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# BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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## I. France attempts to scapegoat Azerbaijan for its foreign policy failures

In recent months, French media has been saturated with articles alleging “interference” from Azerbaijan in France’s overseas territories, particularly New Caledonia. These ridiculous accusations, driven by the French government under Emmanuel Macron, appear to be an awkward and half-baked attempt at diversion from addressing the unrest in New Caledonia and broader failures in Africa. Azerbaijan has become a convenient scapegoat.

The French media's spotlight on the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), a think tank funded by the Azerbaijani government, exemplifies this narrative. This portrayal demands a closer look at Azerbaijan-France relations and the ongoing issues around decolonization. France's backlash against Azerbaijan's role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and its anti-colonial stance reveals a deep-seated insecurity and hypocrisy in French foreign policy.

The Non-Aligned Movement, established during the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s, has always championed the fight against neo-colonialism. Its mission is to support political, economic, and social independence from former colonizers, allowing newly independent nations to determine their own destinies. Azerbaijan's tenure as NAM chairman from 2019 to 2024 has seen strong support for these principles, aligning with the movement's historical goals.

France's neo-colonial activities, especially in Africa, have long been a source of contention. The country's ongoing economic, political, and military engagement in its former colonies is often seen as a continuation of colonialism. This has fueled resentment and anti-colonial movements worldwide, including in New Caledonia. These movements are not influenced by Azerbaijani actions but are genuine responses to France's persistent influence in these regions. France's attempt to blame Azerbaijan for championing anti-

colonialism is unfounded and serves to deflect from its own colonial history and current practices.

France's support for Armenian separatists in the Karabakh region and its continued military aid to Armenia further illustrate its inconsistent stance. By backing Armenia's territorial claims against Azerbaijan and supporting illegal actions in Karabakh, France has undermined Azerbaijan's sovereignty. Notably, in 2020, both chambers of the French parliament recognized the so-called "Artsakh Republic," a move even Armenia had not made. This support for separatism starkly contrasts with France's accusations against Azerbaijan, highlighting a selective application of principles driven by geopolitical interests rather than a commitment to international law and the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

France's position on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict underscores its willingness to endorse secessionist movements when it suits its interests, while condemning similar sentiments that challenge its neo-colonial agenda. This double standard complicates regional peace and undermines France's credibility in addressing issues of sovereignty and self-determination.

France's attempts to scapegoat Azerbaijan for its foreign policy failures and neo-colonial controversies reflect a broader strategy of deflection. Addressing its own colonial legacies and adopting a consistent and principled foreign policy would better serve France's interests and contribute to regional and global stability.

The French media has also taken aim at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center) in Azerbaijan, suggesting it is part of Azerbaijan's alleged neo-colonialist agenda. However, the AIR Center operates with transparency, openly disclosing its funding sources and maintaining public operations. Despite the accusations, the AIR Center has expressed interest in collaborating with French think tanks to discuss bilateral and multilateral issues. Historically, Azerbaijan-France relations have been constructive, with Azerbaijan's

presidents making their first official visits to France upon election in 1993 and 2003.

The recent anti-Azerbaijani rhetoric in the French media highlights France's insecurity regarding anti-colonial sentiments. For example, *Intelligence Online* reported that the French intelligence service, DGSE, was blindsided by what it labeled as an Azerbaijani disinformation campaign. *Le Monde* similarly accused Azerbaijan of using anti-colonial rhetoric as disinformation against France. If *Le Monde* compares these actions to KGB tactics, it should also acknowledge that the French government has used diplomatic cover to facilitate intelligence operations, such as recruiting a French national in Azerbaijan.

France's accusations against Azerbaijan regarding the rise of anti-colonial sentiments are unfounded and reflect a double standard in French foreign policy. To genuinely address the legacies of colonialism, France needs to confront its own neo-colonial practices rather than deflecting blame onto countries like Azerbaijan. The ongoing economic exploitation, political interference, and military presence in former colonies have led to widespread resentment and calls for true independence. These sentiments are rooted in the lived experiences of people in these regions and are not the result of external manipulation.

France's selective application of principles, such as supporting Armenian separatists in the Karabakh region while condemning similar movements that challenge its neo-colonial practices, further undermines its credibility. This inconsistent stance complicates regional peace and stability.

France's attempts to scapegoat Azerbaijan for its foreign policy failures highlight the need for a more consistent and principled approach. Addressing its colonial legacy and adopting a constructive foreign policy will better serve France's interests and contribute to global stability and peace.

## II. Baku Energy Week propels Azerbaijan's green energy agenda

Azerbaijan recently hosted Baku Energy Week, a prestigious gathering that combined three major events: the 29th International Caspian Oil & Gas Exhibition (4-6 June), the 12th Caspian International Power and Green Energy Exhibition (4-6 June), and the 29th Baku Energy Forum (5-6 June). This comprehensive energy event attracted participation from 300 companies representing 37 countries. Baku Energy Week served as a platform bringing together companies, dignitaries, statesmen, and energy experts from around the globe. On June 4, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev attended the opening of the 29th International Caspian Oil & Gas Exhibition and the 12th Caspian International Power and Green Energy Exhibition as part of the Baku Energy Week.

A notable milestone at the Forum was Azerbaijan's agreements with Masdar, a prominent UAE-based renewables company, to develop two solar power plants in Bilasuvar (445 MW) and Neftchala (315 MW), alongside a 240 MW wind power plant in Garadagh, Absheron. These projects, with an estimated investment of approximately \$1 billion, are projected to generate a combined average annual output of 2.025 billion kWh of electricity. They are expected to save 496 million cubic meters of natural gas annually and prevent over 943 thousand tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions.

The Caspian Oil and Gas Exhibition, which started 30 years ago in 1994, has been instrumental in attracting foreign direct investment into Azerbaijan's energy sector. Over the years, this event has evolved into the more comprehensive Baku Energy Week, covering all major segments of energy policy, including oil, gas, upstream, downstream, and green energy.

In the early 1990s, Azerbaijan was a nation just beginning to establish its independence, amidst a backdrop of significant challenges. The country faced aggression from neighboring Armenia, leading to the occupation of nearly 20 percent of

its territories and a severe humanitarian crisis. At the time, Azerbaijan had one of the highest per capita numbers of refugees, making progress difficult in the face of internal conflicts and economic turmoil, including hyperinflation and industrial stagnation.

The turning point came in 1993 with the election of the National Leader Heydar Aliyev as President, which ushered in a period of substantial economic reforms. These included the adoption of a new democratic constitution and efforts to attract investment into the energy sector. The inaugural Caspian Oil and Gas Exhibition in 1994 was a pivotal moment for Azerbaijan, serving as the first international presentation of the country's potential. Shortly after this event, the "Contract of the Century" was signed on September 20, 1994, marking a significant milestone in Azerbaijan's transformation. This agreement led to the establishment of a fruitful relationship with international investors, notably BP and Amoco, who formed a consortium of oil companies that placed their trust in Azerbaijan despite the high risks associated with the region.

Within just three years of signing the contract, oil was being produced from the Chirag Platform, a record achievement in the oil industry. The swift commissioning of two pipelines to Black Sea ports by 1999, followed by the major Baku-Ceyhan oil export pipeline, demonstrated Azerbaijan's growing reliability as an energy partner. This pipeline, extending over 1,700 kilometers across challenging terrain, was a testament to the strong cooperation between regional countries and companies.

The energy sector's development was crucial for Azerbaijan's economy, aligning with the country's broader economic progress. The trust established with international investors facilitated further investments across various sectors, reinforcing Azerbaijan's status as a dependable partner in the global energy market.

Azerbaijan's trajectory over the past 30 years, from the challenges of early independence to becoming

a key player in the energy sector, underscores the importance of strategic investments and international cooperation. The evolution from the Caspian Oil and Gas Exhibition to Baku Energy Week encapsulates this transformation, highlighting Azerbaijan's commitment to embracing all facets of energy policy and ensuring sustainable growth.

June 4th, marks a significant milestone in Azerbaijan's energy journey, commemorating not only the 20th anniversary of the Shahdeniz Contract signing at the Oil and Gas Exhibition but also the groundbreaking ceremony for three solar and wind renewable power stations. These stations will be developed by Masdar, a leading company from the UAE, symbolizing Azerbaijan's transition from fossil fuels to renewables while recognizing the ongoing importance of fossil fuels for both Azerbaijan and its partners.

The Shahdeniz project has played a crucial role in ending Azerbaijan's gas shortage. Before this, Azerbaijan imported natural gas, but now it exports it, with exports expected to exceed 24 billion cubic meters this year. Eight countries currently receive Azerbaijani gas, with six of them being European nations. The European Commission recently acknowledged Azerbaijan as a Pan-European gas supplier, highlighting the country's reliability in providing energy security.

President Ilham Aliyev has emphasized the inseparable link between national security and energy security. Countries dependent on energy imports seek reliable and long-term partners, and Azerbaijan has proven to be just that. All contracts signed over the past 30 years have been fully implemented, building a foundation of trust that underpins Azerbaijan's rapid development in renewable energy.

In October 2023, Masdar inaugurated a 230-megawatt solar power station, and now the capacity will expand to one gigawatt. Two more projects are in the pipeline, with one under construction and another set to begin soon,

bringing Azerbaijan's solar and wind renewable potential close to two gigawatts.

In addition to solar and wind, Azerbaijan is enhancing its hydropower capacity, particularly in the liberated areas of Karabakh and East Zangezur. Since these areas were liberated in November 2020, hydropower stations with a total capacity of 270 megawatts have been inaugurated, with plans to reach 500 megawatts within three to five years. This expansion will save roughly half a billion cubic meters of natural gas annually, meeting market demands.

Twenty-eight years after the Shahdeniz Contract, Azerbaijan is breaking ground on a one-gigawatt renewable energy project, with potential for much more. The involvement of global leaders like Masdar, a champion in green energy, underscores Azerbaijan's commitment to a sustainable energy future.

Hosting COP29 is a significant duty that Azerbaijan fully comprehends, with both its advantages and potential complications. However, the commitment to this role is unwavering. Azerbaijan acknowledges the complexity of this responsibility but stands ready to embrace it. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that Azerbaijan should not be judged for having oil and gas resources, which are natural endowments. Instead, the country should be assessed on how it manages these resources, transforms this wealth into societal benefits, builds an inclusive society, and achieves remarkable reductions in poverty and foreign debt.

Climate change's impact in Azerbaijan is evident along the Caspian Sea shore, where the sea recedes annually due to climate change and irrational human activity. The Caspian Sea's water supply, dependent on rivers beyond Azerbaijan's borders, underscores the country's limited responsibility for this ecological challenge. Despite this, Azerbaijan is proactive, building new dams and water storages to mitigate the effects. However, the primary sources feeding the Caspian Sea lie outside Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan recognizes climate change as a universal challenge and has taken proactive steps in response. The country has formed a Troika with the UAE and Brazil, the future host of COP30, and leverages its former chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement, which comprises 120 countries, to build bridges between this institution and the European Union. Azerbaijan has signed strategic partnership declarations with ten EU member states and actively collaborates with Small Island Developing States, planning to establish a special fund to support them.

For Azerbaijan, climate change is a significant problem, but for many Small Island Developing States, it is an existential threat. Azerbaijan aims to demonstrate maximum responsibility while fostering international cooperation. One of the crucial outcomes sought at COP29 is to move beyond mutual accusations and stop blaming each other for the current situation. Instead, the focus should be on uniting efforts and concentrating on an agenda that ensures a sustainable future for current and future generations.

In hosting such a significant international event in Baku, Azerbaijan underscores its role as a dependable partner in global energy markets while advancing its sustainable development objectives. As a nation rich in energy resources, Azerbaijan is poised to contribute significantly to carbon-neutral initiatives through its support for renewable energy sources. In recent years, Azerbaijan has ramped up efforts to expand its renewable energy capacity, emphasizing the critical role of international cooperation in advancing global green energy initiatives. Azerbaijan continues to forge partnerships with leading global energy firms to enhance its renewable energy capabilities.

In 2024, Azerbaijan has designated the year as the "Green World Solidarity Year," signaling its commitment to environmental conservation and climate action. A pivotal part of this initiative is Azerbaijan's hosting of the 2024 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 29) in Baku, marking the first time such an event will be held in the region. Scheduled from November 11-22,

2024, COP 29 presents a significant opportunity to convene heads of state, government leaders, civil society organizations, businesses, and international institutions to address the global climate crisis. Azerbaijan's involvement in both Baku Energy Week and COP 29 underscores its strategic investments in renewable energy projects, support for reforestation initiatives, and commitment to sustainable development policies. These efforts aim to leverage national capacities and resources effectively.

Baku Energy Week and COP29 represent pivotal moments for Azerbaijan's sustainable development goals. These events are integral to accelerating the adoption of renewable energy sources and driving the green transition. Azerbaijan aims to position itself as a regional hub for green energy, facilitating the export of renewable-based power from the South Caucasus and Central Asia to Europe and beyond.

### **III. Toward lasting peace: Azerbaijan's rightful demand for constitutional clarity from Armenia**

The decades-long conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has seen significant developments since the violent war that erupted due to stalled peace negotiations. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has noted that the 2020 war, which ended the occupation of Azerbaijani territories, ultimately created an opportunity for peace. Following the liberation of its territories, Azerbaijan promptly proposed a peace treaty with Armenia grounded on fundamental principles of international relations, including mutual recognition of territorial integrity and the non-use of force.

In March 2022, Azerbaijan extended this peace initiative, even as the Armenian separatist regime still controlled parts of the Karabakh region under the temporary deployment of Russian peacekeepers. This demonstrated Azerbaijan's commitment to peacefully reintegrate the

Armenian population in Karabakh and resolve outstanding disputes diplomatically.

Regrettably, Armenia did not reciprocate this goodwill. The separatist leaders in Karabakh refused to engage with Azerbaijani officials, and the Armenian government continued supplying military resources to these forces, showing reluctance to acknowledge Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. This led to Azerbaijan's anti-terror operation in September 2023, marking the definitive end of the Karabakh conflict and the restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. This development opened a historic window for regional peace and security.

However, the opportunity for a peace treaty was overshadowed by Armenia and its Western supporters, who made unfounded allegations about Azerbaijan's supposed plans to invade southern Armenia. Despite repeated denials from Baku, including President Ilham Aliyev's frequent rejections of these claims, the accusations persisted. Some argue that Armenia and its Western allies aimed to justify increased military and political presence in Armenia by using the potential Azerbaijani threat as a pretext. Notably, analyst Thomas de Waal suggested a conspiracy involving Azerbaijan and Russia to invade Armenia, further undermining peace efforts by instilling fear and distrust within Armenian society.

Despite these challenges, Azerbaijan and Armenia have made significant strides toward a peace treaty and normalization of bilateral relations. The launch of border delimitation and the peaceful return of four occupied Azerbaijani border villages highlighted the potential for peace between the two countries. However, a major obstacle remains: Armenia's constitution contains territorial claims against Türkiye and Azerbaijan, which Baku insists must be removed to ensure no future government can reignite the conflict.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has acknowledged the importance of this issue. In a January 20 meeting with his political party, Pashinyan emphasized the need for both nations

to eliminate grounds for future territorial disputes, suggesting a new constitution for Armenia to better align with the new geopolitical and regional environment.

Nevertheless, Armenia's government has recently backpedaled on this stance. On June 7, the Armenian Foreign Ministry rejected the call to remove territorial claims from the constitution, labeling it as interference in Armenia's internal affairs. Azerbaijan, however, maintains that a state's constitution is not an exclusive internal matter if it contains territorial claims that provide legal grounds for conflict.

Azerbaijan's position remains clear: it will not sign a peace treaty with Armenia as long as Armenia's constitution contains territorial claims against Azerbaijani territories. "Azerbaijan has a legitimate right to demand the removal of this claim from the Constitution that directly affects our national security, and it cannot be labeled as interference into Armenia's internal affairs," stated the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan in response to Armenia's stance.

Although constitutional changes are challenging, especially amid anti-government sentiments in Armenia, this cannot justify altering Baku's position on such a critical legal matter. Azerbaijan is prepared to wait for Armenia to amend its constitution, as both countries need a lasting solution to their conflict that addresses its root causes.

#### **IV. Strengthening Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations**

On June 10, President İlham Aliyev made a one-day visit to Türkiye to meet with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The meeting focused on the geopolitical developments in the region, alongside discussions on energy, economic, and transportation issues. Over the past two months, economic, energy, and transportation ties between Azerbaijan and Türkiye have notably strengthened. Key decisions at the 11th Joint

Economic Commission meeting on May 11, recent energy agreements on May 14 and June 4, and the reopening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway, following extensive reconstruction of its Georgian section, highlight this growing cooperation.

#### ***Outcomes of the Joint Economic Commission Meeting***

The 11th Joint Economic Commission meeting took place on May 8 in Ankara, culminating in a 120-article protocol. This protocol outlined various collaborative efforts, including:

- Experience exchange in public-private partnerships.
- A new transport agreement.
- Enhanced cooperation for the Middle Corridor.
- Plans for the 4th Energy Forum Meeting.
- Inter-university cooperation.
- A youth forum.
- Efforts for the restoration and reconstruction of liberated territories.

In addition, several significant agreements were signed:

- A memorandum of understanding between Türkiye's Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) and Azerbaijan's Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SME).
- An agreement to establish a joint working group on trade facilitation.
- A cooperation agreement in the water sector.
- A declaration on combating animal diseases.

#### ***Investment and Trade Milestones***

During a post-meeting news conference, Prime Minister of Azerbaijan Ali Asadov highlighted that over 20 Turkish companies have been involved in projects worth \$4 billion for the restoration of liberated territories. Official data reveals that 3,000 Azerbaijani companies operate in Türkiye, while Turkish contractors have completed 526

projects worth \$19.3 billion in Azerbaijan. Türkiye has invested \$13 billion in Azerbaijan, with Azerbaijan investing \$21 billion in Türkiye. A free trade agreement between the two nations is also expected in the medium term. A preferential trade agreement was signed between the two countries in 2020, followed by an additional protocol in 2023. These agreements have significantly boosted bilateral trade, with the trade volume reaching \$7.5 billion. The target is to further increase this figure to \$15 billion.

### ***Boosting the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway Capacity***

A major highlight in recent months has been the increased capacity of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway. Connecting Azerbaijan and Türkiye via Georgia, the BTK's capacity surged from 1 million to 5 million tons in 2024. Originally agreed upon in Tbilisi in 2007 and inaugurated in Baku in 2017, President Aliyev had anticipated this expansion during the railway's opening. By May 2024, the railway's enhanced capacity began operation, marking a significant upgrade.

The BTK railway has gained strategic importance due to recent geopolitical shifts, such as border closures in Russia and Iran caused by COVID-19, the Suez Canal blockage, and the Russia-Ukraine war. These events have underscored the Middle Corridor's value as a vital route between East and West. Consequently, cargo traffic on this corridor has increased significantly, with Azerbaijan Railways reporting a rise from 3.8 million tons in 2019 to 6.8 million tons in 2023.

### ***New Milestones in the Energy Sector***

On June 4, during the 29th International Caspian Oil and Natural Gas Fair, Türkiye and Azerbaijan signed four significant natural gas agreements. These include an extension of the natural gas supply agreement from the "Şahdeniz-1" field to Türkiye until 2030, with an annual export of 3.7 billion cubic meters. Additional agreements covered the transport of Azerbaijani gas to Europe and Nakhchivan via Türkiye, and the delivery of Turkmen gas to Türkiye through Azerbaijan.

In electricity, cooperation is also advancing. At the 3rd Türkiye-Azerbaijan Energy Forum in September 2023, an agreement was signed to facilitate the export of electricity from Azerbaijan to Türkiye and onwards to Europe. Technical studies for this initiative are ongoing, positioning Türkiye as a key transit route for Azerbaijani energy exports.

### ***Iğdır-Nakhchivan Natural Gas Pipeline***

The Iğdır-Nakhchivan natural gas pipeline, with a capacity of 500 million cubic meters annually, is set to become operational by the end of this year. Initially agreed upon in 2010 between Botas and SOCAR, this pipeline will supply gas from the Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline (TANAP) to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, reducing reliance on Iranian gas. Presidents Aliyev and Erdoğan marked the project's groundbreaking on September 25, 2023, emphasizing its significance in bolstering energy security and interdependence between Azerbaijan and Türkiye.

The relationship between Azerbaijan and Türkiye extends beyond political and military cooperation, encompassing successful projects in energy, transportation, and economic sectors. Recent agreements and negotiations reflect ambitious new targets aligned with the Shusha Declaration of June 2021. These include enhancing trade relations, facilitating energy exports, and increasing the BTK railway's capacity, signaling a deepening and mutually beneficial partnership between the two countries. President İlham Aliyev's visit on June 10<sup>th</sup> underscores the deepening strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Türkiye, with both nations committed to enhancing cooperation across multiple sectors for mutual growth and regional stability.



## V. Debunking Armenia's new narrative of Russian abandonment

Recent statements by Armenian officials that Russia has “abandoned” Armenia and “gave” Karabakh to Azerbaijan is inconsistent with observed facts, especially regarding the period before and after the 44-Day War. On June 26, the Secretary of Armenia's Security Council accused Russia of “taking” Karabakh from Armenia and handing it over to Azerbaijan. This accusation was accompanied by a revelation that Armenia's military cooperation with Russia had plummeted from 96% to under 10%. According to the Secretary, this reduction was a decision made by Russia. Following this, Armenia's parliament speaker, Alen Simonian, announced an upcoming referendum on Armenia's membership in the EU, asserting that the society had chosen to align with the European Union. Under Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Armenia's government has been marked by populist and unpredictable policies, both domestically and on the international stage.

The claim that Russia orchestrated the “return” of Karabakh to Azerbaijan is absurd. There are two primary reasons why this narrative is unfounded. First, it was the Azerbaijani Armed Forces that liberated the occupied territories in 2020 and 2023. During the 44-Day War in 2020, also known as the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan achieved a decisive military victory, ending Armenia's 30-year occupation and compelling it to sign a capitulation agreement. This victory came at a significant cost, including many lives lost. Armenian leadership admitted that over 10,000 soldiers deserted during the war, underscoring the inadequacies and lack of motivation within Armenia's military.

Furthermore, instead of recognizing its failures, Pashinyan's government has attempted to shift the blame onto Russia. This narrative disregards the longstanding military alliance between Armenia and Russia. Armenia has been Russia's primary ally in the South Caucasus, receiving military supplies at discounted rates or for free. This alliance has significantly influenced Armenia's military strategy

and sustained its occupation of Azerbaijani territories.

In the early 1990s, Armenia occupied the Karabakh region and surrounding areas of Azerbaijan with substantial military aid from Russia. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 94% of Armenia's arms imports between 2011 and 2020 came from Russia. This included advanced weaponry like Iskander missiles, which were used in military operations against Azerbaijan.

The Armenia-Russia alliance went beyond arms sales, involving joint military exercises, strategic agreements, and the presence of Russian military bases in Armenia. Armenia's participation in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) further strengthened Russia's influence in the region. In 2021, Armenia expanded the 102nd Russian military base, highlighting the deep military cooperation between the two nations.

Under Pashinyan's leadership, Armenia also supported Russia in Syria by sending a so-called humanitarian mission following a meeting between Pashinyan and Russian President Vladimir Putin in September 2018. Despite claims that the mission would not include military components, Armenia's contingent eventually involved defense ministry personnel.

Despite accusations of Russian abandonment, evidence suggests that Russia provided significant military support to Armenia before the 44-Day War in 2020. Following the intense military clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan in July 2020, reports emerged of substantial Russian military supplies being sent to Armenia. In the weeks leading up to the war's outbreak on September 27, 2020, there was a notable increase in flights from Rostov to Yerevan, with IL-76 military transport planes delivering hundreds of tons of military cargo. President Ilham Aliyev expressed concerns about this increased military aid during a phone call with President Vladimir Putin. Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu attempted to downplay

these concerns during a visit to Baku on August 25, 2020, by claiming the shipments contained construction materials for Russia's military base in Gyumri.

The close partnership between Armenia and Russia extended beyond military support. Armenia consistently backed Russia on critical issues in international forums, including votes at the UN General Assembly. For example, in December 2019, Armenia joined 19 states in voting against a resolution that condemned the Russian military presence in Crimea as a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. This diplomatic support for Russia was evident before and after the 44-Day War.

Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government has been characterized by populist policies and unrealistic promises, which have had adverse effects on both domestic and international fronts. Pashinyan's administration has made ambitious but unattainable pledges. In terms of foreign policy, Pashinyan's government has continued to use populist rhetoric to maintain power. This approach has led to negative consequences for Armenia and its neighbors, exacerbating regional security risks and complicating peace efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The claim that Russia orchestrated the return of Karabakh to Azerbaijan overlooks two crucial factors. First, the Azerbaijani Armed Forces played a decisive role in liberating the occupied territories in 2020 and 2023. The 44-Day War resulted in a significant Azerbaijani victory and forced Armenia to sign a capitulation agreement. Secondly, the narrative that Russia is to blame for Armenia's foreign policy failures ignores the long-standing military alliance between Armenia and Russia. Armenia has heavily relied on Russian military support, receiving arms and equipment at discounted rates or for free. This alliance has been instrumental in Armenia's military strategy and its occupation of Azerbaijani territories.

In conclusion, Armenia's attempt to scapegoat Russia for its foreign policy failures is a diversion from its strategic errors, military defeats, and unrealistic policy goals. The narrative that Russia facilitated Karabakh's return to Azerbaijan disregards the significant military efforts by Azerbaijan and Armenia's historical dependence on Russian support. This narrative also serves to justify Armenia's shift towards the West and its efforts to secure Western military supplies. However, this strategy is unlikely to benefit Armenia or contribute to regional peace and security. Armenia's future stability and success will depend on a more pragmatic and realistic approach to foreign policy, acknowledging past mistakes, fostering genuine dialogue with neighboring countries, and setting achievable goals. This is essential for ensuring long-term peace and stability in the region.

#### **VI. Azerbaijan and Egypt strengthen bilateral ties through comprehensive agreements**

On June 7, President Ilham Aliyev embarked for an official visit to Egypt. President Ilham Aliyev and President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi of Egypt met in Cairo, underscoring their commitment to bolstering bilateral relations across various fronts. The leaders presided over a ceremony marking the signing of several key agreements, aimed at enhancing cooperation in crucial sectors.

President El-Sisi extended a warm welcome to President Ilham Aliyev, highlighting the importance of their visit in further solidifying bilateral ties. He congratulated President Ilham Aliyev on his recent re-election and commended Azerbaijan's hosting of the upcoming COP29 conference, underscoring its significance in global climate efforts. Discussions between the two leaders encompassed a wide array of topics, including regional and international issues of mutual interest. Emphasis was placed on enhancing cooperation in construction, transport, pharmaceuticals, oil, and infrastructure, underscoring the potential for economic growth through collaborative ventures.

President El-Sisi reiterated Egypt's commitment to increasing humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people in Gaza and reaffirmed support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the borders of June 4, 1967. He acknowledged Azerbaijan's role in supporting these efforts and expressed confidence in furthering regional stability and development.

President Ilham Aliyev, in turn, expressed gratitude for the warm hospitality extended during his visit to Egypt, emphasizing the historical and cultural significance of the nation. He highlighted the reciprocal nature of high-level visits between Azerbaijan and Egypt, signaling a robust political dialogue aimed at deepening bilateral relations.

President Ilham Aliyev invited President El-Sisi to attend the COP29 conference in Baku, noting Egypt's successful presidency of COP27 and expressing eagerness to exchange experiences in climate action. Both leaders affirmed their countries' shared views on international issues and reiterated their commitment to collaboration within international organizations.

Addressing developments in the South Caucasus, President Ilham Aliyev underscored Azerbaijan's achievements in defining state borders and the return of occupied territories, marking significant progress towards regional peace and stability. He expressed readiness for further negotiations with Armenia, emphasizing Azerbaijan's commitment to resolving conflicts peacefully.

Economic ties featured prominently, with discussions focusing on enhancing trade volumes and exploring new transport corridors. President Ilham Aliyev highlighted Azerbaijan's strategic position in facilitating East-West and North-South transport routes, which present vast opportunities for cooperation in logistics and infrastructure development.

The leaders concluded by highlighting the upcoming joint intergovernmental commission meeting, slated to advance actionable steps outlined during their discussions. President Ilham Aliyev expressed optimism that the agreements

signed during the visit would catalyze advancements across energy, renewable energy production, pharmaceuticals, and other sectors.

President Ilham Aliyev thanked President El-Sisi for the hospitality and affirmed his anticipation of further fruitful engagements, including Egypt's participation in COP29. The meeting between the two leaders solidifies a promising chapter in Azerbaijan-Egypt relations, promising enhanced cooperation and mutual prosperity in the years ahead.

Azerbaijan and Egypt have solidified their bilateral relations through a series of significant agreements and memoranda, marking a new chapter in their diplomatic ties. The ceremony, held on June 8, witnessed the signing of several pivotal documents aimed at enhancing cooperation across various sectors.

President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan and President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi of Egypt presided over the ceremony, underscoring the high-level commitment to deepen relations between the two nations. The agreements were signed by respective ministers, reflecting a broad spectrum of collaboration covering youth and sports, friendship and cooperation between cities, energy, economy, investment promotion, petroleum and mineral resources, international cooperation, and information and communication technologies.

One of the key agreements, the "Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Fields of Youth and Sports," signals joint efforts to foster cultural exchange and sporting initiatives between Azerbaijan and Egypt. This initiative is poised to strengthen people-to-people ties and promote mutual understanding among the youth of both nations.

Furthermore, the "Memorandum of Understanding on Friendship and Cooperation between Baku City Executive Authority and Cairo Governorate" aims to cultivate closer municipal relations, fostering urban development strategies and enhancing cultural exchanges at the local level.

In the realm of energy, Azerbaijan and Egypt have set the stage for collaboration in electrical and renewable energy sectors through the "Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Fields of Electrical and Renewable Energy." This agreement underscores mutual interests in sustainable energy solutions, leveraging expertise and resources to address energy challenges and promote green technologies.

Economic cooperation took center stage with the signing of the "Joint Action Plan for 2024-2025," facilitating strategic collaboration between Azerbaijan Export and Investment Promotion Agency (AZPROMO) and the General Authority for Investment and Free Zones (GAFI) of Egypt. This partnership aims to boost bilateral trade, investment flows, and economic diversification efforts between the two nations.

In the vital sector of petroleum and mineral resources, Azerbaijan and Egypt laid the groundwork for future cooperation with the "Protocol of Intent on Cooperation," aimed at fostering dialogue and joint initiatives in energy exploration and resource management.

Moreover, the "Memorandum of Understanding on Exchange of Experience" between Azerbaijan's Ministry of Economy and Egypt's Ministry of International Cooperation seeks to enhance institutional capacities and promote best practices in economic development and governance.

In the digital realm, the "Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Information and Communication Technologies" paves the way for collaboration between Azerbaijan's Ministry of Digital Development and Transport and Egypt's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. This partnership aims to foster innovation, digital transformation, and cybersecurity initiatives, ensuring both nations benefit from advancements in ICT.

Overall, the comprehensive agreements signed during the ceremony highlight Azerbaijan and

Egypt's commitment to fostering multifaceted cooperation, spanning from cultural exchanges and urban development to energy, economy, and digital innovation. These initiatives not only strengthen bilateral ties but also pave the way for mutual growth and prosperity in both nations. As Azerbaijan and Egypt move forward, these agreements are poised to serve as a solid foundation for future collaborative endeavors, enhancing regional stability and prosperity.