide 33 years later

Thirty-three years ago, on the night of February 25-26, one of the most harrowing crimes against humanity of the past century was carried out against Azerbaijani civilians in Khojaly. The massacre, known as the Khojaly genocide, was marked by extreme brutality and cruelty, leaving a deep scar in the collective memory of Azerbaijanis. As we observe its 33rd anniversary, we solemnly remember the victims of this tragic event, in which 613 people lost their lives, including 106 women, 70 elderly individuals, and 63 children in a single night.

The events in Khojaly were not an isolated incident but part of a broader pattern of aggression against Azerbaijanis. Massacres occurred in numerous Azerbaijani-populated villages, including Baghanis Ayrim, Imarat-Garvand, Tugh, Salakatin, Akhullu, Khojavand, Jamilly, Nabilar, Meshali, Hasanabad, Karkijahan, Gaybaly, Malibayli, Yukhari and Ashaghi Gushchular, and Garadaghli. These atrocities illustrate how the Khojaly genocide was a continuation of Armenia's policy of ethnic intolerance and hatred toward Azerbaijanis.

The siege of Khojaly had been ongoing since 1991, with transportation routes and electricity cut off, subjecting the residents to extreme hardship. On the night of February 25-26, 1992, the Armenian armed forces, with assistance from the 366th Motorized Rifle Regiment of the former USSR, launched an assault that led to unimaginable atrocities. Entire families were wiped out, 130 children lost a parent, while 25 children became orphans. Additionally, 1,275 people, including 68 women and 26 children, were taken hostage. The scale of violence and inhumane treatment inflicted upon the civilians, including torture and desecration of corpses, violated international humanitarian law and multiple international conventions, such as the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of

Genocide and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Evidence of the intent behind the Khojaly genocide is reflected in the confessions of those involved. Monte Melkonian, a key Armenian military figure, described the massacre as both a strategic goal and an act of revenge. Former Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan openly admitted that the operation in Khojaly shattered the perception that Armenians could not target Azerbaijani civilians, showing no remorse for the actions taken. Such statements confirm that the massacre was deliberate, reinforcing Armenia's international legal responsibility for the crime.

The failure of the international community to hold Armenia accountable for the Khojaly genocide enabled further war crimes against Azerbaijanis during the decades of occupation. Even during the 44-day Patriotic War, Armenian forces continued their attacks on Azerbaijani civilian settlements, demonstrating the long-term consequences of impunity.

The restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity through the Patriotic War and subsequent counter-terrorism operations on September 19-20, 2023, led to the liberation of Khojaly and other occupied territories. Bringing those responsible for war crimes to justice is a crucial step toward ensuring historical accountability and preventing similar tragedies in the future.

Today, life is gradually returning to Khojaly, as it is in other liberated areas, but the memory of the genocide remains an indelible part of Azerbaijan's history. The state and people of Azerbaijan continue to honor the victims, ensuring their suffering is neither forgotten nor repeated.

III. France continues to push false narratives against Azerbaijan

During his visit to New Caledonia on February 28, 2025, Manuel Valls, Minister of the Overseas of

France, made baseless accusations against Azerbaijan, alleging interference in French overseas territories and claiming that Azerbaijan had carried out "ethnic cleansing" in Garabagh. Azerbaijan categorically rejected these allegations, viewing them as a deliberate attempt by the French government to deflect attention from its own internal and foreign policy failures.

Instead of addressing the challenges arising from its failed foreign policy, France is seeking to shift the focus by making groundless claims against Azerbaijan. Unlike France, Azerbaijan conducts its foreign policy in full accordance with international law, respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other nations. France's accusations are particularly ironic given its historical record of colonial policies and its continued undemocratic efforts to maintain influence over various nations and peoples.

If one were to examine actual cases of foreign interference, France's actions in the South Caucasus speak for themselves. At a time when there are significant opportunities for lasting peace in the region, France has actively contributed to escalating tensions by supplying arms to Armenia, rather than supporting genuine diplomatic solutions. Such actions directly contradict France's stated commitment to stability and peace and raise serious concerns about its intentions in the region.

The accusation of "ethnic cleansing" leveled against Azerbaijan is particularly absurd in light of France's own role in the now-defunct Minsk Group. As one of the co-chairs responsible for mediating the resolution of the former conflict, France failed to address Armenia's occupation policy, which resulted in the forced displacement of nearly one million Azerbaijanis. Not once did France acknowledge or condemn this large-scale violation of human rights. Now, for France to claim that individuals who voluntarily left the Garabagh region were victims of "ethnic cleansing" is nothing more than hypocrisy and a blatant distortion of the facts to serve its own interests. Such misinformation serves no purpose other than to undermine peace efforts and fuel unnecessary

tensions. Instead of attempting to interfere in the affairs of independent states, France should focus on addressing its own domestic and international challenges with a more responsible and objective approach.

IV. Armenia's accusations are meant to cover up its crimes against humanity

On February 28, the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement regarding allegations of “mistreatment” of Armenian detainees and war crime suspects in Azerbaijan. The accusations are entirely unfounded and represent an attempt to mislead the international community about the fair and lawful judicial process taking place.

The individuals in question, including former separatist leaders and other Armenian-origin detainees, have been either charged or convicted of war crimes, ethnic cleansing, military aggression, torture, and other serious offenses. Azerbaijan, in accordance with the Geneva Conventions and international and domestic law, has both the right and the responsibility to investigate and prosecute these crimes. Their detention is legally justified, and their rights remain fully protected. Even under the Third Geneva Convention, prisoners of war facing criminal proceedings for serious offenses can be detained until the conclusion of the trial and, if convicted, until the completion of their sentence.

Azerbaijan ensures that all detainees are granted their full legal rights. Their rights and obligations are thoroughly explained, all testimonies and court proceedings are properly recorded, and claims of mistreatment have been independently investigated and proven false. Representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross regularly visit detainees, and arrangements have been made for them to communicate with their families through phone and video calls, including as recently as February.

Since the 2020 war, Azerbaijan has demonstrated humanitarian goodwill by repatriating over 200

Armenians classified as prisoners of war or detainees, fully adhering to international humanitarian law. However, following their return, many of these individuals faced imprisonment and interrogation by Armenian authorities. Furthermore, Azerbaijan facilitated the peaceful withdrawal of over 10,000 illegal Armenian armed forces from its territories following the 2023 counter-terrorism measures—a major gesture toward stability and peace.

Unlike Azerbaijan, Armenia has failed to conduct investigations into the well-documented cases of Azerbaijani prisoners of war and detained civilians being subjected to torture, degrading treatment, and severe human rights violations. Armenia has also refused to provide information about the fate of 4,000 missing Azerbaijanis, despite credible evidence and witness testimonies confirming their mistreatment and forced disappearances.

The Armenian government's latest statement reflects its growing unease over the ongoing trials of those accused of war crimes—trials that could expose the full extent of the crimes committed under Armenian leadership. Armenia's continued denial of its state responsibility for occupation and aggression cannot erase the historical and legal facts that hold it accountable. The pursuit of justice for these crimes is a fundamental obligation that cannot be undermined by political rhetoric.

Instead of recognizing the legitimacy of these trials and acknowledging the crimes committed, Armenia has resorted to calling them a “staged” process, revealing its reluctance to confront the painful realities of its own past actions. This stance further highlights its unwillingness to contribute to regional reconciliation and the peace process. Azerbaijan has always urged Armenia to refrain from making baseless accusations that threaten ongoing peace efforts. Ensuring accountability for war crimes is essential for justice and stability in the region, and no amount of political distortion can change this reality.

V. Azerbaijan seeks justice for ecological devastation during decades of Armenia's occupation

On February 12, 2025, Azerbaijan submitted its Statement of Claim to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague in its arbitration case against Armenia under the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats of 1979 (the Bern Convention). This legal action outlines multiple violations by Armenia of its obligations under the Bern Convention, emphasizing the severe environmental destruction that occurred during its occupation of Azerbaijani territories.

Following the liberation of its territories, Azerbaijan uncovered overwhelming evidence of Armenia's environmental devastation and its failure to safeguard habitats and species in one of the world's richest biodiversity hotspots. The damage inflicted by Armenia's actions is extensive and, in many cases, irreversible.

This arbitration process began on January 18, 2023, when Azerbaijan served a Notice of Arbitration on Armenia based on the evidence collected. The arbitral tribunal was formally established on September 15, 2023, and the first procedural conference between the two parties took place on April 12, 2024, at the Peace Palace in The Hague. This case marks the first-ever inter-state arbitration under the Bern Convention, setting a significant legal precedent.

Azerbaijan is seeking full reparations for the destruction of ecosystems and biodiversity caused by Armenia's occupation policies. These damages include widespread deforestation, unsustainable logging, mining operations, and the construction of hydropower plants, all of which had severe consequences for wildlife and their habitats. Armenia's activities significantly disrupted fragile ecosystems, pushing many species to the brink of extinction.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has previously reported that thousands of hectares of specially protected and valuable

forests in Azerbaijan were severely damaged. Some of these forests, home to ancient trees over 2,000 years old, were designated as reserves to protect rare and fragile ecosystems, such as the oriental plane forest in the Basitchay River valley. Additionally, UNEP's assessment documented widespread chemical pollution caused by Armenia's mining activities, leading to contamination of water, soil, and biota. Reports noted mass fish deaths in the Okhchuchay River, with several protected fish and amphibian species remaining under threat due to environmental destruction during Armenia's occupation.

Azerbaijan remains committed to seeking justice and holding Armenia accountable on the international stage for its actions. By pursuing this legal case, Azerbaijan reaffirms its dedication to restoring its environment, protecting biodiversity, and ensuring that those responsible for the destruction face legal consequences.

VI. Armenia's leader manipulates facts to mask aggressive militarization

The claims made by the Prime Minister of Armenia in his article published on February 10, 2025, in Armenpress regarding Azerbaijan's alleged preparations for an attack, the objectives of the Western Azerbaijan Community, and various other baseless accusations, are clear attempts to distort reality and mislead the international community.

It is particularly striking that the Prime Minister, while advocating for the right to military capabilities, represents a country that not only occupied Azerbaijani territories for 30 years but also, for three years after the end of the 44-day war, maintained more than ten thousand armed formations equipped with heavy weaponry within Azerbaijan's borders. This was in direct violation of Armenia's commitments under the Trilateral Statement.

Since the war's conclusion, Armenia's military spending has nearly tripled, increasing from approximately \$600 million in 2021 to \$1.6 billion

in 2024. Moreover, Armenia has primarily invested in offensive weaponry capable of striking deep into Azerbaijani territory, contradicting its claims of peaceful intentions. Given Armenia's ongoing territorial claims enshrined in its Constitution and legal acts, as well as the resurgence of revanchist sentiment, this military buildup poses a serious security threat to Azerbaijan.

Allegations regarding the Western Azerbaijan Community are entirely unfounded. The community's primary goal is to ensure the safe and dignified return of those forcibly displaced from their ancestral lands, a right enshrined in fundamental international legal instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Status of Refugees. The Armenian Prime Minister's outright dismissal of this right, coupled with misrepresentations of the community's objectives, reflects the broader Armenian policy that has systematically erased Azerbaijanis from their historical homeland.

References by the Armenian Prime Minister to the Prague meeting of 2022, the Almaty Declaration of 1991, and purported clauses of the draft peace agreement as evidence of Armenia's renunciation of territorial claims are contradicted by his own actions. In September 2023, he openly celebrated the so-called independence of a puppet regime illegally established on Azerbaijani territory. Furthermore, Armenia continues to ignore the territorial claims embedded in its Constitution and the reservations it made while adhering to the Almaty Declaration, raising doubts about its true commitment to peace.

Rather than recognizing the importance of bringing those accused of war crimes to justice, Armenia continues to dismiss the legal process as a staged trial. This attitude demonstrates its unwillingness to confront the truth about the crimes committed under its watch and its reluctance to contribute to lasting reconciliation. Additionally, instead of fulfilling its commitments—such as unblocking transportation links between Azerbaijan and its

Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic—Armenia continues to delay and deflect. Its proposals, lacking any real practical value, only serve to create confusion and obscure the reality of the situation.

As for Armenia's sudden advocacy for arms control mechanisms, it is well-documented that for more than 30 years, Armenia systematically violated and undermined international arms control agreements to which it was a signatory. Throughout this period, Armenia concealed military hardware and weaponry within occupied Azerbaijani territories, demonstrating its insincerity in upholding international obligations.

Armenia should abandon its counterproductive rhetoric and actions that threaten the prospects for lasting peace. Rather than perpetuating misinformation, Armenia should focus on meeting its commitments and contributing to stability in the region.

VII. Baku suspends activities of Rossotrudnichestvo in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan has officially terminated the activities of the Russian Federation's "Rossotrudnichestvo" agency within its territory, citing legal violations and the absence of proper registration. This decision aligns with Azerbaijan's national legislation, principles of reciprocity in international relations, and the framework of bilateral agreements regulating the operation of foreign organizations within the country.

Azerbaijan informed Russian authorities that the Russian Information and Cultural Center, known as "Russian House" and representing "Rossotrudnichestvo" in Azerbaijan, had been operating without legal registration and was found to be in serious breach of national laws. As a result, on February 3, 2025, Azerbaijan issued a formal diplomatic note to the Russian side, officially terminating the center's operations. Following this decision, Azerbaijan expects Russia to take appropriate steps in response.

The closure of “Russian House” has led to critical remarks from certain Russian politicians, particularly State Duma member Nikolai Valuev. In response, Azerbaijani authorities have condemned Valuev’s offensive and threatening statements regarding Azerbaijan and its people. Valuev, who serves as the First Deputy Chairman of the Tourism Committee of the Russian State Duma, has now been added to Azerbaijan’s list of individuals banned from entering the country.

This measure is not unprecedented. Azerbaijan has previously declared members of the Russian State Duma ‘*personae non gratae*’ for similar offenses. Among them are Konstantin Zatulin, First Deputy Chairman of the CIS Affairs Committee, and Vitaly Milonov, Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Family Protection, both of whom made statements and engaged in actions that undermined Azerbaijan’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Azerbaijan remains firm in its commitment to upholding sovereignty and territorial integrity, ensuring that any foreign entities operating within its borders comply with national legislation. The country will continue to take necessary legal measures against individuals and organizations that act against its interests, reinforcing its position on matters of international diplomacy and national security.