

BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

Table of contents

- I. **Baku hosts the Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement**
2
- II. **The 6th Trilateral Meeting in Brussels**
4
- III. **Azerbaijan's discontent with Russia's controversial statement about the peace process**
5
- IV. **Shusha hosts Global Media Forum**
7
- V. **The trilateral meeting of foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Russia, and Armenia in Moscow**
12
- VI. **Through the smoke of misinformation: Exposing Armenia's unfounded accusations against Azerbaijan**
13
- VII. **Unmasking Armenia's political manipulations**
16
- VIII. **Debunking Armenia's false narratives: A closer look at Vagif Khachatryan's arrest**
19
- IX. **France's misguided allegations over the Lachin border checkpoint**
20
- X. **ICRC should avoid the misuse of its humanitarian mandate for political ends**
21

I. Baku hosts the Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement

On 6-7 July, Baku hosted the Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Coordinating Bureau themed “NAM: United and steadfast in confronting emerging challenges.” This gathering marked the culmination of NAM events under Azerbaijan's leadership, following a summit in Baku this past March centered on post-pandemic rehabilitation and global governance matters. Having been an integral member of the NAM since 2011, Azerbaijan assumed its chairmanship during the movement's 18th summit, which occurred from 25-26 October 2019 in Baku. The subsequent year, NAM members unanimously decided to prolong Azerbaijan's chairmanship for an additional year.

During the ministerial meeting on 6 July, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev reflected on the significant milestones achieved under the Azerbaijani leadership in the past four years. He emphasized that during this time, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) faced numerous regional and global challenges but managed to strengthen and solidify its position.

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, which coincided with the onset of Azerbaijan's chairmanship, saw a unified response from NAM. The movement's proactive measures included the NAM Online Summit in May 2020 spearheaded by Azerbaijan, robust opposition to the "vaccine nationalism" exhibited by certain affluent nations, and advocacy for UN resolutions championing equal and global access to vaccines. These initiatives highlighted NAM's pivotal role in the fight against the pandemic.

In addition to the pandemic response, Azerbaijan championed institutional growth within NAM. This leadership resulted in the creation of the NAM Parliamentary Network in 2021 and the NAM Youth Organization in 2022. Furthermore, Baku has proposed and initiated the establishment of a NAM women's platform. President Ilham Aliyev, recognizing these accomplishments, noted that “with these steps towards institutional sustainability, we will definitely leave a successful legacy to incoming chairs.”

The chairmanship at the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was beneficial for Azerbaijan's diplomatic endeavors, especially amid the 44-Day War with Armenia in 2020. Notably, during the war in October 2020 and again in 2022, NAM members prevented the passage of an anti-Azerbaijan resolution in the UN Security Council.

A defining moment for Azerbaijan in the 2020 conflict was when NAM countries countered efforts by France and Russia to pass a UN draft statement that overlooked the existing UN Security Council resolutions regarding the occupation of Azerbaijani lands. Due to NAM's steadfastness, the proposed draft was eventually retracted.

Given these events, it's understandable that Azerbaijan advocates for reforms in the UN Security Council (UNSC), describing it as being “reminiscent of the past” which “does not reflect the modern reality.” Specifically, Azerbaijan proposes that the UNSC includes a permanent seat for both the Non-Aligned Movement and the African continent. According to President Ilham Aliyev, the “countries holding the position of chair of the NAM, Organization of Islamic Cooperation and African Union should have their seats at the

UN Security Council on a rotating basis with a veto right”.

At a recent ministerial meeting in Baku, Azerbaijani officials did not hold back from vocalizing their deep concerns about global issues, particularly colonialism and islamophobia. The platform provided a space for many nations to voice their grievances, but it was evident that France, one of the global superpowers, was a primary target of criticism. Azerbaijan, alongside various other member states of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), censured France for its neo-colonial stances, especially in relation to territories like Comoros, New Caledonia, and other French-administered overseas communities and territories.

Underlining its commitment to addressing these concerns, a dedicated side event on the "Complete elimination of colonialism" was organized. Spearheaded by the Center of the Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), attendees arrived at a consensus that culminated in the adoption of a declaration. This declaration announced the establishment of the Baku Initiative Group, which aims squarely at opposing and bringing attention to French colonialism.

Speaking at the Ministerial Meeting, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “One of the countries that is still pursuing neo-colonialism is France. French-administered territories outside Europe are nasty remains of the French colonial empire. France must respect the sovereignty of Comoros over the island of Mayotte and the rights of the New Caledonian people and other peoples in French overseas communities and territories. I welcome the distinguished representatives from French overseas communities and territories who will hold their side event in the margins of Baku

Ministerial to make their just cause and aspirations for freedom be heard by the international community.”

“Nearly 1.5 million Algerians were killed during genocidal French rule. Algerian freedom fighters' skulls still remain in Paris Museum as war trophies. This is cynical and disgusting. We demand President Emmanuel Macron of France to hand over to Algeria the remains of its heroes. France, which falsely presents itself as a defender of human rights and international law, still interferes in the domestic affairs of other countries. The recent withdrawal of French troops from Mali and Burkina Faso once again demonstrated that the outrageous neo-colonialism policy of France in Africa is doomed to failure. Unfortunately, France is trying to impose the same ill practice in the region of South Caucasus by supporting Armenian separatism in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan and by means of geopolitical rivalry, foreign military presence and colonial policy of “Orientalism.” France has conducted several nuclear weapons tests in Algeria and its overseas territories - French Polynesia in the Pacific throughout the second half of the twentieth century, thus causing global environmental degradation and severe health problems for local communities. France has to apologize for its colonial past and bloody colonial crimes and acts of genocide against NAM member countries in Africa, South-East Asia and other places,” President Ilham Aliyev underscored in his speech at the Ministerial Meeting.

Beyond the broader global issues, Azerbaijan also took the opportunity to express its profound dissatisfaction with French President Emmanuel Macron's approach to the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process. In the days leading up to the NAM's ministerial meeting,

Armenian media outlets circulated comments attributed to President Macron. In a gathering with the Armenian community in Marseille, Macron reportedly stated that “I have put and will continue to put more pressure on Aliyev than [Armenian Prime Minister Nikol] Pashinyan himself. The question is for Pashinyan. I am the only one who has a clear position and message on the Artsakh [Karabakh] issue”. Macron's alleged comments, in tandem with biased policies of the French government concerning the peace negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, have left a sour taste. It has ignited discussions among officials in Azerbaijan and the general public alike, prompting many to question the genuine motives and objectives underlying President Macron's statements.

Overall, Azerbaijan's tenure as the chair of the Non-Aligned Movement is widely regarded as a watershed moment for the country's foreign policy. Under its leadership, the NAM has seen notable institutional growth and rejuvenation. As this chapter closes, Azerbaijan is preparing for a smooth transition of its chairing responsibilities to Uganda during the 19th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, scheduled from 15-20 January 2024.

II. The 6th Trilateral Meeting in Brussels

On July 15, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev held a trilateral meeting with President of the European Council Charles Michel and Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan in Brussels. During the conversation, the sides exchanged views on the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan,

continuation of negotiations on the peace process, delimitation of borders, opening of transport communications, withdrawal of Armenian military units from the territories of Azerbaijan and disarmament of illegal military detachments. The negotiations held in Brussels were described as a continuation of the Washington meeting.

Leading up to the trilateral meeting the regional dynamics had already been fraught with tension. Azerbaijan had to temporarily shutdown the Lachin checkpoint in response to Armenia's attempt to smuggle items using vehicles of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The ICRC, in a subsequent statement, admitted to the transportation of “unauthorized goods” via the Lachin road and announced the termination of contracts with those involved in this illicit activity. Adding to the charged environment was a rally in Khankendi, Karabakh, on the eve of the Brussels summit. Orchestrated by pro-Russian separatist leaders, the demonstration protested the alleged “blockade” of the Lachin road, casting a shadow over the impending talks. Despite these challenges, the European Union managed to facilitate another round of dialogue between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan. While no groundbreaking outcomes were unveiled post-summit, Michel confirmed that both sides reiterated their earlier agreements. These included mutual recognition of territorial integrity and an eagerness to expedite border delimitation and the re-establishment of transportation links.

The summit, however, did bring forth two significant announcements. Firstly, the EU expressed its willingness to financially support the construction of a “railway connection” between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This commitment is pivotal, especially given the

ongoing debates in Armenia regarding the funding for the railway's construction along the Zangezur Corridor.

The second major revelation pertained to the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Armenian community in Karabakh. For his part, Michel "noted Azerbaijan's willingness to provide humanitarian supplies via Aghdam." This, coupled with the continuation of aid through the Lachin road, was lauded by the EU as a crucial step in addressing the needs of the regional population. This move is also interpreted as a reaffirmation of Azerbaijan's territorial rights by both the EU and Armenia, much to the chagrin of certain ultra-nationalist factions in Armenia and Russia.

In conclusion, while the Brussels summit may not have yielded groundbreaking results, it underscored the importance of dialogue and diplomacy in navigating complex regional dynamics. The EU's involvement and commitment to the region's stability and development are evident, and it remains to be seen how these discussions will shape the future of the peace process.

III. Azerbaijan's discontent with Russia's controversial statement about the peace process

The statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on July 15, concerning the Trilateral Statement and the ongoing peace process raised eyebrows and caused significant disappointment in Azerbaijan. The statement outlined Russia's vision and "red lines" for the peace process. The statement pointed out that the recognition of the Karabakh region as part of Azerbaijan by Armenia "radically changed the fundamental conditions under which the

statement of the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia of November 9, 2020, was signed, as well as the position of the Russian peacekeeping contingent deployed in the region." The statement further emphasized that "responsibility for the fate of the Armenian population of Karabakh should not be shifted to third countries." Moreover, the statement from the Russian Foreign Ministry called for "reliable and clear guarantees of the rights and security of the Armenians of Karabakh," without specifying its details. The Russian authorities emphasized that "the strict implementation of the entire set of trilateral agreements between Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia" should be "an integral part" of a peace agreement. The statement underscored Moscow's "intention to actively contribute to the efforts of the international community to restore the normal life of Nagorno-Karabakh." This sentiment seems to contrast with Russia's past stance against the West's "hijacking" of the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace dialogues. This shift in language could be attributed to the statement's portrayal of Western initiatives as "secondary" to the "real" peace process, which, Russia believes, takes place under the Kremlin's auspices. Consequently, the ministry's statement conveyed Russia's willingness "to organize a trilateral meeting of foreign ministers in Moscow in the near future to discuss ways to implement the agreements at the highest level, including the issue of agreeing on a peace treaty." The statement further indicates the Kremlin's anticipation to convene a trilateral leadership summit in Moscow to ratify a peace agreement.

Commenting on the statement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan underscored that "this statement of the Foreign Ministry of Russia contradicts the

Declaration on Allied Interaction between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation and the statements of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin supporting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan, including the Karabakh region. Russian MFA comments on and setting conditions for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan in the context of the fact of recognition of Karabagh as part of Azerbaijan by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, a country that occupied the territories of Azerbaijan for nearly 30 years, is unacceptable.”

The statement from Russia's Foreign Ministry starkly contradicted the Declaration on Allied Interaction between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation. Furthermore, it was in opposition to President Vladimir Putin's previous affirmations supporting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan, encompassing the Karabakh region. Such inconsistencies in Russia's stance are perplexing, especially when considering the recognition of Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan by the Prime Minister of Armenia, a nation that occupied Azerbaijani territories for nearly three decades.

Azerbaijan has consistently demonstrated its commitment to establishing peaceful relations with Armenia, especially post the 44-day Patriotic War. The nation has been proactive, laying down five foundational principles for relationship establishment, proposing a peace treaty, and initiating border delimitation. Azerbaijan has been at the forefront, authoring initial documents in these domains and taking tangible steps towards actualizing the peace treaty.

Furthermore, Azerbaijan has remained steadfast in its commitment to the trilateral

statements signed amongst Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia. However, Armenia's track record since the signing of the trilateral statement has been less than satisfactory. Many provisions of the statement remain unfulfilled by Armenia, and Russia, despite its obligations, has not ensured the statement's comprehensive implementation.

Azerbaijan's concerns over the Lachin road's misuse for illicit activities, including the transportation of military equipment and landmines from Armenia into Azerbaijani territory, have been consistent. Despite these warnings, no substantial measures have been taken to curb these illegal activities.

In response, Azerbaijan established the Lachin border checkpoint, adhering to both domestic and international regulations. This checkpoint has functioned transparently, allowing hundreds of Armenian residents to pass through without hindrance. However, Armenia's provocations, including an attack on the checkpoint in June and smuggling attempts in July, have continued unabated. Armenia's continued provocations, including attacks and smuggling attempts, underscore the challenges in ensuring peace and stability in the region. The politicization of the Lachin border checkpoint, a clear sovereign right of Azerbaijan, further complicates matters. Attempts to politicize the establishment of the Lachin border checkpoint, a sovereign right of Azerbaijan, are unwarranted. Claims of a humanitarian crisis in the region, in light of these facts, appear baseless.

Despite the 2020 Trilateral Statement's provisions, the complete withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from Azerbaijani territories remains unachieved. Alarmingly, these forces seem to be operating with the tacit support of the Russian peacekeeping

contingent. Additionally, the free communication between Azerbaijan's western regions and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic faces unwarranted obstructions. The presence of Russian peacekeepers in the region was initially seen as a stabilizing factor. However, their perceived support for the remnants of the Armenian armed forces in Azerbaijani territories raises serious concerns about their impartiality. The obstruction of communication between Azerbaijan's western regions and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic further highlights the challenges posed by external actors in the region. Azerbaijan's commitment to ensuring peace in the region is unwavering. Azerbaijan will continue its efforts towards this noble goal. However, for lasting peace, all parties involved, including Russia, must act in good faith, honoring their commitments and respecting the sovereignty of nations.

IV. Shusha hosts Global Media Forum

On July 21, the opening ceremony of the Global Media Forum themed “New Media in the Era of the 4th Industrial Revolution” was held in Shusha. The forum provided a platform for media professionals and leaders to discuss the evolving landscape of media in the context of the ongoing technological revolution. The Global Media Forum held, at the direction of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, as part of the Heydar Aliyev Year and on the occasion of the 148th anniversary of the Azerbaijan National Press brought together 150 participants from 49 countries including state news agencies from 34 countries, 12 international and media organizations. Moreover, the Forum is attended by 60 local media heads and representatives. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev

attended the opening ceremony of the Forum and took the time to address questions from participants.

One of the first questions was the significance of the victory in the 44-Day War and the importance of relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye. President Ilham Aliyev acknowledged the deep-rooted friendship and brotherly ties between the people of Azerbaijan and Türkiye. He expressed gratitude for Türkiye’s unwavering support during the 44-Day War, emphasizing President Erdogan's statement, "Azerbaijan is not alone," which served as a significant morale booster for the Azerbaijani people.

Post the Karabakh victory, the two nations further solidified their bond by signing the Shusha Declaration. This agreement not only recognized the alliance between the two countries but also set the stage for future collaborations across various sectors, including politics, energy, trade, transportation, defense, and more.

President Aliyev also lauded President Erdogan's contributions to Türkiye over his two-decade tenure, which has positioned Türkiye as a global leader with increasing international influence. He expressed confidence in the continued partnership between the two nations, emphasizing the need for stability, peace, and security in the South Caucasus region.

The Shusha Global Media Forum continued its insightful session with a question about the potential threats faced by Azerbaijan and President Ilham Aliyev's perspective on the most pressing concerns for the nation. In response, President Aliyev confidently stated that following the liberation of Azerbaijani territories, the nation perceives no immediate

threats. He emphasized the internal stability of Azerbaijan, attributing it to the unity and solidarity of its citizens. The President proudly highlighted the country's economic prowess, which stands as a testament to its self-sufficiency, resourcefulness, and effective management.

President Ilham Aliyev also addressed the historical threats posed by Armenia due to its occupation policies. He recalled the painful memories of the past, where Azerbaijan was betrayed by its neighbors, leading to the occupation of its territories. While the threat from Armenia has been largely managed in the postwar period, President Ilham Aliyev expressed concerns over certain segments in Armenia that still harbor revanchist ideas.

To counter any potential threats, Azerbaijan has proactively initiated reforms in its defense sector. President Ilham Aliyev stated that the Armed Forces today is significantly stronger than it was three years ago. He emphasized the importance of strength as a deterrent, especially in a world where international law is often flouted. Drawing attention to the non-implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions demanding the withdrawal of Armenian troops from territories of Azerbaijan, President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the selective functioning of international law.

While acknowledging the unpredictable nature of global and regional situations, President Ilham Aliyev assured that the current level of external threats to Azerbaijan remains relatively low. This is due to Azerbaijan's preparedness and unwavering commitment to safeguarding its sovereignty and the well-being of its citizens.

Jordan Morgan from the United Kingdom posed a pertinent question regarding the

opportunities for Azerbaijan and the region. President Ilham Aliyev's response provided a comprehensive overview of Azerbaijan's regional dynamics and its path to peace. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that the development of the Southern Caucasus largely hinges on the normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. He pointed out that while international actors have shown interest in aiding a resolution, the foundation of any solution must be rooted in international law. The President recalled the years of occupation and the ambiguous stance of international players, which led to the freezing of the conflict. The geopolitical agenda of international players at the time often diverged from Azerbaijan's interests. As a result, Azerbaijan had to take matters into its own hands, implementing UN Security Council resolutions on the battlefield. Today, the narrative has shifted, with international brokers now recognizing the new reality post 44-Day War. The President stressed that any peace agreement with Armenia must acknowledge the reality of the 30-year occupation, the destruction it caused, and the outcomes of the war.

Currently, three international actors – the United States, Russia, and the European Union – are assisting in the peace process. While Azerbaijan is working in good faith with all three, the efforts have yet to yield substantial results. The President emphasized that Armenia needs to recognize Azerbaijan's territorial integrity fully. If Armenia takes this crucial step, a peace agreement could potentially be signed by the end of the year. If not, the absence of peace could further destabilize the region, given the fragile geopolitical situation. In conclusion, President Ilham Aliyev expressed hope that progress will be made on one of the three tracks facilitated

by the international brokers. The path to peace is intricate, but with mutual recognition and respect for international law, a stable and secure future for the region is achievable.

Another issue that was touched upon was the question about Azerbaijan's role as an energy bridge between Europe and Central Asia, particularly in relation to potential collaborations with Turkmenistan and how Europe could support Azerbaijan in this endeavor.

President Ilham Aliyev began by emphasizing Azerbaijan's position on the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline project. He clarified that while Azerbaijan has been proactive in initiating projects based on its resources, such as the Southern Gas Corridor, the Trans-Caspian project is fundamentally based on Turkmenistan's gas resources. Hence, it's not Azerbaijan's place to initiate or invest in it. Highlighting the success of the Southern Gas Corridor, President Ilham Aliyev mentioned that Azerbaijan has become a significant gas supplier to Europe. The demand for Azerbaijani gas in Europe is growing, leading to discussions about expanding the existing pipeline system. This expansion is driven by Azerbaijan's increasing gas production, with new discoveries like the Absheron gas field, which possesses at least 300 billion cubic meters. The first well is already producing gas more than any well on Shahdeniz. Regarding the Trans-Caspian Pipeline, President Aliyev pointed out two primary challenges: the construction of the pipeline under the sea and the financing of the project. With European banks ceasing to finance fossil fuel projects and the green transition complicating matters further, the feasibility of the project remains uncertain. Additionally, fluctuating gas prices in Europe and the imposition of price caps

further complicate the economic viability of such projects.

President Ilham Aliyev expressed that while Azerbaijan would welcome the construction of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline for the benefits of transit fees and increased cooperation, the project's realization faces multiple challenges. The way forward requires a collaborative approach, with countries coming together to address the financial and infrastructural challenges.

Answering the question on the ongoing "Great Return" initiative, President Ilham Aliyev began by expressing his pride in the Azerbaijani people and the Army. President Ilham Aliyev recounted the valor of the soldiers who reclaimed their lands and reflected on the spirit and moral qualities of the Azerbaijani people. However, President Ilham Aliyev also expressed the pain and disbelief he feels every time he witnesses the ruins and destruction left behind by the Armenian occupation. Despite the pain, President Ilham Aliyev shared the positive energy and happiness he feels with every new development project in the liberated areas. He described the happiness as a feeling that comes from within, especially when witnessing the progress and development of the region.

Regarding the "Great Return" program, President Ilham Aliyev mentioned that over 30 cities and villages' Master Plans have been approved. The goal is to return more than 150,000 people to both Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur within the next three years. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the challenges of the demining process and the importance of transparency in the reconstruction projects. The President expressed hope that by next year, the first residents would settle in the city of Shusha.

President Ilham Aliyev reiterated his commitment to ensuring that those who suffered for 30 years are provided with the best living conditions in the reconstructed areas.

Touching upon the challenges of landmines on the daily lives of Azerbaijani citizens, President Ilham Aliyev acknowledged the severity of the landmine issue, noting that these explosives have already claimed almost 300 lives and caused severe injuries to both civilians and military personnel. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that the planting of landmines is a war crime and criticized Armenia for not providing accurate maps of the minefields, which President Ilham Aliyev described as a continuation of Armenian terror. President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the efforts Azerbaijan is making in demining. The country has purchased equipment, invited private companies to assist, and even started producing demining machines locally. The State Agency ANAMA, along with the Ministry of Emergency, are working tirelessly to clear the area. However, the President estimated that over 1 million mines have been planted, making the demining process lengthy and challenging. President Ilham Aliyev also mentioned the use of drones to detect heavily mined areas and emphasized the importance of restricting access to the liberated territories to minimize casualties. The President urged former internally displaced persons (IDPs) to exercise caution when returning to their homes and avoid unauthorized areas. President Ilham Aliyev expressed his concerns about the ongoing threat of landmines, emphasizing that it will remain a significant challenge for Azerbaijan in the coming years.

Answering the question about the role of international brokers in the post-war

negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the failure of the Minsk Group, President Ilham Aliyev clarified the negotiation processes between Azerbaijan and Armenia. President Ilham Aliyev mentioned two brokers, Russia and the United States, and the Brussels format, which serves as a supplementary mechanism for direct interaction between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan. He criticized the Minsk Group for making itself dysfunctional and emphasized that any reincarnation of the Minsk Group is unrealistic and unacceptable to Azerbaijan.

President Ilham Aliyev acknowledged the global rivalry between major powers and emphasized that Azerbaijan has always aimed to avoid becoming an area of rivalry. He highlighted that Azerbaijan is a place of cooperation, as evidenced by meetings between Russian and American military commanders in Baku. President Ilham Aliyev expressed concerns about Armenia potentially becoming an area of rivalry due to a lack of a clear foreign policy strategy.

President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan should remain bilateral. He stressed the importance of Armenia formally agreeing to refrain from territorial claims against Azerbaijan. While Armenia has verbally recognized Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, President Ilham Aliyev underscored that there should be a formal agreement. He highlighted the need for discussions on the rights and security of national minorities in both countries.

President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that while Armenia has verbally acknowledged Azerbaijan's territorial rights, especially with the statement "Karabakh is Azerbaijan," it is crucial for Armenia to formalize this

acknowledgment through official documentation. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the importance of clear and unambiguous statements in the negotiation process to avoid any future misunderstandings or conflicts. President Ilham Aliyev also touched upon the issue of national minorities. He stated that if discussions arise about the rights and securities of Armenians in Karabakh, then it is only logical for Azerbaijan to discuss the rights and securities of Azerbaijanis in regions like Zangazur, Goycha, and Yerevan. The President concluded by expressing hope for the negotiations but emphasized the need for a realistic approach.

Answering the question on Azerbaijan-Central Asia relations, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the importance of cooperation and mutual support between Azerbaijan and Central Asian countries. President Ilham Aliyev expressed gratitude for the support and solidarity shown by Central Asian nations, particularly highlighting the contributions from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in the form of a school and a Youth Art Center, respectively. These contributions, President Ilham Aliyev noted, were significant gestures of solidarity and understanding of the vast reconstruction efforts required in the post-war period. Discussing bilateral relations, President Ilham Aliyev highlighted his visits to various Central Asian countries and the reciprocal visits of their leaders to Azerbaijan. He mentioned the establishment of Joint Investment Funds with countries like Uzbekistan and the ongoing initiative with Kyrgyzstan. While the initial assets in these funds might not be substantial, he emphasized that they can be expanded based on the availability and viability of projects. A significant portion of the discussion revolved around transportation and connectivity. President Ilham Aliyev

highlighted the ongoing discussions with Central Asian leaders about enhancing transportation routes across the Caspian, through Azerbaijan, Georgia, Türkiye, and onwards to Europe. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the modern transportation infrastructure of Azerbaijan and its capability to handle a significant volume of cargo. President Aliyev expressed optimism about the future of relations between Azerbaijan and Central Asian countries, emphasizing the potential for increased cooperation and mutual growth.

President Ilham Aliyev also addressed the question regarding the timeline for the reconstruction of Karabakh and the broader implications of the conflict. The reconstruction process of Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur is organized in stages. The "Great Return" program has been initiated, with financial resources allocated for its implementation. By the end of the year, the projected spending for infrastructure and urban development will be around \$7 billion. The primary goal at the initial stage is to rebuild eight cities and about 100 villages. People have already started settling in some areas like Aghali village, Talish village, and the city of Lachin. The President anticipates that all liberated cities will be rehabilitated within the next five years. However, the development plan for these cities is more extensive, and the full realization might take longer.

President Ilham Aliyev delved into the historical context of the conflict, emphasizing the migration of Armenians to Karabakh in the 19th century and the subsequent occupation. President Ilham Aliyev contrasted the destruction and desecration of Azerbaijani heritage by Armenians during the occupation with Azerbaijan's preservation of Armenian

heritage, like the Armenian church in Shusha. The President highlighted the atrocities committed by Armenians during the war, including missile attacks on peaceful Azerbaijani cities. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the importance of remembering these events, not for revenge but to ensure such incidents don't recur. President Ilham Aliyev stressed the importance of reconciliation between the two nations. While a peace treaty can be signed, genuine reconciliation requires acknowledgment and confession of past wrongdoings. He mentioned that some perpetrators of crimes against Azerbaijanis are now being punished in Armenia, which he sees as a step towards justice and reconciliation. President Ilham Aliyev expressed hope for a future where both nations can coexist peacefully, but emphasized the importance of acknowledging past wrongs and working towards genuine reconciliation.

V. The trilateral meeting of foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Russia, and Armenia in Moscow

On July 25, a significant diplomatic event took place as Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, held a bilateral meeting with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov. This was followed by a trilateral meeting that also included Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan. The primary focus of these meetings was the ongoing Azerbaijan-Armenia normalization process. Minister Jeyhun Bayramov took the opportunity to reiterate Azerbaijan's position on the current regional situation. He expressed concerns about illegal activities and threats against Azerbaijan's efforts to establish peace and security in the region. He also highlighted the

military provocations from Armenia, including obstacles to flights.

According to the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan, illegal Armenian armed detachments, operating in the areas where the Russian peacekeeping forces are temporarily stationed, have recently intensified the use of radio frequency interference against GPS satellite navigation systems of passenger aircraft of local and foreign airlines flying through the airspace of Azerbaijan. Specific instances of GPS interference were recorded in several cases. On July 24, an ATR-45 passenger aircraft of the Azerbaijan Airlines, flying on the Baku-Fuzuli route, experienced such interference. The following day, a passenger aircraft C-680 of the Czech Airlines, flying on the Budapest-Baku route, was similarly affected. On July 27, another ATR-45 passenger aircraft of the Azerbaijan Airlines, flying on the Baku-Gabala route and in the opposite direction, also reported GPS interference. The command of the Russian peacekeeping forces, temporarily stationed in Azerbaijan under the trilateral statement, was informed about these incidents and similar ones that occurred earlier. Despite this, no measures have been taken by the Russian peacekeeping forces to date against these provocations, which pose a serious threat to the security of flights passing through Azerbaijan's airspace. Previously, on July 13, the Gulfstream G280 passenger aircraft of the Azerbaijan Airlines, flying on the Zangilan-Fuzuli route from 11:54 to 12:07 (GMT+4) and Fuzuli-Baku route from 13:02 to 13:17 (GMT+4), experienced a failure of the GPS navigation system as a result of radio interference. The continued presence of illegal Armenian armed detachments in Azerbaijan, contrary to the trilateral statement signed by Azerbaijan, Russia, and Armenia following the

44-Day War, pose a significant threat to the safety and security of air travel in the region. The lack of action by the Russian peacekeeping forces, despite being informed of these incidents, raises further concerns about the effectiveness of the peacekeeping efforts in the region.

In response to allegations about the humanitarian situation in the region, Minister Bayramov asserted that these claims were unfounded and amounted to political manipulation. He emphasized that it is within Azerbaijan's sovereign rights to take measures against the misuse of the Lachin road for military purposes and the illegal transportation of Azerbaijan's natural resources, actions that are contrary to Armenia's obligations under the Trilateral Statement dated November 10, 2020.

The establishment of the Lachin border checkpoint by Azerbaijan was cited as a necessary measure. However, the minister pointed out that a provocation committed by Armenia against the checkpoint on June 15 had hindered the passage of Armenian residents, despite the transparent, safe, and well-regulated passage conditions that had been established. He noted that Azerbaijan continues to provide passage through the checkpoint for medical purposes to Armenian residents.

Minister Bayramov also expressed concern over the Armenian side's opposition to all proposals, including the utilization of the "Aghdam-Khankendi" and other alternative routes. He stated that such opposition not only revealed insidious intentions but also confirmed that the claims about the humanitarian situation were a form of political blackmail.

Minister Bayramov emphasized that the cessation of attempts to interfere with Azerbaijan's reintegration of Armenians living in its sovereign territories, the unconditional confirmation of Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity by Armenia in words and deeds, and the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces, which are still fully present in the territory of Azerbaijan contrary to Armenia's obligations, are the most necessary conditions for ensuring peace in the region.

VI. Through the smoke of misinformation: Exposing Armenia's unfounded accusations against Azerbaijan

Unraveling the history and resolving the differences requires dedication to truth, justice, and mutual respect. Any deviation from these principles only serves to perpetuate conflict and deter the path towards reconciliation. A steadfast commitment to historical truth and justice is necessary to ensure progress towards a resolution. It is imperative that the international community does not allow unfounded allegations and distortions to influence its perception and engagement. It must prioritize ensuring adherence to international laws and agreements, deterring provocative actions, and supporting constructive dialogue. A clear, unbiased perspective based on historical facts is necessary to further the cause of peace in the region. This involves critically examining each claim and ensuring that historical revisionism does not muddy the waters of diplomacy.

Unfortunately, the propagandist approach taken by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Minister of Foreign Affairs

Ararat Mirzoyan in their recent interviews underlines the urgency for the international community to take a more proactive role in condemning these provocative actions and distortions. In his interview with *Le Monde*, the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan identified what is widely recognized as a puppet regime, established through severe war crimes including ethnic cleansing and genocide against the Azerbaijani population, as “democratically elected authorities”, which is deeply concerning. This portrayal is not only a blatant misrepresentation but also stands in direct contradiction to Armenia's previous acknowledgment of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, including Karabakh.

Armenia's demand for the removal of the Lachin border checkpoint, which acts as a deterrent against illegal activities in the region, is another point of contention. The establishment of this checkpoint is entirely in accordance with international law. The International Court of Justice, in its Order of July 6, reaffirmed Azerbaijan's right to establish such a checkpoint, emphasizing its sovereign and legitimate nature.

Despite the Azerbaijani side's proposal to use the “Aghdam-Khankandi” road for the benefit of the Armenian residents of the Karabakh region—a proposal that received positive feedback from international figures like European Council President Charles Michel—Armenia declined. This refusal, coupled with allegations about a “grave humanitarian situation” in the region, suggests a potential political motive rather than genuine concern for the well-being of the residents.

The Armenian Prime Minister's claims about a “blockade” are misleading, especially when considering the active role of the International Red Cross Committee in the region and the

daily movement of Armenian residents through the checkpoint. Azerbaijan's initiation to use alternative routes, including the “Aghdam-Khankandi” road, further debunks these allegations.

It is ironic that Armenia, which has been in violation of international law for three decades and has ignored multiple UN Security Council Resolutions, now calls for international action against Azerbaijan. Such a stance is not only hypocritical but also undermines the principles of international diplomacy.

The continuous attempts by Armenian officials to interfere in the reintegration measures of Armenians in Azerbaijan's sovereign territories are detrimental to peace in the region. Armenia's conditional approach to Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity is not only unacceptable but also hampers the normalization of relations between the two nations.

In his July 27th interview, Foreign Minister Mirzoyan also engaged in a series of allegations and claims that have raised serious questions about Armenia's commitment to peace in the region. Mirzoyan's press interview was characterized by distortions of the negotiation process, questionable claims about the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and a pattern of speculation that seemed at odds with the documented realities of the conflict between the two nations.

Armenia's recent conduct on international platforms appears inconsistent with its declared commitment to peace. Its aggressive rhetoric undermines negotiations and impedes the efforts of international mediators. This stark contradiction exposes Armenia's apparent lack of interest in ensuring regional peace and stability. Instead of aligning

with Azerbaijan's attempts to reintegrate Armenian citizens, Mirzoyan decided to table a list of provocative demands. This approach not only impedes the progress of peace initiatives but also seems to perpetuate a misrepresentation of the origins and causes of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Mirzoyan's denial of the forced displacement of Azerbaijanis from the territory of modern-day Armenia paints a concerning picture. His refusal to acknowledge the rights of the Western Azerbaijani Community, coupled with a violation of Armenia's international obligations, comes off as an attempt to rationalize Armenia's decades-long policy of ethnic cleansing. The historical record reveals the violence perpetrated against Azerbaijani civilians living in Armenia, including bloody massacres and forced displacement through threats. Yet, Mirzoyan's claims seem to disregard these facts and instead uphold the narrative of a monoethnic state.

It is alarming that Armenia seems to be trivializing these serious issues, turning them into a rhetoric tool, thereby undermining the gravity of human rights violations and ethnic cleansing. By dismissing negotiations in this area, Armenia signals its unwillingness to address the historical injustices it has perpetrated. Armenia's efforts to maintain the status of a monoethnic state through ethnic cleansing and denial of dialogue with the Western Azerbaijan Community demonstrate a resistance to diversity and inclusion. This approach blatantly disregards the principle of human rights, which is supposed to be the cornerstone of any modern democratic nation.

Furthermore, it is paradoxical that Armenia, which has changed thousands of Azerbaijani toponyms and attempted to erase the traces of Azerbaijan from the territory of Armenia, is

accusing Azerbaijan of violating international law. Such claims seem to be a clear case of deflection, an attempt to obscure its actions that have been in direct violation of international laws and agreements.

Armenia's accusations against Azerbaijan are notably baseless, serving to distract attention from its own questionable conduct. These false allegations appear to be a strategic move designed to derail the negotiation process and cast doubt on Azerbaijan's commitment to the peace process.

Armenia's continuous denial of the right of Azerbaijanis to return to their homes, and its presentation of their requests for dialogue as "territorial claims," suggests a continued endorsement of ethnic cleansing to maintain the status quo. This approach raises serious questions about Armenia's respect for human rights. It's critical to note that the rights of the Armenian population in the Karabakh region do not negate those of the Azerbaijani population. The consistent practice of discrimination cannot be a suitable solution for the region's complex issues. Armenia's claims that Azerbaijan violates agreements are largely unfounded and potentially misleading. It seems to be more of a ploy to deflect attention from its provocative actions and to avoid taking responsibility for its past and present actions. As the international community continues to monitor the unfolding situation, it should remain vigilant to ensure that the facts are not distorted, that peace agreements are respected, and that steps towards lasting peace are not undermined by unfounded accusations and historical misrepresentations.

For lasting peace and stability in the region, it is imperative for Armenia to cease its provocative actions and statements and

adhere to its international obligations. The international community should urge Armenia to adopt a constructive approach, one that prioritizes peace over political maneuvering.

VII. Unmasking Armenia's political manipulations

The Republic of Azerbaijan has been wrestling with the repercussions of Armenian military aggression and occupation of its territories for nearly three decades. This has led to widespread atrocities committed against Azerbaijani citizens, rendering a staggering one million individuals internally displaced or refugees.

Despite four UN Security Council Resolutions issued in 1993 recognizing and upholding Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and calling for the cessation of occupation and immediate withdrawal of Armenian forces, Armenia has systematically disregarded these resolutions. Instead, they have augmented the status quo based on occupation, intentionally destroyed the historical and cultural heritage of the Azerbaijani population in the occupied territories, and implemented an illegal settlement policy.

Armenian leadership has continued to engage in provocative rhetoric, making statements such as "Karabakh is Armenia, and a full stop," and menacingly forecasting a "new war for new territories."

In the 44-day Patriotic War of 2020, under the leadership of President Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan achieved a historic victory, putting an end to the occupation of its lands. Despite enduring three decades of occupation and hardship, the Azerbaijani side proposed principles and a peace treaty for the

normalization of relations with Armenia, based on mutual recognition and respect for each other's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and borders.

The Azerbaijani authorities have consistently reached out to establish contacts and hold dialogues with local Armenian residents of the Karabakh region, contributing positively towards the construction of the new Lachin road, usage of small hydro power plants in the Lachin region, and the management of the Sarsang water reservoir.

However, despite these positive efforts, Armenia has actively impeded contacts between Azerbaijan and local Armenian residents, and continues to push its territorial claims against Azerbaijan. This is in clear violation of their obligations and an ignorant disregard for international commitments.

A disturbing outcome of this has been the extensive landmine threats posed by Armenia, with 303 Azerbaijanis, including two journalists, becoming victims since November 2020. In defiance of their obligations, Armenian forces have yet to fully withdraw from Azerbaijani territories. Using the Lachin road, Armenia continues to supply their forces with weapons and ammunition, funding them from the state budget of Armenia, and exploiting Azerbaijan's natural resources.

In order to establish control over its borders and to prevent further illegal acts by Armenia, Azerbaijan has set up the Lachin border checkpoint within its sovereign territories. Despite Azerbaijan's facilitation of passage for Armenian residents, ICRC personnel, and the Russian Peacekeeping Contingent, Armenia has continued to spread false claims about a "tense humanitarian situation in the region."

Azerbaijan has proposed alternative routes to meet the needs of the Armenian residents, an initiative supported by the European Union and the ICRC. However, Armenia's refusal of all proposals and blockage of alternative roads indicate that their claims about the humanitarian situation are nothing more than political manipulation.

Armenia's objective is to entangle third parties, broaden regional tensions, and sabotage the peace process. Their actions, including military provocations and intensifying interference targeting civilian flights, are both intolerable and unacceptable. The responsibility for all these provocations lies squarely with Armenia and its leadership, which continues to foster separatism and obstruct reintegration efforts.

Biased statements against Azerbaijan by countries and international organizations that ignored Armenia's 30-year occupation of Azerbaijani territories are highly inappropriate. Azerbaijan demands these entities to respect its sovereignty and territorial integrity, refrain from interfering in its internal affairs, and put an end to their policy of double standards.

The Republic of Azerbaijan remains committed to ensuring the rights of Armenian residents living in its Karabakh region, based on its Constitution, and will resolutely thwart any actions against its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Even with its commendable commitment to achieving a sustainable peace, Azerbaijan faces tremendous hurdles on its path, primarily because of Armenia's incessant aggression. The aggression ranges from blatant military confrontations to subtler strategies like the continued dissemination of

misinformation to provoke international misunderstanding and disapproval towards Azerbaijan.

The recent incident involving the Lachin border checkpoint perfectly illustrates this. Azerbaijan installed this checkpoint in its sovereign territories to establish control over its borders and prevent Armenia's illegal activities. While the passage of Armenian residents, ICRC personnel, and the Russian Peacekeeping Contingent through the checkpoint has been facilitated by Azerbaijan, Armenia has continued to disseminate false claims. Such allegations, although false, are particularly damaging in the international sphere. They unfairly tarnish Azerbaijan's reputation, suggesting a humanitarian crisis where none exists. Instead, what has been overlooked is Azerbaijan's relentless commitment to ensuring the safety and welfare of Armenian residents, something it has demonstrated time and again despite the past and ongoing provocations.

However, the most concerning aspect of Armenia's strategy is its provocative military activities. Despite multiple calls for withdrawal, Armenia's armed forces have continued their presence in Azerbaijani territories. They rotate their troops using the Lachin road, continually supply them with weapons and ammunition, and even finance these activities from Armenia's state budget. All this is carried out while simultaneously plundering Azerbaijan's natural resources, demonstrating a complete disregard for international law and obligations.

Furthermore, in violation of the statement made on November 10, 2020, regarding the cessation of all military activities, Armenia has intensified the laying and planting of landmines produced in 2021 in Azerbaijani

territories. This has led to numerous casualties, with over 300 Azerbaijanis, including two journalists, falling victim to these landmines since November 2020.

To add to the gravity of these issues, Armenia has thwarted Azerbaijan's initiatives for a peaceful resolution, effectively stalling the peace process. Despite Azerbaijan's numerous proposals for normalizing relations, including the use of alternative routes for the benefit of Armenian residents, Armenia has rejected all these propositions, choosing instead to maintain a state of unrest.

In the latest round of political maneuvering, Armenia is also using the pretext of 'humanitarian aid' to dispatch convoys to the sovereign territories of Azerbaijan without any prior agreement. This act is not just a flagrant provocation, but a clear violation of international law and norms. To add fuel to the fire, this provocation is being encouraged at the Prime Ministerial level in Armenia, a move that is simply unacceptable.

Armenia's claim of a 'tense humanitarian situation' is nothing more than a smokescreen for illicit activities and an attempt to stir tension through baseless political manipulation. By cloaking its actions under the guise of humanitarian aid, Armenia seeks to divert attention from its own past transgressions and violations of human rights.

The reality of the matter is that Armenia needs to confront its own past. It must apologize for the forced deportations of Azerbaijanis from their territory, the mass casualties caused by driving these people from their ancestral lands, and the aggression against Azerbaijan. Armenia has been involved in numerous instances of crimes against humanity, including genocide during its military

occupation. The evidence of its ethnic cleansing policy and actions is overwhelming and can't be dismissed.

Instead of directing baseless accusations of 'genocide' towards Azerbaijan, Armenia needs to take responsibility for its actions and make amends. Making empty claims and evading responsibility is a poor attempt to rewrite history and does not contribute to peace and stability in the region.

If Armenia truly desires peace and stability in the region, and genuinely respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, it must abstain from such provocative actions. Instead, it should support the utilization of routes proposed by Azerbaijan, such as 'Aghdam-Khankendi', to meet the needs of the Armenian population.

Azerbaijan is making efforts to reintegrate the Armenian residents, but these endeavors are being constantly obstructed by Armenia. The time has come for Armenia to shift its approach from provocation to cooperation, from distortion to acceptance of facts. Only then can we hope for the advent of genuine peace and stability in this region.

What becomes apparent is that Armenia's ultimate goal is to involve third parties in the region, escalate tensions, and push the peace process to a breaking point. The responsibility for this precarious situation undeniably rests with Armenia and its leadership, who continue to hinder reintegration efforts by promoting separatism and maintaining an illegal military presence in Azerbaijan.

In light of these challenges, the international community must realize the double standards employed against Azerbaijan and move towards an unbiased stance. Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity should be

respected, and any interference in its internal affairs should be strongly discouraged.

Azerbaijan remains firm in its resolution to uphold the rights of Armenian residents in the Karabakh region, based on its constitution. It will continue its efforts for peace, while resolutely protecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity against any threats.

VIII. Debunking Armenia's false narratives: A closer look at Vagif Khachatryan's arrest

In an effort to avoid its responsibilities, Armenia is yet again resorting to tactics of deceit and political manipulation aimed at the international community regarding the arrest of Vagif Khachatryan by the State Border Service of Azerbaijan at the Lachin border checkpoint on July 29. Khachatryan was arrested at the Lachin border checkpoint while trying to cross into Armenia in a vehicle of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The arrest was not arbitrary or unjustified and was rooted in an ongoing criminal case against Khachatryan dating back to the early 1990s., Khachatryan is accused of perpetrating a horrifying attack against the Azerbaijani population in the Meshali village of the Khojaly region in 1991. Rather than recognizing the need for justice, Armenia chose to launch an offensive of political manipulation, attempting to depict the arrest as a violation of international humanitarian law.

The truth, as confirmed by the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Azerbaijan, paints a starkly different picture. As per the official statement from the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Vagif Cherkhezovich Khachatryan

stands accused of being part of an Armenian armed formation that carried out a massacre against the Azerbaijani population in the Meshali village of the Khojaly region on December 22, 1991. The atrocities led to the death of 25 Azerbaijanis, left 14 wounded, and displaced a further 358 individuals. In light of these horrific acts, Khachatryan was charged under the articles 103 (genocide) and 107 (deportation or forced exile of population) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The pre-trial detention was ordered as a preventative measure by the court within this criminal case. Khachatryan's arrest at the Lachin border was consistent with both international law and Azerbaijan's legislation. Even after his arrest, Azerbaijan ensured that Khachatryan, who was travelling to get medical assistance, was placed in a medical facility in Baku and received the necessary treatment.

Armenia's attempts to politicize the arrest are not grounded in reality, as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) confirms that almost 700 persons of Armenian origin have travelled via the ICRC to Armenia and back to Azerbaijan since December of the previous year. No unlawful acts were committed against these individuals. The claims made by the Armenian Foreign Ministry about the imminent threat to persons crossing the border checkpoint are, therefore, unfounded and only serve to induce panic among Armenian residents.

Armenia's accusation of Azerbaijan breaching international humanitarian law is nothing short of ironic. The international humanitarian law allows no leniency for war criminals, and the reference to it by Armenia is inappropriate, especially considering the country's track record of genocide and mass killings against

civilian populations in Khojaly, Malibeyli, Gushchular, Aghdaban, Ballighaya, and Bashlibel, among others.

The efforts made by Armenia to shield war criminals and cover up their actions contradict the international imperative to bring to justice those who committed crimes against humanity, including genocide. Armenia's attempts to smear Azerbaijan's commitment to this responsibility expose the country's evasion of its obligations.

Throughout the 30 years since these crimes took place, Azerbaijan has been clear and consistent. The country has initiated criminal cases against individuals who committed war crimes on its territory and issued international warrants against these individuals. Azerbaijan will continue to act within the confines of its internal legislation and international practice to bring these individuals to justice. The commitment of Azerbaijan to international law remains steadfast, despite the deceptive practices of political manipulation by Armenia. With a keen eye towards justice and the enforcement of international law, Azerbaijan took appropriate action against an individual charged with heinous crimes against humanity. However, Armenia's continued resort to deceit and political manipulation serves as a disturbing distraction from the truth.

Armenia's attempts to deceive the international community in relation to this arrest are deeply problematic. The claim that individuals crossing the border checkpoint are under imminent threat is patently false. In reality, many individuals of Armenian origin have crossed this border safely, facilitated by the ICRC, with no instances of unlawful acts committed against them. Armenia's claims, therefore, merely serve to instigate

unnecessary panic among the Armenian residents.

Furthermore, Armenia's allegation that Azerbaijan has breached international humanitarian law during Khachaturyan's arrest is ironic and baseless. International humanitarian law does not provide immunity to war criminals. In fact, Armenia's reference to these laws seems misguided, especially in light of the country's own track record of genocide and mass killings against civilian populations.

In a quest for justice and adherence to international law, Azerbaijan has consistently sought to hold accountable those responsible for war crimes on its territory. Azerbaijan has initiated criminal cases, issued international warrants against the perpetrators, and will continue to act within the framework of internal legislation and international practice to bring these individuals to justice.

It is high time that Armenia stopped its attempts to shield war criminals and distort the truth. Instead, it must fulfill its obligations to the international community, support justice for heinous crimes against humanity, and cease its deceptive tactics of political manipulation.

IX. France's misguided allegations over the Lachin border checkpoint

In a climate where accuracy is paramount, the statement by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, released on July 27, was full of misconceptions. The allegation, suggesting that Azerbaijan's establishment of the Lachin border checkpoint constitutes a so-called blockade and a violation of commitments, is a far cry from the truth. It is

necessary to underscore the critical fact that the presence of Armenian armed forces in Azerbaijan's territories, along with their continual military provocations, illegal transportation of landmines, and other munitions into Azerbaijani territory, contravene the terms of the Trilateral Statement. In light of this, France's selective attention and one-sided criticism directed at Azerbaijan become untenable.

In a conspicuous oversight, France's statement fails to acknowledge the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on July 6, which affirmed the complete legitimacy of the Lachin border checkpoint. The ICJ unanimously rejected Armenia's appeals to remove Azerbaijani Border Guard personnel and dismantle the border checkpoint. Azerbaijan has a compelling obligation and rightful authority to prevent the Lachin road from being misused for illegal purposes. Ensuring control and transparency at its border is not a transgression but an exercise of sovereignty.

Despite this, Armenia has incessantly stoked tensions with acts of provocation, opening fire on the checkpoint, attempting smuggling, and sending cargo to the area without prior agreement. Even in the face of these provocations, Azerbaijan has facilitated the passage of Armenian residents through the checkpoint. On July 27 alone, 34 individuals and 7 vehicles passed through unimpeded. Furthermore, Azerbaijan proposed the use of alternative routes, such as the "Aghdam-Khankendi" road, for the transportation of large volumes of cargo.

France's silence in the face of Armenia's provocations and its unwarranted criticism of Azerbaijan are indicative of a flawed policy. The claims about a humanitarian situation are evidently speculative and misguided, given the

openness demonstrated by Azerbaijan even amid provocations.

It is therefore prudent for France and other international entities to reflect upon the repercussions of biased statements that are not grounded in reality. The propagation of such distortions does not serve the cause of peace and stability in the region. Instead, it fuels unwarranted tensions.

International actors should not fall prey to Armenia's manipulations and consider the true context before issuing skewed narratives. The primary goal should be to foster a genuine understanding that ultimately supports regional peace and stability, rather than endorsing one-sided distortions.

X. ICRC should avoid the misuse of its humanitarian mandate for political ends

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) plays a vital role in providing humanitarian aid and assistance in conflict zones and areas affected by natural disasters. Its mandate is rooted in principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence. However, the potential abuse of this mandate for political purposes can undermine the ICRC's mission and credibility. In this context, instances where ICRC resources are used for smuggling or other illegal activities can severely damage the organization's reputation and hinder its ability to operate in conflict zones. Recent incidents, such as the reported misuse of ICRC vehicles for smuggling at the Lachin border checkpoint, highlight the challenges faced by the organization. Such actions not only violate the ICRC's principles but also compromise the organization's neutrality.

The ICRC released a statement on July 25 regarding the humanitarian situation in the region and the activities of the ICRC. This statement has drawn attention to the complex dynamics between Azerbaijan and the ICRC, especially in light of Armenia's ongoing unlawful actions that violate Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty. While assessing the firing at the Lachin border checkpoint on June 15, and the attempts of Armenian drivers to bring smuggled items to Azerbaijan in vehicles of the ICRC as further illegal acts by Armenia against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan, as well as hindering of operation of the checkpoint, Azerbaijan demanded an immediate halt to such malign activities.

Despite these challenges, Azerbaijan has continued to cooperate with the ICRC, working to prevent Armenia's illegal actions while maintaining essential humanitarian cooperation. Following discussions with the ICRC, Azerbaijan created conditions within necessary regulations to allow the passage of Armenian residents through the border checkpoint for medical purposes. Dozens of Armenian residents have been able to pass through the checkpoint in both directions on a daily basis.

Azerbaijan has also offered assistance for the transportation and delivery of larger quantities of medicine and cargo using the "Aghdam-

Khankendi" road. Regrettably, the Armenian side has adamantly refused this offer. Additionally, a planned visit by ICRC medical personnel to the area to assist in the passage of Armenian residents through the border checkpoint was refused on-site by the Armenian side, despite previous agreements.

The opposition of the Armenian side to Azerbaijan's efforts, including proposals to use alternative roads, has been interpreted as evidence that claims of a "tense humanitarian situation" in the region are being used as a means of political manipulation and pressure.

The situation underscores the importance of adhering to the humanitarian mandate of the ICRC and avoiding the abuse of this mandate for political purposes. The ongoing cooperation between Azerbaijan and the ICRC, despite the challenges posed by the Armenian side, reflects a commitment to humanitarian principles and the rule of law.

The humanitarian mandate of the ICRC is a cornerstone of its ability to provide aid and protection to those most in need. Continued vigilance, transparency, and adherence to the core principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence should be essential to preserving the ICRC's vital role in global humanitarian efforts. Any abuse of this mandate for political purposes undermines the organization's integrity and effectiveness.