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### **I. President Ilham Aliyev raises the National Flag in Khankendi**

On October 15, President Ilham Aliyev conducted a visit to the recently liberated areas of Azerbaijan following a successful anti-terrorism operation carried out by the Azerbaijan Armed Forces. During this visit, President Ilham Aliyev symbolically raised the National Flag of Azerbaijan as a gesture representing the reestablishment of Azerbaijan's authority over the entire Garabagh region. President Ilham Aliyev proudly displayed the Azerbaijani tricolor flag in various locations, including the city of Khankendi, as well as the towns of Khojaly, Khojavand, and the settlements of Aghdara and Asgaran, along with the Sarsang Water Reservoir. The liberation of Khankendi, which had served as a key stronghold for an unauthorized separatist regime for over three decades, played a vital role in putting an end to separatism and reinstating Azerbaijani sovereignty over the entire territory. Armenia's refusal to engage constructively in political negotiations to resolve the unlawful occupation of Azerbaijani lands resulted in the 44-Day War in 2020, and its subsequent territorial claims set the stage for the anti-terrorism operation in September.

“The people of Azerbaijan know very well, and I am sure so does the world community, that we wanted to resolve the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict peacefully. For seventeen years, I personally participated in meaningless and fruitless negotiations many times. Why? Because I thought that this issue should be resolved peacefully. But gradually, our hopes dwindled,” President Ilham Aliyev noted

following the flag-raising ceremony in Khankendi.

Following 44-Day War in 2020 and in accordance with the trilateral agreement signed on November 10, 2020, Russia dispatched a temporary peacekeeping mission to Azerbaijan. These peacekeepers were deployed to specific areas within the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan. Paragraph 4 of the agreement stipulated the immediate withdrawal of Armenian army units from the Garabagh region. Regrettably, this provision remained unfulfilled over the past three years. During this time, Armenian armed units in the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan engaged in several provocative actions and offensives, including acts of mine terrorism, resulting in the loss of lives among Azerbaijani servicemen and civilians. Notably, on September 19, a mine explosion in the Khojavand district claimed the lives of four police officers and two civilians. On the same day, two servicemen in the Aghdam district were wounded by Armenian armed units.

Consequently, on September 19, the Azerbaijan Armed Forces initiated localized anti-terrorist operations to neutralize unlawful Armenian armed units and their military infrastructure within the Garabagh region. By the end of the one-day operation on September 20, Azerbaijani military forces had successfully incapacitated artillery systems, radio-electronic warfare equipment, military hardware, ammunition depots, military strongholds, and shelters used by the Armenian army units in the Garabagh region. Furthermore, more than 90 strategic positions and combat posts held by Armenian military forces were brought under Azerbaijan's

control during this operation. A significant number of weapons, ammunition, seven military vehicles, four mortars, one tank, and two infantry fighting vehicles were seized as spoils of war.

On September 20, the Defense Ministry of Azerbaijan officially declared the conclusion of the localized counter-terrorism actions in the Garabagh region after the separatist forces agreed to disarm completely by withdrawing from their positions, relinquishing their arms, and surrendering their military equipment. Azerbaijan Armed Forces promptly initiated the confiscation of weapons, ammunition, and equipment on the same day. Subsequently, on September 21, Azerbaijani authorities hosted representatives of the Armenian residents from Garabagh to discuss their reintegration into Azerbaijani society. Despite Baku's invitations to remain and reintegrate, along with assurances of safeguarding fundamental rights, a significant portion of Armenian residents opted to voluntarily depart the Garabagh region for Armenia.

Meanwhile, on September 28, the self-proclaimed leadership of the Armenian puppet regime in the Garabagh region announced its dissolution. A relevant decree was signed by the regime's self-declared "president," Samvel Shahramanyan. This move also called upon the Armenian residents of the Garabagh region to acquaint themselves with the reintegration conditions presented by Azerbaijan and make independent, individual decisions regarding the possibility of staying in or returning to the Garabagh region.

"The Patriotic War lasted only 44 days. Throughout those days, I repeatedly

addressed the people and, at the same time, addressed the enemy, urging it to lay down arms and provide a timetable of when they would vacate our lands. And then we would be ready to stop the war. After we had liberated Shusha, our sacred home and the impregnable fortress, the enemy realized its defeat and waved the white flag, and we had stopped the war," President Ilham Aliyev noted.

In his speech, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the country's remarkable progress and its journey over the past two decades to restore its territorial integrity. President Ilham Aliyev described the primary objective of raising the Azerbaijani flag in all its territories and cities that were occupied, highlighting the unity and hard work of the Azerbaijani people to achieve this goal.

President Ilham Aliyev stressed Azerbaijan's growing strength and influence on the global stage, noting its recognition and the significance of its actions for the region and beyond. President Ilham Aliyev discussed the political and legal groundwork created for resolving the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and the substantial economic growth, which resulted in the economy growing over four times.

The President emphasized that a strong economy and a powerful army were essential for achieving absolute independence. He celebrated the development of a powerful Azerbaijani military and its remarkable performance in the Patriotic War that led to Armenia's capitulation in just 44 days. President Ilham Aliyev also mentioned the recent counterterrorism operation that lasted only 23 hours, displaying Azerbaijan's strength.

President Ilham Aliyev commended the young generation of Azerbaijan, ready to defend the motherland, and paid tribute to the martyrs. President Ilham Aliyev expressed pride in the Azerbaijani Armed Forces, highlighting the heroism, patriotism, and self-sacrifice of soldiers and officers.

President Ilham Aliyev discussed the inevitability of the recent counterterrorism operation, stating that peaceful negotiations had been attempted for many years but the hope for a peaceful resolution faded as Armenia showed no intention of returning occupied lands. President Ilham Aliyev criticized international mediators for wanting to perpetuate the conflict and highlighted Azerbaijan's unwavering stance against the situation, stating that it would never accept the creation of a second Armenian state on Azerbaijani land.

President Ilham Aliyev reflected on the recent victory of Azerbaijan in restoring its territorial integrity, emphasizing that the decision to stop the Second Karabakh War on November 10 was the right one, and the Azerbaijani people understood that they would achieve their goal. President Ilham Aliyev underscored the strong support and confidence the Azerbaijani people had in his leadership, highlighting their trust in his ability to navigate the challenges and achieve their objectives. The President mentioned that the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Heydar Aliyev, the National Leader, had been marked by concrete actions that honored his legacy and his modest character. President Ilham Aliyev explained the symbolic significance of celebrating Heydar Aliyev's 100th birthday in Shusha, a city with a special place in the hearts of Azerbaijani

people, and how the souls of the National Leader and all those who did not live to see this day were rejoicing.

## **II. Azerbaijan's renewable horizon: Charting a course to regional leadership**

In Azerbaijan, a new era is dawning in the realm of energy strategy as the nation embarks on the journey of exporting electricity generated from renewable sources. President Ilham Aliyev has made the expansion of renewable energy a top priority, with the ambitious goal of increasing the share of renewable energy in the country's total electricity production to 30 percent by 2030. Azerbaijan is blessed with an abundant renewable energy potential, boasting more than 27 gigawatts (GW) of capacity, which includes onshore wind and solar energy. Furthermore, within the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea, an additional 157 GW of wind energy potential has been identified. In May 2021, President Ilham Aliyev unveiled his intention to transform the entire Garabagh region into a "green energy zone," emphasizing the commitment to sustainable, eco-friendly energy sources.

Azerbaijan has set bold and forward-looking targets for its energy landscape. By the year 2027, the nation aims to generate 3 GW of wind energy and 1 GW of solar energy, with the remarkable ambition of exporting 80 percent of this clean energy production. Looking even further ahead, the country envisions expanding its renewable energy capacity to a minimum of 6 GW by 2037.

Azerbaijan has reached a remarkable milestone in its pursuit of an ambitious energy strategy with the official inauguration of the Garadagh Solar Power Plant, boasting a capacity of 230 MW. This solar power facility, the largest of its kind in the South Caucasus, had its construction agreement signed in 2020. On October 26, President Ilham Aliyev initiated its operation during the official ceremony, marking a historic moment in the country's energy landscape and setting the stage for many more to come.

At the opening ceremony of the plant, President Ilham Aliyev hailed this occasion as a pivotal moment in Azerbaijan's history, underscoring that it is the first of many such milestones in the nation's journey towards a sustainable energy future. "We plan to work together to produce in phases up to 10 gigawatts of renewables and that will be a total revolution in the energy development of the region, because Azerbaijan is a country where the first oil in the world was produced in the middle of 19th century. The first oil from offshore fields was produced in the middle of the last century. And now, having in mind that still we are rich in fossil fuel resources, we are moving towards green agenda. This is a deliberate choice. This is our contribution not only to the future development of Azerbaijan, but to the issues related to the climate change," President Ilham Aliyev underscored.

In addition to the Garadagh Solar Power Plant, Azerbaijan has forged agreements with Masdar, outlining a comprehensive strategy for the development of green energy projects with a combined capacity of 1000 MW. These projects include the establishment of a 445 MW solar power plant in Bilasuvar, a 315 MW

solar power plant in Neftchala, and a 240 MW wind power plant in Absheron-Garadagh.

These developments highlight Azerbaijan's commitment to green and sustainable energy solutions and its role as a regional leader in the renewable energy sector. The inauguration of the Garadagh Solar Power Plant and the strategic collaborations with Masdar are pivotal steps in the nation's journey toward a cleaner, more environmentally conscious energy landscape, benefiting not only Azerbaijan but also the broader South Caucasus region.

In a recent and pivotal move, the governments of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary have come together to sign a strategic partnership agreement for the development and transmission of green energy. This agreement not only underscores the continued demand for Azerbaijani energy resources in Western Europe but also represents a significant leap in promoting sustainable energy solutions.

Central to this ambitious endeavor is the plan to establish a formidable 1,195-kilometer power transmission line boasting a capacity of 1,000 MW, seamlessly connecting Georgia and Romania. This infrastructure project will be accompanied by the installation of a digital connecting cable, further cementing the commitment to a clean energy future. This initiative not only serves as a testament to Azerbaijan's dedication to energy security but also showcases the nation's pivotal role in advancing green energy solutions that benefit not only Azerbaijan but its European partners as well.

"Among our plans is to work actively with our partners to create energy corridor, Caspian-EU energy corridor. Last December, a corresponding agreement was signed. We have already started our activity, the steering committee already gathered couple of times. In several months, we will have a full feasibility study of the new energy security project – Green Energy Corridor, integrated transmission production and consumption facilities, including the electric cable under the Black Sea. At this moment, the feasibility study is being prepared for 4 gigawatts of renewables," President Ilham Aliyev pointed out.

Azerbaijan is taking proactive steps to enhance its electricity production through renewable energy sources, positioning itself as a future provider of clean energy to Europe. Notably, on January 9, 2020, pivotal agreements were forged to launch pilot projects in renewable energy, with active involvement from Saudi Arabia's ACWA Power and the UAE's Masdar. These agreements encompass the implementation of pilot initiatives, including the construction of a 240 MW wind power facility in collaboration with ACWA Power and a 200 MW solar power plant in partnership with Masdar.

Furthermore, on December 30, 2020, a series of fresh investment agreements concerning power purchase and grid connectivity were solidified, in conjunction with ACWA Power. And on January 13, 2022, a groundbreaking ceremony marked the initiation of the Khizi-Absheron wind power station project, an effort in partnership with ACWA Power. Other projects envision the generation of a colossal 25 GW of renewable solar and wind energy,

encompassing both onshore and offshore installations. Among these potential projects, Masdar will lead the charge with the development of 10 GW, Fortescue is set to contribute 12 GW, and ACWA Power has pledged 2.5 GW. Another milestone in Azerbaijan's journey towards a cleaner energy future came on December 15, 2022, as Azerbaijan's Ministry of Energy and Australian Fortescue Future Industries (FFI) signed a groundbreaking agreement. This pact outlines a collaborative effort in exploring and developing renewable energy and green hydrogen projects in Azerbaijan. The scope of this agreement extends to research and the execution of projects, with the potential to yield a combined capacity of up to 12 GW in renewable energy and green hydrogen ventures in Azerbaijan. These initiatives exemplify Azerbaijan's resolute commitment to sustainable energy and its active role in shaping the green energy landscape, fostering not only its own energy security but also the opportunity to provide Europe with clean and reliable electricity in the years to come.

### **III. Coexistence in the South Caucasus: Georgia's unique position in mediating peace**

On October 8, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan visited Georgia and held discussions with Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili. The leaders addressed various aspects of their strategic cooperation, with a particular focus on energy, transport, and logistics. The meeting also delved into the normalization process between Azerbaijan and Armenia, where Georgia expressed its

willingness to play a role in mediating the peace process. The potential for trilateral cooperation among the South Caucasus nations was a highlight of their discussions, emphasizing the changing dynamics in the region.

The discussions between President Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister Garibashvili emphasized the importance of the strategic cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia. The leaders explored opportunities in trade, energy, sustainability, and infrastructure development, reflecting their shared commitment to advancing regional cooperation. An essential aspect of their meeting was Georgia's possible role in mediating the normalization process between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Prime Minister Garibashvili reaffirmed Georgia's neutral and unbiased position in the peace process and expressed readiness to contribute through mediation or facilitation. He highlighted the importance of creating a friendly and constructive format for the South Caucasus and emphasized that regional affairs and development should be determined collectively. "Georgia has always held a neutral, unbiased position in this process and we stand ready to make our humble contribution through mediation or facilitation – establishment of a friendly format in general," Prime Minister Garibashvili noted, adding that "Tbilisi is always ready to take part in this process. Our future should be peaceful, stable and we – all three countries of the South Caucasus – should be able to decide on our own about the regional affairs and our development ahead."

President Ilham Aliyev underscored the importance of working towards a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, a goal that could reshape the political landscape of the South Caucasus. President Ilham Aliyev expressed optimism about the prospect of such an agreement and emphasized the potential for enhanced cooperation in various fields, including transport, energy security, trade, and mutual investment, in a trilateral format involving Georgia. Azerbaijan and Georgia's discussions reflect the evolving dynamics in the South Caucasus, as countries seek to strengthen regional cooperation and play a constructive role in mediating regional conflicts. Georgia's willingness to participate in the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and President Ilham Aliyev's optimism about a peace treaty, offer hope for a more peaceful and stable South Caucasus.

The negotiations in South Caucasus have taken place through various formats, including the Brussels format, quadrilateral meetings in the United States, and five-party meetings involving France and Germany. These formats have often been marred by geopolitical divisions and interests, making it challenging to achieve tangible results. Recent cancellation of a meeting between Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Granada, Spain, due to France's destructive position, underscores the limitations of existing formats.

In contrast to major geopolitical players, Georgia is a relatively small country without significant ambitions in the region. Its historical, cultural, and geographical proximity to both Armenia and Azerbaijan makes it a

favorable venue for negotiations. Georgia has already demonstrated its potential as a mediator, hosting a meeting between the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia. One of Georgia's strengths as a mediator is the coexistence of Armenian and Azerbaijani communities within its borders. These communities live in harmony, showcasing the country's potential to facilitate dialogue and understanding between the two parties. This unique aspect can contribute to creating a conducive atmosphere for negotiations.

Georgian Vice Parliament Speaker Gia Volski has expressed confidence in Georgia's ability to successfully mediate peace talks, emphasizing the country's high reputation and its potential to engage in substantive discussions.

Azerbaijanis constitute the largest ethnic minority in Georgia, residing in five distinct districts. Similarly, ethnic Georgians living in Azerbaijan have maintained their identity, reflecting the coexistence and harmony among different ethnic groups. This model of peaceful cohabitation serves as a valuable example for fostering bilateral relations between countries and can be applied to Azerbaijan and Armenia once the rights of ethnically cleansed Azerbaijani people to return are ensured.

The South Caucasus region stands at the threshold of a transformative period marked by the potential for peace and stability. If the parties involved succeed in this endeavor, it will open up new prospects for the development of the entire region, resulting in a different geo-economic landscape. Azerbaijan sees the current situation as a

genuine opportunity, not only for itself but also for the entire region, to establish a new regional order that prioritizes peace and cooperation. Georgia's proximity to the conflict zone and its genuine interest in peace make it an ideal candidate for mediating the peace process. This mediation initiative should be actively supported by the international community. Azerbaijan has responded positively to this offer, and now it is Armenia's turn to consider this path towards reconciliation and lasting peace.

The 4th Tbilisi Silk Road Forum, held on October 26, 2023, served as a platform for key regional stakeholders, including Azerbaijani Prime Minister Ali Asadov and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, to present their perspectives on regional peace. The forum, hosted by Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, aimed to foster lasting peace in the South Caucasus region and featured a trilateral meeting between the prime ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia, mediated by Garibashvili. This meeting was conducted behind closed doors, highlighting Georgia's proactive involvement in the Azerbaijan-Armenia peace negotiations.

Azerbaijan has consistently emphasized Tbilisi's role as a mediator and has actively encouraged cooperation between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The recent trilateral meeting between the prime ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia underscores Tbilisi's renewed role in the ongoing Azerbaijan-Armenia normalization process.

The prospect of tripartite and bilateral meetings in Tbilisi holds significant promise for catalyzing Azerbaijan-Georgia-Armenia



trilateral cooperation, laying a robust foundation for enduring peace in the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan has been successful in establishing various trilateral cooperation formats in its foreign policy, exemplified by the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey partnership, which has achieved remarkable progress in terms of regional cooperation. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized this point, underscoring the potential for regional cooperation in energy security, transportation, trade, and mutual capital investment if a peace agreement is reached with Armenia. This offers Armenia a valuable opportunity to participate in regional energy and transport initiatives.

Armenia could draw inspiration from the peace and cooperation established between Azerbaijan and Georgia. Over the past three decades, Azerbaijan has become a reliable energy partner and investor for Georgia, while Georgia has evolved into a crucial transit country, efficiently facilitating the movement of Azerbaijani energy resources to global markets. This partnership is built on mutual reliance and demonstrates the benefits of peaceful cooperation in the region. Prioritizing peace and collaboration over conflict and animosity is crucial for ensuring a brighter future for generations to come. Trilateral cooperation involving Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia has the potential to transform the South Caucasus into a region characterized by peace, stability, and prosperity.

The Brussels process has experienced setbacks, increasing the importance of Georgia as a promising new negotiation platform. Conducting peace talks in Georgia holds significant implications for regional cooperation and normalization. Georgia

maintains close relationships with both Armenia and Azerbaijan and can facilitate the signing of a peace agreement between its neighboring countries. This development is crucial for regional stability and the harmonious coexistence of Azerbaijani and Armenian communities within Georgia, further exemplifying the potential for peaceful coexistence in the region. Therefore, continuing peace talks in Georgia may lead to the signing of a meaningful peace agreement. Georgia's emergence as a mediator offers renewed hope for progress in the Azerbaijan-Armenia peace process and regional stability.

The South Caucasus region is at a crossroads, and the potential for peace and stability is within reach. The coexistence of ethnic communities in Georgia and Azerbaijan serves as a model for reconciliation and bilateral relations, offering hope for the future. International support for Georgia's mediation initiative is essential, and all parties involved must recognize their responsibility in the quest for a peaceful South Caucasus. The region's future, marked by cooperation and prosperity, hinges on the decisions made in this critical moment.

#### **IV. Azerbaijan pushes for regional solutions in the South Caucasus**

Azerbaijan's successful restoration of territorial integrity and sovereignty over the Garabagh region has eliminated a longstanding obstacle to a comprehensive peace in the region. The region has been hostage to the interests of great powers for three decades, but the removal of this major obstacle opens up new possibilities for

cooperation and stability in the South Caucasus.

While Azerbaijan has shown support for continued peace talks with Armenia mediated by the EU, it was dissatisfied with the Granada Declaration, which was signed without Azerbaijan's participation. On October 4, President Ilham Aliyev canceled a meeting with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, along with European leaders, including European Council President Charles Michel, French President Emmanuel Macron, and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. This cancellation was a signal of Azerbaijan's preference for a more regionally-centric approach in resolving disputes in the South Caucasus. Charles Michel later invited the leaders of both countries to a meeting in Brussels at the end of October, but the meeting did not take place.

The declaration, signed during the European Political Community (EPC) meeting in Granada on October 5, 2023, lacked Azerbaijani involvement and sought to gain its support retroactively. However, President Ilham Aliyev expressed his reservations during a phone discussion with Charles Michel, President of the European Council, deeming the adoption of the Granada Declaration without Azerbaijan's approval inappropriate and unlikely to yield positive results. Azerbaijan had advocated for Türkiye's inclusion in the peace talks due to Türkiye's role as an ally and a key regional player. Türkiye's participation could have broadened the scope of regional reconciliation efforts, considering its direct involvement in the Azerbaijan-Armenia normalization process. However, opposition from Armenia and France led to Azerbaijan's

absence from the Granada summit, resulting in the adoption of the declaration without Azerbaijan's consent.

Hikmet Hajiyev, the Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan and Head of the Foreign Policy Department of the Presidential Administration, clarified that Baku's decision to boycott the summit was a response to France and Germany's reluctance to include Türkiye in the talks. This move also served as a protest against the pro-Armenian positions taken by the French side. Hikmet Hajiyev pointed out that France endangers regional peace and stability in the South Caucasus with its controversial policies. On October 3, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna traveled to Yerevan and underscored France's willingness to supply Armenia with arms. Azerbaijan no longer considers France a neutral mediator capable of making constructive contributions to regional peace efforts. Baku believes the region's problems should be discussed and resolved within a regional framework. This emphasis on a regional approach aligns with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's earlier proposal to establish a new format for addressing Armenian-Azerbaijani disputes. President Erdogan's proposal called for the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan to meet in a quadrilateral format, along with the presidents of Türkiye and Russia.

Simultaneously, South Caucasus countries are exploring other avenues for cooperation in addressing regional disputes. In his recent visit to Georgia on October 8, President Aliyev highlighted the potential role that Georgia could play in normalizing Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. Georgian Prime Minister

Irakli Garibashvili expressed his government's impartiality in the peace process and stated their willingness to mediate. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the historical context and geographic factors, indicating that Georgia's proposal to mediate peace talks would be an appropriate course of action. "If Armenia agrees, the heads of our relevant authorities can immediately come to Georgia for both bilateral and trilateral meetings," President Ilham Aliyev noted.

Efforts to foster regional dialogue and cooperation in the South Caucasus have faced both promising proposals and enduring challenges. In 2021, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili introduced the Peaceful Neighborhood Initiative, aiming to promote peace and stability in the region. This proposal, formed on the "3+2" format involving Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, along with the European Union and the United States, held the promise of facilitating dialogue and confidence-building to address common regional issues. However, the initiative ultimately faltered, revealing the complexities of regional dynamics. Prime Minister Garibashvili's Peaceful Neighborhood Initiative, based on the "3+2" format, sought to bring Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia together with the European Union and the United States. The initiative aimed to promote peace and stability in the South Caucasus by fostering dialogue and trust-building among regional actors. Regrettably, this proposal did not yield the expected results, emphasizing the challenges in achieving consensus and cooperation in the region.

Azerbaijan has persistently advocated for the establishment of a trilateral format for

discussions among the South Caucasus countries. The Munich Security Conference in February 2023 presented a notable opportunity for Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to engage at the highest level in a panel covering the South Caucasus. However, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan chose not to participate alongside his counterparts from Azerbaijan and Georgia. Armenia's cautious approach to the trilateral format remains unclear, underscoring the complexities surrounding regional cooperation. Despite the challenges in achieving multilateral cooperation, there have been instances of engagement between South Caucasus nations. A significant exception occurred in July 2022 when the Armenian foreign minister met with his Azerbaijani counterpart in Tbilisi, marking the first bilateral dialogue between the two countries in this format. While such interactions are positive developments, they underscore the cautious and selective nature of regional engagement, leaving the prospect of sustained multilateral cooperation uncertain.

At the same time, the "3+3" format, comprising Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, along with Russia, Iran, and Türkiye, has emerged as a potential initiative for regional cooperation and conflict resolution in the South Caucasus. This configuration was introduced following the 44-Day War, in November 2020, reflecting a changing landscape in the region. While Georgia has abstained from participating due to its territorial conflict with Russia, the initiative, even in a "2+3" format without Georgia, has faced challenges, including Russia's actions in Ukraine and Iran's assertive policies in the

region. The "3+3" format has gained momentum, with a recent meeting of foreign ministers held in Tehran on October 23, approximately two years after the initial gathering of deputy foreign ministers in Moscow in December 2021. During this meeting, the participants emphasized the significance of platforms like the Consultative Regional Platform "3+3" in fostering constructive dialogue and mutually beneficial cooperation among regional countries. Despite Georgia's current abstention from the format due to its ongoing territorial conflict with Russia, the foreign ministers confirmed that the platform remains open to Georgia's participation. However, Georgia has not indicated any willingness to join, further highlighting the complexities surrounding the inclusion of all regional actors.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov underscored the importance of the 3+3 platform in complementing existing bilateral and multilateral cooperation formats. Minister Bayramov highlighted its potential to enhance security, stability, and economic growth in the region. Minister Bayramov stressed the significance of respecting sovereignty, territorial integrity, borders, and non-interference in internal affairs as foundational principles for collective efforts and regional collaboration. In this context, the emphasis was put on the importance of joint transport networks, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project and the North-South Transport Corridor. Minister Bayramov particularly emphasized the role of transportation networks in enhancing regional connectivity. The commissioning of transport links between Azerbaijan's East Zangezur

economic region and Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic via Iran's territory is expected to facilitate mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation and create a new connection artery that enhances the transport and transit potential in Eurasia. Minister Bayramov reaffirmed Azerbaijan's commitment to ending the occupation of its territories and restoring sovereignty. Minister Bayramov proposed a fair and equitable peace agreement based on mutual respect for each other's legitimate interests, emphasizing the need for Armenia's constructive approach to expedite the peace process.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian reiterated the joint efforts between Baku and Tehran to reestablish a direct connection between Azerbaijan's mainland and Nakhchivan through Iran. He described the current moment as a historic opportunity for all countries involved and emphasized the importance of peace, cooperation, and development in the Caucasus, marking the end of the long-standing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Türkiye's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan emphasized the role of regional transport links in accelerating the normalization and peace processes. He stressed that comprehensive peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia is pivotal for regional stability and called for the opening of transport links. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov acknowledged that the main unresolved issue, the status of Garabagh, has been addressed with both parties recognizing it as part of Azerbaijan. He emphasized the need for practical steps, including the preparation of a peace treaty, border delineation, and the

establishment of economic and transport ties, to fully normalize relations and pave the way for lasting peace. The Consultative Regional Platform "3+3" summit in Tehran underscores the evolving dynamics in the South Caucasus, offering a promising avenue for cooperation, development, and peace. The region has suffered from a protracted conflict, but the willingness of all involved nations to engage in dialogue and pursue practical solutions bodes well for the future.

The "3+3" format and other regional initiatives reflect the evolving dynamics in the South Caucasus as countries seek ways to address regional disputes and foster cooperation. The region's complex geopolitical landscape, marked by historical conflicts and power struggles, underscores the difficulties in achieving a unified approach. Nevertheless, continued dialogue and diplomatic efforts will be essential in building consensus and promoting lasting peace and stability in the region. While proposals like the Peaceful Neighborhood Initiative and Baku's trilateral format suggest a commitment to regional dialogue, challenges persist in bringing all parties to the table. Achieving lasting peace and cooperation in the region will require persistent efforts and a shared commitment to dialogue, confidence-building, and practical solutions to the region's complex challenges.

Furthermore, the counter-terror measures in September 2023 which led to the elimination of the illegal puppet regime in the territories of Azerbaijan signifies a turning point in the prolonged conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Both sides have acknowledged each other's territorial integrity, and Armenia has formally recognized Garabagh as part of

Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan has categorically dismissed alarmist claims made by certain political and expert circles. Baku has made it clear that it harbors no intentions of launching a military operation against Armenia in the Zangezur region, and it acknowledges this region as part of Armenia. "We recognize that this is the sovereign territory of Armenia. However, it is important for us to know how the other side will ensure traffic safety along the corridor. We need reliable guarantees for the safety of every passenger who takes a train from the main part of Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan or back," Elchin Amirbayov, the representative of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on special assignments, said in an interview with the BBC News Russian in October.

In a recent interview with POLITICO, Hikmet Hajiyev, the Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan and Head of the Foreign Policy Department of the Presidential Administration, also addressed the issue of the Zangezur corridor, offering insights into Azerbaijan's perspective. Hikmet Hajiyev began by emphasizing that Azerbaijan's primary goal is to establish transportation links and enhance connectivity in the region through bilateral cooperation. The Zangezur corridor, initially considered a promising avenue for achieving this objective, is now under reconsideration. Hikmet Hajiyev explained, "Our agenda was solely focused on establishing transportation links and connectivity through the context of bilateral interaction. We no longer find the project appealing; we can accomplish this with Iran instead. It is still on the table, but the

Armenian side must demonstrate a genuine interest in it."

Azerbaijan's stance highlights the importance of mutual commitment and collaboration in addressing regional concerns. The Zangezur corridor could be a valuable asset for both countries, promoting economic development and regional stability. However, this vision can only be realized if Armenia actively expresses its interest in participating in this initiative.

Hikmet Hajiyev refuted Armenia's false claims that Azerbaijan has intentions to "seize Zangezur." The baseless allegation that Azerbaijan seeks to annex Zangezur has been a major theme in anti-Azerbaijani narratives spread by Armenia in the last few months. Azerbaijan's denial of these allegations underscores its commitment to peaceful negotiations and constructive dialogue. The Zangezur corridor, if developed, has the potential to promote economic growth, regional integration, and stability. However, it can only be realized if Armenia shows a genuine interest in working together with Azerbaijan to achieve common goals. As negotiations continue, the spotlight remains on Armenia, with the expectation that they will take steps to express their interest in the opening of the Zangezur corridor, fostering the opportunity for collaborative regional development and cooperation.

On October 30, President Ilham Aliyev took a significant step in enhancing the country's infrastructure and regional connectivity. In a decisive move, President Ilham Aliyev signed a decree aimed at advancing the construction of a new road that will link the Horadiz-Jabrayil-Zangilan-Aghband highway to Iran. This

ambitious infrastructure project is accompanied by the construction of a bridge over the Aras River, which is set to bolster transportation and connectivity in the region.

To fund this vital infrastructure development, a total of 14 million Azerbaijani manat, equivalent to approximately \$8.2 million, will be allocated from the reserve fund of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as designated in the state budget for the year 2023. This financial commitment underscores the government's dedication to improving transportation links, trade, and regional collaboration.

The responsibility for overseeing the allocation and management of these funds falls under the purview of the State Agency of Azerbaijan Automobile Roads. This agency will play a pivotal role in ensuring that the construction of the new road and bridge proceeds smoothly and efficiently. To facilitate the financial aspects of this decree, the Ministry of Finance of Azerbaijan has been tasked with providing the necessary financing, as outlined in the aforementioned decree. The ministry will play a crucial role in overseeing the allocation and disbursement of the allocated funds.

In addition to the financial and administrative aspects, the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan has been entrusted with addressing any issues that may arise as a result of the implementation of this presidential decree. This demonstrates the government's commitment to ensuring that the project progresses without undue delays or challenges.

The construction of the road from the Horadiz-Jabrayil-Zangilan-Aghband highway to Iran,

along with the construction of the bridge over the Aras River, holds great promise for Azerbaijan and the broader region. This strategic infrastructure project is poised to enhance trade, facilitate the movement of goods and people, and foster closer ties with neighboring countries. It reflects Azerbaijan's commitment to modernizing its transportation networks and promoting regional connectivity, which will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the nation's economic development and regional cooperation.

In another significant development for the economic landscape of Azerbaijan, in October, President Ilham Aliyev has signed a decree that expands the territory of the Alat Free Economic Zone. This expansion, encompassing an additional 23.74 hectares, underscores the government's commitment to fostering economic growth and development within the region. The Alat Free Economic Zone has been a focal point of Azerbaijan's economic strategy, aimed at attracting investment, promoting trade, and creating favorable conditions for businesses. This zone is designed to facilitate a range of economic activities, including manufacturing, logistics, and trade, with the ultimate goal of driving economic diversification and prosperity. The expansion of the Alat Free Economic Zone comes as part of a broader effort to bolster the country's economic infrastructure. President Aliyev's decree reflects a commitment to creating an environment that is conducive to business growth and investment. This expansion is also a testament to the government's recognition of the strategic importance of the Alat Free Economic Zone. Situated in a prime location near the Caspian

Sea, it holds the potential to serve as a vital hub for trade between Europe and Asia, capitalizing on Azerbaijan's unique geographical position. As the Alat Free Economic Zone continues to expand, it is likely to play an increasingly crucial role in Azerbaijan's economic diversification and regional trade aspirations.

Armenia and Azerbaijan are now on the cusp of a potential peace treaty, with prospects for its conclusion in the near future. This situation presents the opportunity for a fresh beginning in the South Caucasus, marked by enhanced stability and a more tranquil environment. Nevertheless, there are substantial risks that could pose threats to regional peace and security. To mitigate these challenges, the three countries in the region—Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—must take steps toward deeper integration.

The potential for regional integration in the South Caucasus is substantial, with numerous economic and social benefits awaiting the countries in the region. However, to fully realize this potential, existing disputes, particularly those between Armenia and Azerbaijan, need to be resolved. Additionally, a unified approach to address pressing geopolitical and other challenges that threaten regional peace and stability is essential. Just as the Baltic countries successfully integrated by avoiding contradictory foreign policy strategies and pursuing a common agenda, the South Caucasus must do the same to achieve cooperation and integration. The efforts by the leaders of Georgia and Azerbaijan to organize meetings involving all three regional nations in Tbilisi and to facilitate future peace talks between Baku and Yerevan in the Georgian

capital are promising steps in this direction. The South Caucasus would benefit from a cooperation and consultation platform involving the three local countries and coordinated foreign policy approaches to develop joint solutions to shared challenges.

#### **V. Armenia continues to misinform the international community**

In October, Armenia's Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, addressed the European Parliament, reaffirming Armenia's aggressive stance and making allegations against Azerbaijan. His statements demonstrate Armenia's determination to undermine the prospects of a peace agreement while maintaining a confrontational approach. Armenia's allegations against Azerbaijan are jarring, especially considering Armenia's claims to be a peace-loving, democratic country that respects international law. However, Armenia has not abandoned its claims against Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Armenia accuses Azerbaijan of "ethnic cleansing" and mistreatment of local Armenians who voluntarily relocated to Armenia. These accusations are unfounded and contradict the reports and statements of UN agencies that have visited the region and are active in Armenia. Moreover, Prime Minister Pashinyan's statements on the safety of Armenians in the Garabagh region are inconsistent, highlighting Armenia's history of manipulating facts and history.

Prime Minister Pashinyan references the principles of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of borders, as well as the non-use of force, while

forgetting that Azerbaijan presented five basic principles to Armenia immediately after the 44-day war. Armenia has violated these principles for more than 30 years, including during Pashinyan's term.

Pashinyan's claims about the "extraterritoriality" of the Lachin road is also baseless. Armenia has previously misused this road contrary to the Trilateral Statement co-signed by the Prime Minister. In contrast, Azerbaijan has fulfilled its obligations to guarantee the road's security and established a border checkpoint to prevent malign acts by Armenia. Azerbaijan maintains sovereignty over all roads within its territory, and attempts to prove otherwise lack a basis.

Armenia's allegations against Azerbaijan and Türkiye regarding a blockade are divorced from reality. Armenia's self-imposed isolation from regional ventures due to its military aggression and territorial assertions is widely recognized. It appears that Armenia persists in this isolation despite Azerbaijan's reclamation of its territories. Armenia is fully aware of its obligation to facilitate unrestricted movement of people, vehicles, and goods in both directions while ensuring security in this regard. Armenia is also obliged to oversee the construction of new transportation routes linking western Azerbaijan to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. Unfortunately, Armenia is missing out on yet another opportunity in this regard. The recent agreement to construct a road and railway connecting Azerbaijan to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic through Iran's territory underscores Azerbaijan's consistent efforts to foster the development of alternative



transportation routes in the region, unlike Armenia.

Despite historic opportunities for Azerbaijan-Armenia reconciliation and the potential for transforming the South Caucasus into a region of peace and collaboration, the Prime Minister of Armenia's persistent aggressive rhetoric, following the elimination of the threat from the Armenian puppet regime and illegal armed forces in the Garabagh region, undermines the prospects for peace.

Moreover, the statement issued by the Armenian Foreign Ministry on October 4, protesting the arrest of members of a separatist puppet regime created by Armenia on Azerbaijani soil, once again demonstrates the long-standing issue of Armenia's aggressive policies and actions against Azerbaijan. This statement not only displays Armenia's failure to abandon its hostile stance but also attempts to justify the actions of those who have been arrested. The statement from the Armenian Foreign Ministry is a stark reminder that Armenia has yet to fully renounce its aggressive attitude. This refusal to change course raises serious questions about its commitment to peaceful coexistence and regional stability.

Armenia's attempt to justify the actions of the arrested puppet regime members is concerning. These individuals face charges related to aggression against Azerbaijan, separatism, terrorist acts, crimes against peace and humanity, and war crimes. The arrest is not an act of aggression but a step toward justice, aimed at holding accountable those responsible for grave crimes.

The arrests are part of a criminal investigation initiated under the relevant articles of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan. Their primary goal is to restore justice and accountability for crimes committed during Armenia's occupation. These actions should be seen as a necessary step toward ensuring that justice prevails. Armenia's refusal to let go of unjustifiable legal claims, despite the rulings against it at the International Court of Justice, indicates a lack of commitment to the principles of international law. These actions only serve to further undermine the prospects for peace and normalization with Azerbaijan. The Armenian Foreign Ministry's statement not only fails to encourage the return of Armenian residents who voluntarily left Azerbaijan but also fans the flames of racial and ethnic hatred.

On October 10, Armenia's Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, made additional allegations against Azerbaijan. His statements reveal Armenia's continued reliance on political manipulations and distorted interpretations of facts. Azerbaijan has consistently been a proponent of peace initiatives, such as the peace principles, peace treaty, opening of communications, and demarcation. In contrast, Armenia has frequently avoided participation in various platforms without valid reasons. Azerbaijan's commitment to pursuing peace is well-known, as it respects the efforts of all mediators. Azerbaijan's successful clearance of remnants of Armenian armed forces and the puppet regime from its territory on September 20, 2023, has created significant opportunities for peace in the region. It is now essential for Armenia to refrain from making territorial claims and interfering with the

sovereignty of Azerbaijan and its other neighbors. Armenia's constant references to the principles of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of borders, as well as the non-use of force, are ironic given Armenia's history of violating these principles over more than three decades. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, has consistently adhered to these principles and has not distorted them. Armenia's unconstructive stance is evident in its failure to fulfill its obligations within the Trilateral Statement, which includes ensuring unhindered movement of citizens, vehicles, and cargo in both directions and guaranteeing security in this regard. Moreover, Armenia's reluctance to facilitate the construction of new transport communications connecting western Azerbaijan to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic illustrates its self-isolation policy. In contrast, Azerbaijan is actively contributing to regional development by promoting alternative transport routes.

Armenia's emphasis on territorial integrity and delimitation is perplexing. Delimitation is not solely based on maps but also relies on international legal documents mutually agreed upon by both countries. Armenia has not delimited its borders with any of its neighbors due to its territorial claims, making its demand for one specific map as a reference source meaningless. Armenia's claims that Azerbaijan allegedly occupied territories of some Armenian villages are false. In violation of international law and humanitarian principles, Armenia occupied eight Azerbaijani villages and perpetrated mass massacres against the local population.

In conclusion, while historical opportunities have arisen for the normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the signing of a peace treaty, and the transformation of the South Caucasus region into a place of peace and cooperation, Armenia's continued insistence on putting forward outrageous claims demonstrates a lack of willingness to learn from history. Such destructive actions hinder the peace efforts in the region, making it difficult for communities to coexist peacefully. In summary, Armenia's persistent aggressive rhetoric and actions pose the main threat to establishing peace, security, and justice in the region. It is crucial for the international community to take note of these actions and exert diplomatic pressure to encourage Armenia to change its course towards a more peaceful and constructive approach Azerbaijan.

#### **VI. France is the biggest obstacle to the peace process**

On October 27, Azerbaijan issued a strong condemnation of baseless and biased allegations made by French President Emmanuel Macron during the European Council meeting in Brussels on October 27. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan firmly rejected Macron's allegations, which are a departure from a neutral and impartial stance, particularly given France's historical role as a mediator in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Azerbaijan has been deeply concerned about the French stance, arguing that France, despite its role as a mediator for decades, has turned a blind eye to the occupation of approximately 20% of Azerbaijani territory by Armenia. It is

unacceptable that France, which has a history of mediating in the conflict, accuses Azerbaijan of threatening Armenia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. France has not led any successful mediation efforts and, with the Minsk Group's dissolution, its role as a mediator effectively ended. Azerbaijan has consistently called for the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from its territories and the dismantling of the puppet regime created by Armenia, in line with international obligations and UN Security Council resolutions. However, France has failed to use its influence to encourage Armenia to comply with international norms and principles.

France's claims that Armenian residents who voluntarily relocated from the region were forcibly displaced, without providing concrete proof, are an attempt to mislead the international community. It is crucial to emphasize that for almost 30 years, France remained largely silent about the forceful mass deportations of Azerbaijanis from their homelands, as well as the war crimes and massacres committed against them. Such allegations, contrary to the positions of international organizations like the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, are detrimental to a just and lasting resolution of the conflict.

Responding to the remarks by the French Minister of Culture Rima Abdul Malak made in Armenia about endangerment of historical and cultural monuments in the Garabagh region, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan pointed out that "Azerbaijan is very well aware of its obligations and importance of protection of all the cultural and historical monuments in

its territories," adding that "[c]laims about endangerment of cultural and historical monuments following the anti-terror measures of Azerbaijan has no ground, which was confirmed recently by two UN missions to the region. In its statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also underscored that "[t]he cultural heritage situated in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, regardless of its origin, whether secular or religious, reflects the cultural diversity of the people of Azerbaijan, which Azerbaijan values and protects."

Azerbaijan stands firm in its commitment to preserving every bit of its rich cultural history. The nation is unwavering in its dedication to safeguarding the cultural and historical monuments within its borders. Two UN missions recently affirmed that allegations about the endangerment of monuments following Azerbaijan's anti-terror measures are baseless. Historically, France has faced its share of controversies tied to the appropriation of historical and cultural assets from other countries. This backdrop makes it intriguing for France to express concerns over another nation's heritage management.

For nearly three decades, Azerbaijan has consistently sought the participation of international bodies to evaluate the condition and possible destruction of its cultural sites. Azerbaijan has repeatedly raised alarms about the desecration, alteration, and illicit removal of its cultural treasures, not just in Garabagh but beyond. The 2005 report from UNESCO validated these concerns, noting that past missions to address these issues faced hurdles, especially from Armenia.

Azerbaijan's dedication to its cultural heritage remains steadfast. The nation views every monument, secular or religious, as an emblem of its diverse and rich history. These assets symbolize the unity and resilience of the Azerbaijani people, regardless of their origin.

Azerbaijan's message is clear. Countries with shared interests in global cultural heritage should respect each other's sovereignty and maintain neutrality. While global concern for cultural preservation is appreciated, it should not trespass into political interference or be viewed as provocative.

Azerbaijan has also repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring the peaceful coexistence of citizens of Armenian origin in the Garabagh Economic Region. This assurance has come from various senior officials. For instance, the Head of the State Security Service of Azerbaijan, Colonel-General Ali Naghiyev, who in October met with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Marija Pejcinovic Buric, emphasized Azerbaijan's enduring interest in establishing long-lasting peace and stability, extending from the comprehensive provisions by the Azerbaijani government for the peaceful residence of citizens of Armenian origin in the Garabagh Economic Region to the protection of their rights and freedoms.

This commitment to ensuring the well-being of citizens of Armenian origin reflects Azerbaijan's dedication to addressing post-conflict challenges and creating an environment where diverse communities can live in peace and harmony. In his meeting with Buric, Colonel-General Ali Naghiyev also highlighted the extensive efforts made by

Azerbaijan to promote the well-being and fundamental stability of the region. These efforts encompass various aspects, including normalizing relations with Armenia. The peaceful residence and protection of the rights and freedoms of citizens of Armenian origin in the Garabagh Economic Region not only exemplify Azerbaijan's commitment to peace but also contribute to the broader goals of regional stability and reconciliation. This pledge signifies a step forward in the journey towards sustainable peace and cooperation in the South Caucasus, ultimately benefiting all the people living in the region.

In conclusion, these provocative and biased statements by Armenia and its supporters are obstacles to the development and progress of the region based on the principles of international law. It is imperative that all parties involved engage in constructive dialogue to promote lasting peace and stability in the South Caucasus.

The failure of mediation efforts, including those involving France, to yield results and the inability to curb Armenia's aggressive policies led Azerbaijan to liberate its lands through military means. The stance of France reflects a refusal to learn from situations in its former colonial regions and attempts to compensate for failures in other regions with intervention in the South Caucasus. France failed to acknowledge the forceful mass deportations of Azerbaijanis from their homelands, war crimes, and massacres committed against them during the nearly 30 years of conflict. Azerbaijan is concerned about France's efforts to supply Armenia with weaponry and the potential instigation of further aggression and military adventures. Such actions are

unacceptable, as they undermine the fragile peace in the region. France's role in supplying weaponry to Armenia, a move that instigate further aggression and military adventurism by Armenia cannot be overlooked. France's disregard for the occupation of approximately 20% of its territories by Armenia, which is a gross violation of international law and Armenia's obligations under previous agreements, along with France's support for continued military-political provocations against Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty undermines France's claims of being an impartial and neutral mediator in the conflict over the past three decades. France needs to cease its insidious policy of supporting and arming Armenia in the region, which undermines peace and stability.

The same could be said about the U.S. and Canada as well. The response from Azerbaijan to the recent remarks by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken reflects a longstanding frustration regarding the United States' role in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Azerbaijan, as a party directly affected by the conflict, has voiced its concerns over what it sees as a lack of balanced U.S. support and a failure to address its core issues. Despite its role as a mediator for decades, the United States has not been consistent in advocating for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. The absence of explicit calls for the de-occupation of Azerbaijani territories and the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces for the last three decades, as well as the dismantling of the puppet regime in those territories, has been a point of contention. Over the years, the U.S. has taken actions that were detrimental to Azerbaijan's interests. For

instance, the representatives of the illegal entity from the occupied territories in Azerbaijan would often visit the United States to advocate for their cause. Azerbaijan justifiably considered those actions as legitimizing an illegitimate status quo. A different U.S. approach could have potentially prevented the need for Azerbaijan to resort to military means to liberate its territories. The failure of mediation efforts, including those involving the United States, contributed to the continuation of Armenia's aggressive policies.

In a recent joint press conference held on October 25, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan and Canadian Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly made statements that have drawn strong condemnation from Azerbaijan. These remarks not only reflect Armenia's continued manipulations but also hinder the progress of the peace process in the South Caucasus. Armenia's Foreign Minister is engaged in manipulative tactics rather than seizing the opportunity to advance the peace process. Instead of fostering constructive dialogue, these statements are seen as counterproductive.

One of the most significant points of contention arises from Armenia's allegations against Azerbaijan. Labeling Azerbaijan's anti-terror measures conducted in its sovereign territories as "aggression" and "ethnic cleansing" is baseless. Armenia's inappropriate reference to the decision of the International Court of Justice in this context is an attempt to distort the reality of the situation. Contrary to Mirzoyan's assertion, Azerbaijan has consistently taken the lead in efforts to promote the peace process. It has initiated discussions on peace principles, treaties,

communication channels, and demarcation, despite Armenia's disruptive actions over the past 30 years. In contrast, Armenia's recent provocative actions are hindrances to the negotiation process. Armenia's references to principles such as independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, and refraining from using or threatening force are hypocritical. It was Armenia that, for over three decades, consistently violated these very principles.

The Canadian Foreign Minister's position on the matter demonstrates a lack of knowledge about the situation in the region. Foreign Minister's assertion of a humanitarian crisis in the region, when none such exists, and the failure to openly support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan, as well as the apparent lack of interest in the plight of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from formerly occupied Azerbaijani territories and those forcefully deported from Armenia, indicate a clear bias against Azerbaijan.

## **VII. Azerbaijan firmly rejects PACE's resolution**

Azerbaijan condemned Resolution 2517 (2023) and Recommendation 2260 (2023) by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), dated October 12, 2023. Azerbaijan criticized PACE for failing to display an unbiased approach to the situation in the region. Instead of acknowledging Azerbaijan's efforts to address the major security and territorial threat posed by Armenia's separatist regime and illegal armed forces on its territory, PACE is basing its stance on unfounded rumors and the agendas of certain countries in the

region that seek to tarnish Azerbaijan's reputation.

The resolutions and recommendations by PACE are contradictory to the core decisions and documents of the Council of Europe. This contradicts the Council's commitments to uphold the norms and principles of international law, particularly regarding the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of all member states within their internationally recognized borders. These actions only embolden Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan's territory.

PACE also presented a distorted version of the events leading to the 24-hour counter-terrorism measures in the region. PACE's failure to acknowledge Azerbaijan's respect for humanitarian law and its efforts to avoid violating the human rights of the local civilian residents of Armenian origin, as positively assessed by two UN missions and the UNHCR in Armenia, is clear evidence of a long-standing bias against Azerbaijan within the organization.

The misinterpretation of facts by PACE, particularly in relation to the Lachin road and the International Court of Justice's decisions, is a source of concern for Azerbaijan. PACE's disregard for the court's Order of July 6, 2023, which unanimously rejected Armenia's claims on the operation of the Lachin border checkpoint, is unacceptable.

Azerbaijan is deeply concerned by PACE's failure to address critical humanitarian issues, such as the fate of nearly 4,000 missing Azerbaijanis, the landmine threat that has claimed 333 victims since the 44-day war, and

the extent of devastation in the formerly occupied Azerbaijani territories.

PACE violates its human rights obligations by making slanderous and outrageous claims about the voluntary relocation of Armenian residents in the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan. This is done while turning a blind eye to almost 30 years of violations of the human rights of Azerbaijani internally displaced persons (IDPs) and ethnic Azerbaijani refugees forcibly expelled from Armenia. PACE is also neglecting its appeals for the restoration of the rights and dignified return of Azerbaijanis expelled from Armenia.

In conclusion, PACE should cease making unreasonable and biased decisions that undermine the prospects of peace efforts between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Short-sighted attempts to use Council of Europe mechanisms against Azerbaijan are counterproductive and will not deter Azerbaijan's determination to continue working towards lasting peace in the region and the reintegration of local Armenian residents in the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan.

### **VIII. Azerbaijan helps to recover Ukraine's energy sector**

Ukraine and Azerbaijan have a deep-rooted history of mutual assistance and solidarity, and this enduring partnership is once again making headlines. In October, Azerbaijan allocated an additional \$7.6 million for humanitarian aid to Ukraine. This funding is set to play a pivotal role in revitalizing the energy industry in Ukraine. As a concrete manifestation of this partnership, the first consignment of electrical

equipment from Azerbaijan, intended for humanitarian aid to Ukraine, was dispatched from the Sumgayit Technological Park. This humanitarian cargo, delivered by the Ministry of Energy, includes more than 555,000 meters of electric cables and wires. The shipment, consisting of 14 trucks, is designed to facilitate the restoration of a stable electrical supply to the regions affected by the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. This humanitarian effort, guided by the unwavering commitment of Azerbaijan's leadership, is set to make a significant impact in Ukraine's ongoing recovery.

Under the directive of President Ilham Aliyev, as per a decree issued on July 17, 2023, the Ministry of Energy is spearheading this humanitarian mission. The cargo, comprising more than 555,000 meters of electric cables and wires, holds the key to revitalizing the energy infrastructure in Ukraine, a nation grappling with a challenging crisis. A convoy of 14 trucks was sent to deliver these critical humanitarian supplies to Ukraine. These electrical materials will play a crucial role in supporting the restoration of a sustainable electricity supply to regions affected by the ongoing situation in Ukraine.

Ukrainian Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Vladislav Kanevsky, recently expressed his gratitude for the invaluable support extended by Azerbaijan and its people during these challenging times. Kanevsky expressed Ukraine's appreciation, noting that this generous support helped thousands of Ukrainian citizens endure the harsh winter last year. Kanevsky highlighted the historical affinity between Ukraine and Azerbaijan, emphasizing that both countries have stood by each other during their most trying moments. He lauded the generosity of

the Azerbaijani government and its citizens, who have stepped up to offer humanitarian aid and assistance in the reconstruction of vital infrastructure. To date, Azerbaijan has allocated more than \$30 million for these noble purposes, underlining their commitment to aiding Ukraine in its time of need. The ambassador also reflected on the profound wisdom of Heydar Aliyev, the national leader of the Azerbaijani people, who once remarked that the path to independence is among the most arduous journeys. He noted that this statement rings true, and the ever-growing friendship between Ukraine and Azerbaijan underscores the strength of their strategic partnership.

This delivery is part of a broader effort to provide essential aid to Ukraine, with a total value of \$7.6 million allocated for this purpose. The organization and dispatch of these additional aid packages are being carried out based on applications received from Ukraine, ensuring that the support reaches those who need it most. Azerbaijan's dedication to helping Ukraine in its time of need has been consistently evident. The nation has previously extended a hand of assistance by supplying electrical equipment to Ukraine, underscoring its commitment to international cooperation and humanitarian support. In total, Azerbaijan has donated more than \$33 million in humanitarian aid to Ukraine, encompassing assistance for reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts.

Beyond material support, Azerbaijan has also offered a lifeline to Ukrainian youth affected by the war, providing medical and socio-psychological rehabilitation to 154 youngsters who have tragically lost family members

during the conflict. The "Linguist" Humanitarian Lyceum, named after Zarifa Aliyeva, which was severely affected by military actions in Irpin, has undergone complete repair, and Azerbaijan is actively engaged in extensive reconstruction efforts for several other social facilities in the area. Azerbaijan's ongoing commitment to assisting Ukraine exemplifies the power of international collaboration and solidarity during times of adversity. This multifaceted humanitarian endeavor not only delivers vital supplies but also conveys a message of unity and support, reinforcing the bonds of friendship and compassion between nations. This act of humanitarian aid exemplifies the unwavering commitment of Azerbaijan to standing with Ukraine during these challenging times. The remaining portions of the \$7.6 million aid package, as outlined in President Ilham Aliyev's decree, are slated for delivery in the near future, further solidifying the bond of friendship and cooperation between the two nations, which is rooted in history and strengthened by compassion.

#### **IX. Azerbaijan successfully concludes Chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)**

On October 25, 2023, the Republic of Azerbaijan celebrated the completion of its remarkable four-year chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the second-largest political institution in the world after the United Nations. During this tenure, Azerbaijan's chairmanship has been widely recognized as a resounding success and praised by the majority of NAM member



states, leading to the unanimous extension of its chairmanship for an additional year.

Throughout its chairmanship, Azerbaijan pursued a policy aimed at revitalizing NAM's influence in the international system and upholding the "Bandung principles" without conflicting with any international actors. Despite facing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Azerbaijan transformed these obstacles into new opportunities for international cooperation, thanks to globally important initiatives led by President Ilham Aliyev as the chairman of NAM.

One noteworthy achievement of Azerbaijan's chairmanship is the introduction of critical resolutions proposed by the country and adopted in the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. These resolutions aim to end the "policy of vaccine nationalism" by developed countries and address their unjust and uncaring stance toward developing nations.

Over the past four years, Azerbaijan has taken significant steps to institutionalize NAM. It established the NAM Parliamentary Network and Youth Organization in alignment with President Ilham Aliyev's initiatives. Currently, efforts are underway to establish Women's and Media Platforms within the Movement. Azerbaijan's chairmanship also facilitated the first-ever meeting of think tanks from NAM member states, marking the initial step toward networking these vital institutions. Moreover, Azerbaijan's leadership has made valuable contributions to sectoral cooperation within NAM. Meetings were convened for member states responsible for labor, health, education, information, and communication fields.

In September of this year, after a nine-year hiatus, the Joint Coordination Committee of NAM and the "Group of 77" gathered during the high-level week of the UN General Assembly, co-chaired by Azerbaijan and Cuba. This event aimed to expand cooperation in sustainable economic development among NAM members, the majority of which are developing countries.

The Non-Aligned Movement, known for advocating justice in the international relations system, has played a crucial role during Azerbaijan's chairmanship, particularly in the context of the Patriotic War. NAM did not remain indifferent to the injustices faced by its member states, including Azerbaijan, and condemned the aggression against our territorial integrity and sovereignty. As a result, NAM has successfully thwarted provocative steps within the framework of the UN.

In January 2024, during the 19th Summit of the NAM in Kampala, Uganda, Azerbaijan will pass the chairmanship to Uganda. However, Azerbaijan will continue to play an active role as a member of the "chairmanship troika" of the Movement for the next three years, contributing to the strengthening of NAM's international influence and positions.

Azerbaijan's successful chairmanship of the NAM has not only enhanced the Movement's role in the international arena but also cemented its commitment to justice and solidarity among its member states.

## **X. Baku hosts 74th International Astronautical Congress**

On October 2-6, Azerbaijan hosted the 74th International Astronautical Congress. The theme of the 2023 IAC was "Global Challenges and Opportunities: Give Space a Chance" – the host organization being Azercosmos, Space Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This event provided unparalleled opportunities for building strong collaborations and reaching a diverse international audience. Beyond discussing the latest developments in the field of space, attendees had the chance to immerse themselves in the authentic culture and warm hospitality of Azerbaijan. The 2023 IAC held historical significance as it returned to Baku exactly half a century after the capital of Azerbaijan hosted it for the first time in 1973. Baku holds the distinction of being the first and only city in the region to have this honor. The 74th edition of the IAC not only offered a platform for discussing the latest in space exploration but also provided a unique exposure to an emerging market, an opportunity to experience Azerbaijan's renowned hospitality, cultural immersion, and the diverse allure of the country.

Established in 1951, the International Astronautical Federation (IAF) has emerged as the world's foremost space advocacy organization, boasting over 460 members in 110 countries. Its membership includes prominent space agencies, companies, research institutions, universities, societies, associations, institutes, and museums across the globe. The IAF plays a pivotal role in promoting the peaceful development of astronautics and facilitates the dissemination of scientific and technical knowledge in the

realm of space exploration. Azerbaijan, a member since 2003, actively participates in the IAF's initiatives and events.

With a rich history spanning over seven decades, the IAF stands at the forefront of space advocacy. It serves as a unifying force, bringing together a diverse range of stakeholders, including space agencies, academic institutions, and industry leaders. The annual International Astronautical Congress (IAC), organized by the IAF, has become the premier global space event, facilitating collaboration and knowledge-sharing on a worldwide scale.

The IAF actively supports the dissemination of scientific and technical information related to space. Through its numerous initiatives and events, it serves as a hub for the exchange of cutting-edge research, technological advancements, and best practices in space exploration. This dissemination of knowledge not only benefits its members but also contributes to the advancement of the entire space community.

The International Astronautical Federation's enduring legacy as the world's leading space advocacy body continues to shape the future of space exploration. Through its global network of members and its flagship event, the International Astronautical Congress, the IAF remains at the forefront of advancing peaceful, collaborative, and knowledge-driven astronautics. Azerbaijan's membership in this esteemed organization underscores its dedication to the shared goals of space exploration and cooperation.

The Baku International Astronautical Congress in 2023 was an exceptional event, with

participation and sponsorship from a plethora of companies in the space industry. Notably, the congress surpassed its predecessors held in various countries in terms of sponsorship packages. With over 30 sponsors, including major names from the United States, China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and many others, the event became a gathering of space industry leaders.

The Baku Congress garnered sponsorship packages from 22 companies within the space industry, including U.S. giants like "Space X," "Axiom Space," "Blue Origin," "Boeing," "Lockheed Martin," and "Northrop Grumman." This international participation showcased the global interest and investment in the event. The range of sponsors encompassed organizations and companies from various countries, including the Chinese Society of Astronautics, the Turkish Space Agency, the Saudi Space Agency, the Indian Space Research Organization, and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency. Notably, it also included companies such as "ispace," "JGC Holdings Corporation," and "Astroscale," demonstrating the broad spectrum of industry players involved. The congress features a diverse set of sponsors from around the world, including European participants like the "Airbus" Office in Germany, Portugal's "Neuraspace" company, Bulgaria's "EnduraSat" company, Austria's "Asgardia Space" company, and the Italian Association of Aeronautics and Astronautics. The United Kingdom Space Agency also contributes to the event's global reach. In addition to established space industry players, the event is supported by Amazon's "Project Kuiper," the "Jet Propulsion Laboratory," and "Voyager Space"

company, further enhancing the congress's prestige and impact.

President Ilham Aliyev also spoke at the opening ceremony of the 74th IAC. President Ilham Aliyev highlighted Azerbaijan's entry into the global space community over a decade ago, emphasizing the operation of two telecommunication satellites and one Earth observation satellite by Azerbaijani specialists, serving not only the nation but also 45 other countries. President Ilham Aliyev underlined the significance of the Baku Congress in stimulating the space industry, high-tech sector, and modernization in the country.

President Aliyev discussed Azerbaijan's active role in the international community, mentioning the country's clear, transparent, and cooperative foreign policy. Azerbaijan's leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement for the fourth year, supported by 120 countries, illustrates broad international backing. President Ilham Aliyev also mentioned the successful cooperation with European institutions and the signing of strategic partnership declarations with nine EU member states, reflecting Azerbaijan's open foreign policy agenda.

President Ilham Aliyev noted Azerbaijan's dual membership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Council of Europe, serving as a unique bridge between Europe and Asia. Azerbaijan's geography offers opportunities for broad international cooperation, and its peaceful coexistence among diverse ethnic and religious groups has strengthened over the past 30 years of independence.

President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the importance of the Baku Process, which united the Council of Europe and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, addressing global political issues, intercultural dialogue, and peaceful development. President Ilham Aliyev also mentioned Azerbaijan's historical significance as the birthplace of the world's first oil production, highlighting its transformation of natural resources into economic development, identity preservation, and independence. Azerbaijan's role in energy and transportation projects was acknowledged, contributing to global energy security and economic development.

President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the country's significant achievement of restoring its territorial integrity, which had been violated for nearly three decades. President Ilham Aliyev mentioned the immense suffering due to aggression, occupation, and ethnic cleansing, leading to a humanitarian catastrophe for the nation. Despite facing adversity, Azerbaijan demonstrated strong political will and made considerable efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. After 28 years of commitment to the negotiation process and realizing that peaceful means would not resolve the situation, Azerbaijan exercised its right to self-defense, liberating its territories three years ago and restoring full sovereignty recently.

President Ilham Aliyev expressed disappointment in international organizations that were responsible for ending the occupation but had failed to produce results. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the unique nature of Azerbaijan's experience in restoring territorial integrity, protecting its dignity, and

upholding justice and international law. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that Azerbaijan's current agenda evolves around fostering peace in the Caucasus, regional cooperation, and mutual benefits. "We restored justice and international law. And now, it is time for peace in the Caucasus. This is our agenda. Our agenda is peace in the Caucasus, peace in the region, cooperation and shared benefits," President Ilham Aliyev underscored.

In his speech, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the country's remarkable economic achievements and the significance of a strong economy for genuine independence. President Ilham Aliyev provided several key figures to illustrate Azerbaijan's progress, highlighting that the GDP had grown fourfold over the last two decades, budget revenues had increased more than 30 times, and foreign trade turnover had surged over tenfold. President Ilham Aliyev also pointed out that the direct foreign debt had been significantly reduced, falling to around 10% of the GDP, with plans to lower it further to 7-7.5% by the end of 2024. Azerbaijan's foreign exchange reserves exceeded its direct foreign debt by ten times, indicating financial stability. The President spoke about creating a favorable investment climate, both in the energy sector and other industries, with over 300 billion USD invested in the country over the past 20 years, including 190 billion USD in the non-energy sector. President Ilham Aliyev noted the substantial reduction in poverty from nearly 50% to 5.5%, emphasizing the proper management and fair distribution of national wealth. Political, economic, and social stability were highlighted

as vital factors in Azerbaijan's development, as they encouraged investor confidence.

The Baku International Astronautical Congress 2023 was a remarkable gathering of space industry leaders, with a diverse array of sponsors representing a wide range of countries and organizations. The impressive

list of sponsors highlighted the global significance of the event and underscored its potential to drive forward the advancement of space exploration and technology. With participation from influential companies and agencies, the congress became a pivotal moment in the world of space exploration.