

# BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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## **I. Meeting in Brussels gives a fresh momentum to Armenia-Azerbaijan peace prospects**

On April 6, President Ilham Aliyev and Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, met in Brussels in order "to move rapidly towards the peace agreement." The Second Trilateral Meeting, organized by the European Union and mediated by European Council President Charles Michel became the third EU-arbitrated discussion of the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan over the last four months, with the parties previously meeting in Brussels on December 14 and holding an online summit on February 4. The President of the European Council Charles Michel said that the meeting he mediated between Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and President Ilham Aliyev in Brussels on April 6, marked the start of a concrete process for peace talks and a possible peace treaty between the two countries.

Charles Michel's official statement on the results of the meeting said that the sides had agreed to instruct the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia "to work on the preparation of a future peace treaty, which would address all necessary issues." It was also agreed to convene an Azerbaijani-Armenian joint border commission by the end of April. The mandate of the commission was to delimit the bilateral border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and "ensure a stable security situation along, and in the vicinity of, the borderline." The statement referred to the 26 November 2021 meeting held between President Ilham Aliyev and Nikol Pashinyan with Russian President Vladimir Putin's mediation where the sides had agreed to establish mechanisms for border demarcation and delimitation. The EU also pledged its support for the resolution of humanitarian issues, including the issue of missing persons

and de-mining efforts, support for confidence-building measures between Azerbaijan and Armenia as well as assistance to conflict-affected populations, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

"The leaders also discussed the restoration of communications/connectivity infrastructure between Armenia and Azerbaijan in particular and in the South Caucasus more broadly. President Michel welcomed the steps towards the restoration of railway lines, while encouraging Armenia and Azerbaijan to also find effective solutions for the restoration of road links. The EU is ready to support the development of connectivity links, including in line with its Economic and Investment Plan and by utilising the proposed economic advisory forum to identify common projects," the official statement of European Council President Charles Michel following the Second Trilateral Meeting with President Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan read.

On April 7, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan said that the Brussels meeting was "yet another important step towards ensuring the future development of the region in conditions of peace and prosperity in line with Azerbaijan's interests". EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Joseph Borrell also welcomed the launch of the process toward a possible peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia. "Crucial efforts and progress made between Armenia and Azerbaijan to work towards lasting peace and a stable and secure South Caucasus. In the current geopolitical context, it is more important than ever to find ways to engage and to diplomatically solve conflicts," Borell tweeted.

On April 11, 2022 Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov had a telephone conversation with the

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan. "As a follow up to the agreements reached at the level of the leaders of the both states, the sides had an exchange of views about the work on the preparation of a future peace treaty, convening of a Joint Border Commission, as well as the humanitarian issues," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan noted in its statement.

"We must move toward peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia and must sign a peace treaty as soon as possible," President Ilham Aliyev told the visiting OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Poland's Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau on March 31. President Ilham Aliyev went on to say that Azerbaijan was receiving "certain messages" from Armenia that Yerevan viewed Azerbaijan's proposal as acceptable. "This is very good news, and I hope that this issue will be clarified at the meeting in Brussels," President Ilham Aliyev added.

Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan also said that Armenia agreed to start peace negotiations with Azerbaijan. "I want to reaffirm Armenia's readiness to sign a peace treaty with Azerbaijan. Armenia is ready to immediately start peace negotiations. European Council President Charles Michel, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and me will meet in Brussels on 6 April. I do hope that all issues related to the start of peace negotiations will be discussed and agreed with the President of Azerbaijan during this meeting," Pashinyan told a cabinet meeting. At the same time, however, revanchist and separatist groups in Armenia are systematically trying to prevent peace talks from happening. For instance, Armenian social media accounts shared a post by a separatist Sasun Barseghyan who suggested holding a referendum in Karabakh on becoming part of the Russian Federation. Another separatist

Haik Khanumian in his interview also supported joining Russia by rationalizing that "the Republic of Armenia used to be the guarantor of our security, and in essence it cannot perform that function anymore." Vasif Huseynov, a senior advisor at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (Air Center), noted that "revanchist circles in Armenia and separatist groups in Karabakh feel threatened by the prospect of Yerevan formally recognizing Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan. Therefore, they try to prevent this by all means," adding that "a referendum on becoming part of Russia might be one such response for some Karabakh Armenians."

Shahmar Hajiyev, a leading advisor at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (Air Center), also noted that "if Armenia agrees to sign a peace treaty with Azerbaijan on the basis of the above-mentioned principles, it will create a backbone for the establishment of diplomatic ties and cooperation between the two states. It is worth underlining that the signals regarding an agreement for bringing sustainable peace to the region became very positive when Azerbaijan and Armenia agreed to instruct their ministers of foreign affairs to work on the preparation of a future peace treaty that would address all necessary issues." At the same time, Shahmar Hajiyev pointed out that "despite all positive gestures, Armenia's leading radical opposition parties led by opposition leader Artur Vanetsyan started again the campaign to hinder peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. They began a nonstop sit-in Yerevan's Liberty Square, and the main aim is to stage coordinated street protests in an attempt to topple Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian and thus prevent what they see as unacceptable concessions to Azerbaijan planned by Prime Minister. Such developments show again that

tangible steps are needed for supporting a future peace treaty.”

In his meeting with EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus Toivo Klaar in Baku on 19 April, President Ilham Aliyev praised the EU-sponsored talks in Brussels on 6 April. President Ilham Aliyev said the meeting was constructive and produced good results and achievements. President Ilham Aliyev said the meeting was a starting point for peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, adding that it was important to move forward and implement the reached agreements. “I consider the results of the meeting in Brussels positive. I announced this to the public on 12 April. The next day, the Armenian prime minister also spoke openly about the normalization process and Armenia's acceptance of the five principles put forward by Azerbaijan. This indeed is a turning point in the process. I think these are positive comments. Now, after this official statement from both sides, we must prove our seriousness on the table. Here we have high hopes for the efforts of the European Union, especially President Charles Michel, who is already extensively involved in the process. He is already quite familiar with the process. I think this creates a very promising environment for successful negotiations,” President Ilham Aliyev noted.

At the same time, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that Yerevan was delaying work toward the construction of railway and highway links that will connect Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and that this issue needs to be clarified with Armenia. President Ilham Aliyev noted that Azerbaijan had already built more than 60 kilometers of the 100-kilometer Horadiz-Aghband railway road and would complete the construction next year. “Unfortunately, they have not yet started working on the feasibility

study in Armenia, which indicates that the process can be delayed,” President Ilham Aliyev noted.

President Ilham Aliyev also touched upon the issue of the future highway via Zangazur. “As for the highway, Azerbaijan is actively building it, and most of the road has already been built. We also hope that the highway will reach the Armenian border by the end of next year. Unfortunately, the Armenian prime minister did not specify the geographical coordinates during the meeting in Brussels. I raised this issue in a video conference on 4 February, but there was no answer. On 6 April, I asked for the geographical coordinates of the road again, but there was still no answer. I do hope we will get it soon,” President Ilham Aliyev noted.

In early April, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “Armenia must also see that it cannot thwart our plans. If it doesn't grant us passage through Zangazur, it will lose and, first of all, be in violation of the 10 November statement. Because the 10 November statement explicitly states that there must be a connection between the western regions of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, and this is Armenia's obligation. If they don't want to fulfill his obligation, then we will not be under any obligation to fulfill our commitments either. They should know this and not procrastinate. We will achieve what we want sooner or later anyway. It is better for them to move a little faster. Otherwise, they will still find themselves at an impasse yet again.”

On 23 April, President of the European Council Charles Michel had a telephone conversation with President Ilham Aliyev. During the phone call, the parties discussed the trilateral meeting held at the initiative and with the participation of European Council President Charles Michel in Brussels on 6 April, and

emphasized the importance of tangible and results-oriented work in accordance with the agreements reached. President Ilham Aliyev thanked President of the European Council Charles Michel for his support and continuous attention to the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, including the demarcation and delimitation of borders, preparation of a peace agreement between the two countries and the opening of transport and communication lines. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that according to the results of the Brussels meeting, Baku had determined the composition of the national commission for the delimitation and demarcation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and a delegation to draft the peace agreement between the two countries, adding that Azerbaijan was ready for negotiations with Armenia in the “Baku-Yerevan” format. President Ilham Aliyev underlined the importance of taking into account the five principles presented by Azerbaijan for negotiations on a peace agreement.

President Charles Michel said he would continue his efforts to normalize the relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and contribute to a lasting peace in the South Caucasus region. The intention of the European Union to support Azerbaijan in its mine-clearance efforts and the determination of the fate of about 4,000 Azerbaijanis who have been missing since the first Armenian-Azerbaijani war was praised during the conversation. The sides also exchanged views on prospects for cooperation between Azerbaijan and the European Union, as well as other issues of mutual interest.

## **II. Key foreign policy takeaways from President Ilham Aliyev’s speeches in April**

On April 12, President Ilham Aliyev has chaired a meeting dedicated to the results of the first quarter of 2022. On April 22, President Ilham Aliyev gave a speech at the 5th Congress of World Azerbaijanis in Shusha. On April 29, President Ilham Aliyev attended the international conference under the motto “South Caucasus: Development and Cooperation” held at ADA University. In his speeches, President Ilham Aliyev commented on a number of important foreign policy issues, which are briefly summarized below.

Commenting on the post-conflict period, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that so far Azerbaijan has reached all its goals. “The post-war period is very sensitive, and a year and a half after the war, we can confidently say that we have passed this difficult test with dignity. Leading international organizations have embraced the postwar realities, including the UN, which held an international event in Shusha,” President Ilham Aliyev noted. President Ilham Aliyev also stated that the European Union is currently very active in the process of normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. “Our contacts with the European Union have intensified after the war. The European Union has also accepted the realities of the post-conflict period. At the initiative of the President of the European Council, Mr. Charles Michel, trilateral meetings were held in December and April. Information about the meetings has been provided, so I don’t want to talk much about that. But, of course, both the experts and the Azerbaijani public could see that the final communiqué did not contain the expression “Nagorno-Karabakh”, which is quite natural. Because Azerbaijan expressed its protest, so there is no word “conflict” either. This is natural, because

there is no conflict. The conflict has been resolved,” President Ilham Aliyev reiterated once again.

President Ilham Aliyev also noted that Armenia accepting five basic principles that Azerbaijan put forward for the normalization of relations between two countries is an important moment for the post-conflict period. “We put forward a proposal consisting of five specific principles, and Armenia has accepted these five principles. Thus, the Armenian leadership has officially stated that it recognizes the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and has no territorial claims to Azerbaijan and will not do so in the future. This is an essential moment for the post-conflict period, and we intend to conduct further negotiations based on these five principles,” President Ilham Aliyev stated.

President Ilham Aliyev noted that the recognition of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and renunciation its territorial claims by Armenia is a very positive development. “This is a very positive thing, and I think that it is a key condition for the normalization of bilateral relations. It was agreed that working groups would be established both on the border and for the preparation of a peace agreement. As you know, the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia have recently had a telephone conversation, which I think was the first time it happened in the last 30 years. We also welcome that,” the president emphasized.

President Ilham Aliyev also noted that “at present, the foreign ministers and ministries of the two countries are setting up working groups, and I think concrete talks should be initiated soon. The talks should not be delayed because a peace agreement will be signed based on five principles. Therefore, the text of the agreement can be prepared and signed soon. Thus, the relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan can be established, including

diplomatic. By making this proposal, we once again show our good intentions and, I repeat, show foresight. The revengeful forces occasionally raising their voices in Armenia should remember that this is the only way out for Armenia, their last chance perhaps. If they refuse, we will not recognize the territorial integrity of Armenia either and will officially declare that. Given the consequences of the second Karabakh war, the Armenian side should understand what this might lead to.”

Overall, on the issue of the peace process, President Ilham Aliyev reiterated once again that “the relations between two countries should be resolved by the two countries. Those who want to help should help. This is how I see it. This is our position. I think that the working groups on the delimitation of the border to be set up by the end of April, as well as the working groups on the preparation of a peace agreement, should start their work soon. We have very high hopes for this process and are not wasting time. In any case, we are in favor of starting to resolve the issue without wasting time.”

On the issue of various cooperation and development formats launched in the region, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “we don’t need these formats simply for the sake of visibility. If these formats don’t produce concrete results, then they will lose their significance,” adding that “we are in favor of doing tangible work and have a very clear vision for the future development of the region. We know exactly what we want and we will continue to use every opportunity to achieve our goals.” President Ilham Aliyev also pointed out that various trilateral formats between Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia were rejected by Yerevan. “There have been already several times proposals from Azerbaijan supported by leading international organizations to organize trilateral meetings

on different levels. We suggested on the levels of foreign ministers. Armenia refused. Then, there was a suggestion to have this meeting on the level of experts, again Armenia refused. Then we suggested to have this meeting on the level of representatives of civil society, and again Armenia refused. This is known by our partners and we do not understand why. Because we think it is counter-productive if we looked to the future of South Caucasus as integrated area of security, cooperation, and shared prosperity then this policy of Armenia is beyond any logic. Probably, they need some time, probably, they need to evaluate risks which they think may occur from that. But I think it's inevitable, and we are ready and our Georgian colleagues are ready," President Ilham Aliyev noted.

In his speeches, President Ilham Aliyev also touched upon Azerbaijan's continuous military modernization efforts. "Each day of the 44-day war has been analyzed in depth, and, of course, this analysis allowed us the opportunity to build our future army on the basis of the real situation. Taking this into account, the purchase of new weaponry and equipment is also being arranged. At the same time, after the war, the Ministry of Defense has undergone restructuring. Structural changes have been made, and this will further strengthen and modernize our army," President said, adding that "after the war, a new type of troops – the Commandos – was created, and I personally attended the opening of the first Commando military base in Hadrut. This is a very strong army contingent. I am sure that this contingent can now perform any task. We will increase the number of commandos every year."

At the same time, President Ilham Aliyev warned that the push to arm Yerevan must be stopped. "I believe that in order to establish peace in the region, the process of arming

Armenia must be stopped. Armenia does not have the money to buy weapons. It never did. In the second Karabakh war, we destroyed Armenia's military equipment worth about 4-5 billion dollars. Some of this equipment was taken as spoils of war, and we are using it. Some of it is displayed in the Military Trophies Park. The question is: where does so much money come from in a poor country? Where do these loans come from? Were these loans then repaid or written off? If those loans had not been given to them, I am sure there would have been no need for the second Karabakh war. Armenia would have meekly come to us seeking an agreement, just as it did when signing the act of capitulation, accepting all our conditions and acting completely differently after the war," President Ilham Aliyev said, warning that "if money is allocated for the armament of Armenia again, we will consider it as an unfriendly step and will take our steps accordingly."

Answering the question of Armenia-Russia alliance relations, President Ilham Aliyev touched upon Armenia's expectations during the war, adding that "they thought that Russian army should come and fight and defend separatism." President Ilham Aliyev said that "there have been a lot of expectations in Armenia that Russia will interfere into war in Karabakh. It didn't happen. Because we fought on our territory. And Armenia was trying to manipulate with this Collective Security Treaty Organization's obligation. But Collective Security Treaty Organization has a mandate to support member states on their territory and we were fighting on our territory. So that did not happen." At the same time, President Ilham Aliyev touched on the issue of arms transfers from Russia to Armenia during the 44-Day War. "During the 44-day war regularly there have been several days' cargo planes carrying

weapons from Russia to Armenia. We traced all the routes from Rostov, from Mozdok. We asked our Georgian friends to block the airspace and they did. Also, we asked our Georgian friends to block the land route from Russia to Georgia to transport weapons to Armenia and they did it also. And we are grateful,” the president said, adding that “we send letters to all Caspian littoral states not to allow Russian cargo planes carrying weapons to Armenia. We send it to Kazakhstan to Turkmenistan and Iran. But unfortunately, these planes were using the territory of these countries entering Armenia. So that was how it was and we should not hide this part of 44-day war.”

On the issue of demining process in liberated territories, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “it’s one of the big problems and big tragedies, because after the war ended more than 200 people, military and civilians were killed or seriously injured because of the mines,” adding that “it is very difficult now to demine the area, because physically we don’t have a capacity. And now demining agency was created many years ago. Now we are increasing the number of personnel, we are purchasing the new equipment, new machines, including, very sophisticated like drones which can detect the mines contaminated area, but it takes a lot of time and efforts. So far we had groups of Turkish specialists who helped us to demine but, of course, we will need a broad international cooperation.” The demining process is especially difficult since Armenian occupational forces planted part of those mines after the November 10 Statement. “We find mines now which are newly-planted and in the area which makes them to find is very difficult. So, this is another demonstration of their behavior as we correctly mentioned we gave them from ten to twenty days to leave

the territories which they had to leave based on the agreement signed on 10 November. But they used it for planting mines, for burning houses which they did not built, but they settled for cutting trees and for doing other ecological disaster. So, it demonstrates the behavior,” President Ilham Aliyev underscored, adding that “unfortunately, Armenia was not reprimanded for that terrible behavior.”

Touching upon the issue of international support to the demining process in the liberated territories, President said that “with respect to international support, unfortunately we did not get any support from any international organization so far. What we do, we do it at our own expense. We wanted to contract several international companies which can help us to speed up the process, but unfortunately the price they want to charge is several times higher than the cost we pay for our demining agency. So, they look at it from commercial point of view. Well, we can to a certain degree understand it, because they are private companies. But that means that we will not be able, because it’s an astronomic figure which they want to charge for one meter of demining.” At the same time, President Ilham Aliyev underlined that the EU has started to address this issue, noting that “during my last conversation with President of the European Council Mr. Charles Michel, he told me that they will allocate five million euros for demining.” President Ilham Aliyev noted that although Azerbaijan is grateful the EU for the help, it is not going to make real difference. “We need a serious support and also from international NGOs who deal with the mine problems. None of them so far turned their eye towards Azerbaijan. We know that several NGOs, foundations, which help countries to get rid of the mines, but in our case, nobody is helping. And everything what is done on the

liberated territories is done with the financial source of Azerbaijani budget only. Not a single dollar we got from any country or any international organization. And of course, it is not fair. It is double standards but what to do we live in this world. But anyway, no matter who will help us or not, we will clean the area. Of course, it will take more time. We will resettle former refugees and will build Karabakh that will be an example for the world," the president said.

On the issue of energy needs and electrification of Karabakh, President Ilham Aliyev noted that "we built power stations and already, not a big number but more than 20 megawatts of new power stations have been built last year. And 25 megawatts will be built this year. So, all Karabakh and Eastern Zangazur is already connected with electric lines and sometimes we had to bring these lines in the high mountains of 3.500 m which have snow 6 months a year. So, that has been done." At the same time, Azerbaijan does not supply energy to the area where the Russian peacekeepers are temporarily deployed. However, President Ilham Aliyev noted that "the gas pipeline which goes from Armenia to Khankandi is going through the territory which is under our control. There was recently an explosion there and for several days there was no gas and unfortunately, we were immediately accused of causing humanitarian catastrophe. Again, double standards, because when the first Karabakh war started, Armenians cut the gas supply from Azerbaijan mainland to Nakhchivan and for fifteen years Nakhchivan, the population of at that time more than 400 thousand people have been living without natural gas. And the winter there is much severe. It goes beyond 30, and nobody was accusing Armenia for causing humanitarian disaster for Nakhchivan. Only in 2005, we agreed with Iran to build a pipeline

and now Nakhchivan is 100 percent gasified. But what we did, we restored the pipeline which was going from Armenia to Russian-controlled part of Karabakh, and now the supply has been restored." President Ilham Aliyev also added that "it will be much easier and less costly to deliver electric energy, natural gas from Aghdam to Khankandi rather than to bring this gas from Russia, Georgia, Armenia and then Azerbaijan and Khankandi."

On the issue of preserving cultural heritage, President Ilham Aliyev highlighted that there is a clear anti-Azerbaijan bias at the level of international institutions. "After the war, there was a kind of a narrative, very strange and based again on fake facts and, I would say, Azerbaijanofobia, that Azerbaijan will destroy Armenian cultural heritage on the territories which we returned. UNESCO was knocking the door and was planning to come and, of course, we worked with them. We need to have a proper wording of our correspondence. We needed to have full compliance with territorial integrity of Azerbaijan in their public communications. And, finally, we already agreed on the text and agreed on the composition of the mission," the president said. At the same time, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that "for 30 years we were asking UNESCO to come to occupied territories and testify and they always refused. Just one year or maybe a year and a half before the second Karabakh war, our then foreign minister was in UNESCO asking for that and the answer was that UNESCO is not involved in political issues. After war ended, the situation has changed. Why? Because that it was a kind of a perception that Armenian historical heritage can be damaged. But, the fact that 65 mosques out of 67 were knocked down by Armenians is absolutely ignored, as if this is not historical heritage and as if it is not religious heritage. This is the situation which we are facing."

President Ilham Aliyev underscored that if UNESCO comes to Azerbaijan, they will “have to report about 65 destroyed mosques. They will have to report that the Armenians kept pigs and cows in Aghdam Mosque. They will have to report that Armenian, Christian and Alban religious heritage is untouched. We will never do it and we never did it. Here in Baku you can see the Armenian church in the center of the city. We keep there 5,000 Armenian books.” President Ilham Aliyev contrasted Azerbaijan’s attitude towards the cultural heritage with Armenia’s behavior. “They hanged the name of an Azerbaijani mosque. They called it a Persian mosque. The mosque in Shusha they also called a Persian mosque. They even invited specialists from Iran to make some repairs in order to change its origin. There was a diplomatic note and the Iranian ambassador then was invited to the Foreign Ministry and we demanded to put an end to that. Because that was also part of the legitimization of destruction of Muslim heritage,” the president underscored. The president concluded that “our religious and historic heritage in Azerbaijan belongs to all people of Azerbaijan. The Zoroastrian temple, mosque, catholic church, orthodox church, Armenian church and synagogue are all our national heritage and we preserve them. Everybody who visits Baku, Shusha, Guba and other places can see it. But, of course, this double-standard approach is something which we already used to live with, unfortunately.”

On the relations with China and connectivity potential of the region, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “we already started to receive cargos from China through the Caspian through the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad, but not in big volumes, because we clearly understood that China has diversified supply routes through different sources and we just tried to make our route more attractive. But, recently

we got several messages from Chinese companies that they seriously want to increase the transportation of cargos through the middle corridor, as it is called in China, through Azerbaijan, the Caspian and Georgia either to Georgian ports or to the Turkish city of Kars. So, these are new opportunities for us and our transportation infrastructure is brand new. It is a brand new sea port, the biggest Caspian fleet among the Caspian littoral states and railroad. But, of course, if we think about dramatic increase of cargos, we need also to invest in expansion of our transportation handling potential, because all our projects were based on existing volumes of cargos and slowly growing volumes of cargos. But today we see the demand for dramatic growth of cargos. Therefore, instructions have already been given to corresponding governmental structures to give me a report about what we can do and how we can increase the capacity of our trade sea port, which has capacity now of 15 million tons and we can in a relatively short period of time increase it up to 25 million tons. Then, of course, the construction of new ferry boats and tankers in our Caspian shipping factory is also necessary to be able to transport all that volume though Azerbaijan. In other words, it is an absolutely new situation with new opportunities.”

President Ilham Aliyev also talked about reforming SOCAR. “We are now in the process of active reforms of SOCAR. There is new management in SOCAR. SOCAR will finally transform into a transparent international energy company, I am sure, because the new management has these instructions. Subsequently, there will be reduction in losses, because we have a lot of losses in gas. Some losses are justified because of the outdated infrastructure, but some losses are very suspicious. So, I am sure that optimization, transparency and corporate management of

our leading company SOCAR will give us an additional source. It already gives us, I just don't want to talk about it before it happened and before you have official figures, but we really have a potential to substitute a large part of our energy, which comes from gas, to solar and wind. Also, just going a little bit further from you asked, we are already evaluating the opportunity of joining the project between Georgia and Romania, the electric cable under the Black Sea, which will be primarily used by us, because we have extra production – we export electric energy now to four countries and have a plan to expand. And, our electric energy is needed in Europe along with our gas,” the president stated.

Talking about delimitation and demarcation of the borders and responding to the question about maps used to determine the borders between the two countries, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that “our position is that while defining the border, we should take into account history and, of course, the maps which were available and which are available after the Sovietization of the Southern Caucasus. We cannot concentrate on only one map, there have been many maps starting 1918 when Iravan was part of Azerbaijan and also before November 1920 when Zangazur was part of Azerbaijan. What is today the Iranian-Armenian border was inhabited by Azerbaijanis and had no relation to Armenian nation. In November 1920, it was a decision of the Soviet government to give Zangazur to Armenia. But, when it was given to Armenia, it was not given in today's shape – not in 42 kilometers, but much narrower. Then, by different tricks Armenians managed to expand the territory, which today is the only border between Armenia and Iran, and expanded up to 42 kilometers. Therefore, our position is that we will take all the maps starting from, for instance, 1918 or even before, until 1991 when

the Soviet Union collapsed. But, that, of course, will be part of negotiations of our joint working groups.”

Commenting on the relations with neighboring Iran, President Ilham Aliyev drew attention to the fact that there are a number of people who got shelter in Iran and who on regular basis contest territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. “During the Caspian Littoral Summit in Aktau, during my meeting with the then President Hassan Rouhani, I gave him a list of almost 20 Azerbaijanis who live in Iran and on regular basis, through media and social networks, they not only contest the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, but they use such a vocabulary that is not appropriate in the normal society and we demanded these people to be handed over to Azerbaijan because of their direct participation in the lethal attack on a policeman in the city of Ganja. And we have evidences, but, unfortunately, none of them has been handed over,” the president said.

Touching upon the issue of increased supply of gas from Azerbaijan to Europe, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “when we received several demands and requests not only from Italy, but from some other European countries about increase of supply, first of all, it is the source. We need to find the source. As said, partly it will be due to the optimization of the losses of gas internally, partly, it will be due to the solar and wind substitution of natural gas and partly it will be due to the new production. We expect production from new fields next year already, from Absheron field to have 1,5 billion cubic meters more, and we expect from some other fields. Apart from that, of course, capacity of the pipelines is also important. The Southern Gas Corridor is an integrated pipeline system, which, for example, TANAP has one diameter and TAP has a different diameter. TANAP can transport more than 30 b.c.m, TAP can transport 10 b.c.m. Why? Because it was a

market. We were supposed to sell to Italy 8 b.c.m. And for that purpose, the shareholders of TANAP, including SOCAR, which has only 20% there, designed the pipeline volume so that not to have additional expenses. We did not expect additional gas to come in the nearest future, therefore, the design of TAP was different. Is it possible to expand it? Yes, it is possible. By adding pump stations, it can be expanded up to 20 billion cubic meters. In other words, Italy can get twice as much as they get today. But, for that purpose, TAP team should get together and that was part of my discussions with Prime Minister Draghi and then with Minister Di Maio, who visited us here. Shareholders of TAP need to agree on an additional investment program how to expand it and look from a technical point of view. I don't want to go into too much technical detail, but it is not something which can be done in one month. It is not possible technically. So, in the meantime, there are other ways to have interconnectors. For instance, now, the construction of the interconnector between Bulgaria and Greece is in the final stage and I got information from our Bulgarian colleagues that by September it will be in operation. There are other projects to interconnect the European gas distribution network. So, all that is on our agenda."

Answering the question on what one advice would President Ilham Aliyev personally have for Ukraine today – based on the experience that Azerbaijan had with the war, with the long term occupation, and with the liberation of the territories – President Ilham Aliyev noted that the most critical thing is to never agree to occupation. "You know during times of negotiations there were different moments and different messages, which I was receiving from Western colleagues. One of them was that you have to take into account the reality. Azerbaijan lost the first Karabakh war and your

actions must be based on the reality. There have been attempts to advise us that we need to consider the issue related to our territorial integrity. And I was always saying no. I was saying that never Azerbaijan, myself and the people of Azerbaijan will agree to create another Armenian fake state on our territory. Never! If necessary, we will fight until the death. My comments sometimes were interpreted as very hostile and aggressive. I was always criticized for the rhetoric. Armenian leaders were always praised for being constructive. Yes, they were constructive. They wanted to seal the occupation. They wanted us to agree to give independence to separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh. They wanted to keep a big part of our territory, particularly the territory between the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and Armenia under their control. My position was no. We will never agree. So, first, based on our experience, is never agree on violation of territorial integrity in any case," the president underscored. President Ilham Aliyev noted that the second lesson is to rely on your own resources.

"The third advice was not to rely on international organizations' decisions and resolutions. "The UN Security Council adopted four Resolutions demanding complete and immediate withdrawal of Armenian troops from our territories, which were not implemented for 27 years. We implemented them ourselves. And those who adopted those resolutions, three countries – permanent members of the Security Council, were co-chairs of the Minsk Group. I was telling also them why don't you implement the resolutions which you adopted and the answer was obvious. The situation with occupation was acceptable to them. It was acceptable to Armenia. It was acceptable to the Minsk Group co-chairs. It was not acceptable to us. And we

were a minority and we had to live in the real world and understand that there will be no help from international community,” the president added.

President Ilham Aliyev also noted that Azerbaijan supports the territorial integrity of Ukraine. “We support territorial integrity of Ukraine and of all other countries. We do it publicly. We do not hide behind big trees. We say what we mean. Yes, we have good relations with Russia, but with Ukraine we also have good relations. The principles of international law should not be interpreted based on political preferences. We were always the subject of that, because even before events in Ukraine, territorial integrity of Georgia and Moldova was always articulated very openly by international community and when it came to us, always there was a message: go and agree peacefully. But how to agree peacefully with an aggressor who doesn’t want to leave your territory. We tried and I tried for almost 17 years, but then we saw it is not possible. Then we saw that the more we want to do it peacefully, the more the aggressor becomes arrogant and aggressive. They already started to frighten us with new war for new territories and were saying things like Karabakh is Armenia. But, now what they say? Now, they say Karabakh is Azerbaijan. And who says that? The same people who said Karabakh is Armenia in 2019. We created a new reality with our own hands and with our soul. So, that is what we experienced and I think it is important for every country for dignity, for territorial integrity and for justice,” the president added.

On the EU-Azerbaijan relations, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “these relations are very important and I think our advantage is that we have a very clear and realistic agenda with respect to relations with the EU. I know that there are aspirations from other members

of the Eastern Partnership Program to have a membership. But, we must understand that it is a long process, a very, very long process and in case with Azerbaijan probably it is not a possible scenario. Therefore, we need to base our relations on pragmatism, mutual benefits and mutual interests and not to have over-expectations. Otherwise, disappointment will be there if you put a target and cannot reach, then you start to blame someone for that. The last you blame is yourself, you blamed everybody, but not yourself. To avoid it, we need to put very realistic targets: what we want and what EU wants. More or less it is clear. EU wants stability on its neighborhood, on its borders, from us, of course, they get, but they want to get more energy resources, that was even before the Russian-Ukrainian war. That was a strategic part of our cooperation. They are very interested in our transportation infrastructure and how can it be connected with the broad European transportation network. That is why, for instance, when the former President of the European Council, Mr. Donald Tusk, was in Baku in 2019, he went to our trade sea port to see the facilities. When Charles Michel was the President of the European Council in Baku last year, he made a regional visit to Shamakhi and there he was presented with Baku trade sea port capability and opportunity. What it means. It means a big interest in our transportation. And, of course, EU wants security and stability and wanted resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh. They wanted a peaceful resolution, but it didn’t happen. But now they accept fully the new realities and that is why we have these meetings in Brussels now. Regular meetings. What we want? We want, first of all, to establish closer relations. We don’t want to put in front of ourselves, as I said, unrealistic targets, like membership and not to spoil these relations. We want to have access to modern technologies and we have them. Of course, we want to have broader

access to European energy market and this is fully in line with European energy strategy.”

President Ilham Aliyev also noted that Azerbaijan wants “a single standard approach to the situation in the region, not only Armenia-Azerbaijan, but also Georgia-Armenia-Azerbaijan, to treat three countries of the Southern Caucasus from the same angle. With respect to Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization, of course, this balanced financial and adequate financial package for both will be crucial. If this balance is not observed, there will be a lot of disappointment. It is obvious. But, as I said, we are moving on this direction and to finalize the remaining part of our agreement with EU and to sign it. We, in 2018, we initialed the Partnership Priorities Document between EU and Azerbaijan, which had a very important paragraph about territorial integrity, sovereignty and inviolability of international borders of Azerbaijan. That was for the first time. Always before, EU was very reluctant to put such a firm and straightforward wording. Always they were referring to peaceful talks, Minsk Group, etc. But, the Partnership Priorities Document was a very important signal and it encouraged us. I can tell you. And I attended the signing ceremony in Brussels and after that we really started seriously to believe that EU can be a fair broker. What happened after the war clearly demonstrates. Because, there was a kind of vacuum and Minsk Group was dysfunctional. That vacuum is now to a certain degree filled by the EU.”

### **III. The OSCE Minsk Group is virtually defunct**

In April, President Ilham Aliyev made several remarks over the current mandate of the Minsk Group, pointing out that “although the mandate given to the Minsk Group to resolve

the conflict is de jure in force, it can already be considered invalid de facto.” During a meeting dedicated to the results of the first quarter of 2022 on April 12, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “the OSCE has also fully accepted the new realities. I recently had a meeting with the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, and the meeting once again showed that the OSCE also fully accepts the new realities, and this is a very significant event. As for the OSCE Minsk Group, immediately after the war, the Minsk Group co-chairs arrived in Baku. This was their first and last visit to Azerbaijan after the war, and there was sufficient information about that meeting in the media, I do not want to repeat that. Our position has always been unequivocal. Whatever we said during the discussions, we voiced the same theses and opinions in our official statements. We have resolved this conflict ourselves. The Minsk Group was active for 28 years before the second Karabakh war. The co-chair countries have probably made hundreds of visits to Azerbaijan and Armenia over the years. The result is obvious. The result was zero.”

During the post-war period, before the last Russian-Ukrainian war, we expressed our views on this issue. Our foreign minister has met with the Minsk Group co-chairs at various international events, and we said to them, “Tell us what you want to do now? The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has now been resolved, there is no and will not be an administrative territory called Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan. Tell us what you want to do, let us know, and then we will state our position. For more than a year now, we have not received any proposals on this issue. Under the current circumstances, the Minsk Group and its co-chairs are virtually non-functional. This has already been stated by high-ranking officials of these co-chair countries. Therefore,

of course, there can be no talk of any group activity,” President Ilham Aliyev noted.

President Ilham Aliyev welcomed the first telephone conversation between the foreign ministers of the two countries in the past 30 years and said that “the two countries should settle relations between themselves, and those who want to help should render their assistance.”

“I think that the OSCE can play a role as a credible international organization. As I mentioned, during my recent meetings with the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office I stated that civil society representatives, the media and other influential public figures could hold meetings within the framework of the OSCE, i.e. within this format, so that Armenian-Azerbaijani relations could be normalized. This is the issue on the agenda now. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been resolved. Now the issue is the normalization of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, and any international organization, an organization that can contribute to this area is certainly welcome to do that,” the president added.

In his interview with journalist on April 22, the Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan, Head of the Department of Foreign Policy Affairs of the Azerbaijani Presidential Administration, Hikmat Hajiyev, said that the OSCE Minsk Group was in the process of self-liquidation and that the Minsk Group itself made statements about the impossibility of the continuation of joint activities of three Co-Chairs for various reasons, especially in the context of what is going on in Ukraine. On April 8, during the press conference with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed that the US and France refused to cooperate with Russia within the Minsk Group, adding that “as for the activities or the future of the “troika” of

the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk, I don’t know what the future will be, because our so-called French and American partners in this group (...) canceled the “troika” of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, saying that they will not communicate with us in this format.”

Azerbaijan has repeatedly underscored that the conflict has been resolved and there is a new course of relations in the region - the Armenia-Azerbaijan relations, and the Minsk Group does not have any mandate in these relations. “Therefore, the Azerbaijani side has always stated that the Minsk Group should present the roadmap of its further activity,” Hikmat Hajiyev said, adding that “during the post-war period, the Minsk Group has once again demonstrated that it was unable to provide such a document.”

“The statements of the Minsk Group’s co-chairing countries also clarify that the representatives that were sent to the region have other statuses rather than the status of a co-chair,” Hikmat Hajiyev said. “So, the Minsk Group cannot work in this format.” In April, Igor Khovayev, the Russian co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, has been appointed Special Representative of the Russian Foreign Minister for the normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. “Russia intends to contribute to the conclusion of a peace agreement between Yerevan and Baku. To this end, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Igor Khovayev will continue in his new position as Special Representative of the Russian Foreign Minister for assistance in normalizing relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia,” Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said. The US also announced that Andrew Schofer, the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair from the US, was appointed US Department of State Senior Advisor for Caucasus Negotiations. France also announced that Brice Roquefeuil, the co-chair

from France, was charged as the Ambassador of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic for the Eastern Partnership.

In his speech at the 5th Congress of World Azerbaijanis in Shusha on April 22, President Ilham Aliyev underscored once again that talks about the Minsk Group make no sense. Azerbaijan resolved the conflict by military and political means alone, without any mediators, and the fact that high-ranking officials in Armenia are still trying to talk about the Minsk Group is pointless. “The Minsk Group was virtually paralyzed in 2019. The group, which was mandated to address the issue in 1992, has failed to achieve any results,” President Ilham Aliyev said. President Ilham Aliyev also noted that “looking at the actions of this group and proposals in retrospect, we can see again that this group was not established to resolve the problem. We were just a little naive at the time. This group was established not to resolve the problem, but to perpetuate the fact of occupation.”

Delving into the details of how the Minsk Group came apart in 2019, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “in 2019, the group almost ceased its activities. The reason for that was the bizarre behavior of the new Armenian leadership. Because when the new leadership of Armenia came to power in 2018, both the Minsk Group, I must say quite frankly, and we had certain hopes that the criminal junta regime had been overthrown. A new generation of politicians had come to power. We were hoping that they would realize that they were not in a position to fight or wage war with Azerbaijan. Active negotiations for almost a year reinforced these ideas even more. However, in 2019, the Armenian leadership began to take a completely different position. The ludicrous statements voiced by the Armenian leadership virtually put an end to

the process of negotiations. By saying that “Karabakh is Armenia, full stop,” they put an end to the negotiating process, and the Minsk Group, which met with me after this statement, was in a very uncertain situation because it was impossible to hold any talks after this statement. Because the essence of the talks was to liberate the occupied territories.”

President Ilham Aliyev went on to say that “as a matter of fact, the Minsk Group has not been able to take any action, at least for the sake of visibility. But the Armenian leadership went even further. After that, explicit threats were voiced against us. We were threatened with a new war for new lands. But the international community continued to stay tight-lipped over that. This is an obvious threat. It was another threat from an occupier state to the state whose lands were already occupied. In other words, we were threatened with renewed occupation. However, the UN, the OSCE, other organizations or the Minsk Group did not make any statements about that. Inspired by this, of course, the aggressor became even more depraved and actually started to believe in the mythology Armenia had been concocting for decades.”

In his speech, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that “the OSCE understands perfectly well that the Minsk Group no longer exists,” adding that “I was indeed asked a few months ago, before the Russia-Ukraine war, what the Minsk Group should be doing now. I said that 2022 would see the 30th anniversary of their establishment. They will celebrate the anniversary and then retire. But since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, they haven’t had the opportunity to celebrate the anniversary.”

“When I met the representatives of the Minsk Group just after the end of the war, I told them to give a proposal what they are going to do,

what will be their agenda. And I know that it was difficult for them to put forward some practical proposals. But after the Russian-Ukrainian war it was already announced that Minsk Group co-chairmanship is no longer functional. It is dysfunctional. In this respect it shows that the new realities, of course, have their impacts,” the president said, adding that “so, it is important that Armenian government and Armenian political spectrum fully realize the new realities and totally refrains from any kind of attempts to take revenge. First, it will be counter-productive. The result of that, if that happens will be even more painful for Armenia and second, it will be contradictory to the demand of the region and demand of international community to finally achieve a long-lasting piece. From our side, we do everything in order to support the positive trends.”

As Robert M. Cutler succinctly put it in his article in Foreign Policy, “for 30 years, the Minsk Group failed to produce results; the recent victory by Azerbaijani military forces—ending Armenia’s occupation—leaves it with nothing left to do. It is now bankrupt and dead. The sooner it is buried, the sooner energies for real peace and reconciliation, not to mention physical reconstruction, can be turned to the future rather than the past.”

#### **IV. Azerbaijan raises the issue of missing persons during the first Armenia-Azerbaijan war**

President Ilham Aliyev raised the issue of 3,980 Azerbaijanis who went missing during the First Karabakh War in the early 1990s at his meetings with Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejcinovic Buric and Director-General of the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) Kathryn Bomberger in Baku on April 4. The meetings were held as

Baku had discovered yet another mass grave in the village of Farrukh in Karabakh. Azerbaijan has found the remains of about 60 people in mass graves in Karabakh since the end of the 44-Day War. In February, Armenia said it had handed over to Azerbaijan the remains of 108 people who were considered missing in the first Armenia-Azerbaijan war.

During the meeting with Director-General of the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) Kathryn Bomberger, President Ilham Aliyev said that many of the missing Azerbaijanis had been tortured, killed and buried in mass graves by Armenia. The president said that although Azerbaijan had repeatedly appealed to Armenia over this humanitarian issue, Armenia had failed to demonstrate constructive cooperation and goodwill.

President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that one such mass grave had recently been located in the Edilli village of Khojavand, and that the remains of those buried there had been discovered during excavations and submitted to DNA analysis laboratories. In early March, the UN General Assembly and Security Council circulated a letter from Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres about the discovery of mass graves in liberated Khojavand region's Edilli village and Fuzuli city as an official document. In the letter, dated March 2, 2022, Minister Bayramov drew attention to the plight of about 4,000 Azerbaijanis, who went missing in the first Karabakh war.

President Ilham Aliyev underscored that the issue of missing persons was always on the agenda of the state and was also being discussed with the EU and other international institutions. Pointing out that Baku had boosted its technical capabilities in this field,

President Ilham Aliyev noted that new modular laboratories had been set up in the country, special drones and other equipment had been purchased and the professional skills of the specialists involved had been strengthened. Kathryn Bomberger stated her readiness to work closely with Azerbaijan to determine the fate of missing persons. Kathryn Bomberger noted that the organization had operated on a large scale in various countries around the globe, including the Western Balkans, and had played a role in informing the families of thousands of missing people and determining their fate. Underscoring the importance of collecting DNA samples and identifying people through laboratory tests, Kathryn Bomberger said that they were ready to contribute to the creation of a database of missing persons in Azerbaijan, joint excavations in mass graves and professional development of local specialists. Kathryn Bomberger added that determining the fate of missing persons was important in terms of building trust and achieving lasting peace.

President Ilham Aliyev once again raised the issue of 3,980 Azerbaijanis who went missing during the first Armenia-Azerbaijan war in the early 1990s in his telephone conversation with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on April 5. During the phone conversation, Antony Blinken stated that the US attaches importance to the meeting at the level of leaders between Armenia and Azerbaijan held on April 6 in Brussels with the support of the European Union. President Ilham Aliyev underlined Azerbaijan's proposals to ensure peace and stability in the region, normalizing relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, launching negotiations on a peace agreement, and establishing transportation links and communications. Highlighting humanitarian issues, President Ilham Aliyev underlined the

need for Yerevan to clarify the fate of 3,890 Azerbaijanis missing since the first Armenia-Azerbaijan war and provide information on the location of mass graves.

#### **V. Azerbaijan and Italy set to boost bilateral ties**

On April 2, 2022, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov met with his Italian counterpart during the official visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Italian Republic Luigi Di Maio to Azerbaijan. The two Ministers chaired the first meeting of the Strategic Dialogue between the two countries, which was based on the "Joint Declaration on Strengthening the Multidimensional Strategic Partnership" signed during the state visit of the President of Azerbaijan to Italy in February 2020. The meeting focused on Azerbaijan-Italy bilateral strategic partnership, issues of mutual interest on the regional and international agenda. "It was stressed that Azerbaijan and Italy have mutually beneficial cooperation in all areas, Italy is Azerbaijan's largest trading partner, Azerbaijan is Italy's largest supplier of crude oil and the largest export point in the South Caucasus. It was noted that Italian companies successfully operate in the Azerbaijani economy, both in the oil and non-oil sectors, and there are ample opportunities for further deepening economic cooperation," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan noted.

At a meeting with Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, President Ilham Aliyev said that "Azerbaijan is Italy's key trading partner in the South Caucasus, as 95 percent of Italy's trade with the South Caucasus is with Azerbaijan. The numbers are very good, almost \$10 billion last year. I am confident that this figure will increase this year due to additional gas

supplies to Italy,” adding that “there are new opportunities in energy cooperation. For many years, Azerbaijan has been a reliable source of oil and the number one source of oil supply to Italy. Now with the completion of the Southern Gas Corridor project, we have become an important gas supplier and are the third largest supplier of gas. If there is potential to move forward, of course, we will. I was also very pleased with the fact that last year we supplied 7 billion cubic meters of gas, and this year it will be even more.”

As part of the visit, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Italian Republic Luigi di Maio along with Azerbaijan’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Energy Parviz Shahbazov and Minister of Education Emin Amrullayev participated in the groundbreaking ceremony for the joint Italy-Azerbaijan University at the campus of the ADA University in Baku. The newly founded university has been an initiative of President Ilham Aliyev. The agreement for establishment of this university was reached in 2020 during the state visit of President Ilham Aliyev to Italy. The University is established in partnership with five leading Italian Universities, namely Luiss University, Bologna University, Politecnico di Milano, Politecnico di Torino and Sapienza University of Rome. The Memorandum of Understanding on Collaboration for Italy-Azerbaijan University was signed between ADA University and the Italian partner universities in 2021. After the groundbreaking ceremony, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov told reporters that “the opening of the university will be another step in strengthening the Azerbaijani-Italian cooperation.”

Italy was one of the first countries to express support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, as well as an interest in participating in

restoration efforts in Azerbaijan's liberated territories. Thus, Italy and Israel have already begun work on a joint project to transform the liberated Zangilan region into a smart city

As part of the conference on “Azerbaijan-Italy: Path towards a multidimensional strategic partnership”, a meeting was held between Minister of Energy Parviz Shahbazov and a delegation led by Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy Luigi Di Maio at ADA University. The sides discussed the strengthening of energy cooperation between Azerbaijan and Italy. Luigi Di Maio emphasized the role of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) in boosting bilateral energy cooperation. Luigi Di Maio underscored the importance of expanding the capacity of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline.

Minister of Energy Parviz Shahbazov stressed the growing importance of natural gas supply through TAP in energy cooperation with Italy, a largest trading partner of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is a major supplier of energy resources to Italy. Azerbaijan's total investment in the Italian economy is estimated to be around €1.7 billion, with Italy investing approximately €770 million in Azerbaijan. Italy was Azerbaijan's top trade partner in January-February 2022, with a total trade turnover of \$3.1 billion between the two countries. Minister of Energy Parviz Shahbazov also emphasized the possibility of transporting a 10 per cent hydrogen mixture with the expansion of TAP. Italian companies were offered to evaluate the possibilities of this cooperation, noting that the use of offshore wind energy and “green” hydrogen exports to Europe are also on the agenda. Pointing out that 10 billion cubic meters of gas from Azerbaijan have already been delivered to Europe through TAP, Parviz Shahbazov noted that “if the current growth rate continues, we expect that our gas exports to Italy will reach 9.5 billion cubic

meters under long-term and spot contracts by the end of this year. The expansion of TAP can provide more natural gas not only to Italy, but also to other European countries. Therefore, we invite interested parties to take an active part in this process.”

#### **VI. Azerbaijan and Albania pledge to strengthen bilateral ties in energy and tourism sectors**

On April 14, Albania’s Prime Minister Edi Rama paid an official visit to Azerbaijan. During his meeting with Prime Minister Rama, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “for more than a year Azerbaijan became exporter of natural gas to Europe and Albania always was supporting this initiative,” adding that Albania and Azerbaijan are “in one team of countries which implemented successfully this historical project and the importance of the Southern Gas Corridor and Trans Adriatic Pipeline.” In his interview on April 14, Prime Minister Edi Rama noted that Albania and Azerbaijan agreed to take steps forward in the spheres of energy and tourism. “We have very good relations and this is a moment for discussion about how we can strengthen our relations

and how we can go forward with more investments, more tourism, more ties between our people. There is a room for expanding our economic relations. That’s why I came here today and we had a long conversation with President Ilham Aliyev, Prime Minister Ali Asadov. We agreed to take some steps forward in the field of energy and tourism,” Prime Minister Edi Rama noted. The prime minister noted that during the meetings in Azerbaijan he discussed the issue of gas supply. “The technical team will start looking to it and very soon we will have an assessment of what to do next,” Edi Rama added. Furthermore, the prime minister pointed out that Albanian companies are interested in investing in Karabakh. “This is something I mentioned to Prime Minister Ali Asadov and he was very open to consider it,” the prime minister noted. Commenting on the spheres in which Tirana would like to see investment, the prime minister said that energy and tourism are the two directions. “Next year we will have the 30-year anniversary of our diplomatic relations and we will dedicate all week to Azerbaijan in Albania. It would be good to have embassies in both countries,” Prime Minister of Albania concluded.