

BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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I. Azerbaijan and the EU sign an MoU on strategic energy partnership

On July 18, Azerbaijan and the EU agreed to deepen the existing cooperation in energy sector by signing a Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Partnership in the field of energy. The document was signed by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen. This new energy deal is part of the EU's effort to diversify its energy supplies REPowerEU Plan and cut its dependency on Russian gas. The Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic Partnership in the Field of Energy envisions the doubling of Azerbaijan's gas exports to the EU in next five years, which means doubling the capacity of the Southern Gas Corridor to deliver at least 20 billion cubic meters to the EU annually by 2027. Azerbaijan is already ramping up deliveries of natural gas to the EU, from 8.1 billion cubic meters in 2021 to an expected 12 bcm in 2022. The MoU on Energy also underscores the EU and Azerbaijan shared desire to boost the development and deployment of renewable energy generation and transmission capacity "to fully reap the synergies between the EU's clean energy transition and Azerbaijan's strong untapped renewable energy potential, in particular in the offshore energy sector."

President von der Leyen noted that "today, with this new Memorandum of Understanding, we are opening a new chapter in our energy cooperation with Azerbaijan, a key partner in our efforts to move away from Russian fossil fuels. Not only are we looking to strengthen our existing partnership which guarantees stable and reliable gas supplies to the EU via the Southern Gas Corridor. We are also laying the foundations of a long-term partnership on energy efficiency and clean energy, as we both pursue the objectives of

the Paris Agreement. But energy is only one of the areas where we can enhance our cooperation with Azerbaijan and I look forward to tap the full potential of our relationship". Commissioner for Energy, Kadri Simson also added that "the new Memorandum of Understanding underlines the strategic role of the Southern Gas Corridor in our diversification efforts. Azerbaijan has already increased the natural gas deliveries to the EU and this trend will continue, with up to 4 billion cubic meters of additional gas this year and volumes expected to more than double by 2027. But our cooperation goes beyond that, accelerating the deployment of renewables and addressing methane emissions; these steps will both increase security of supply and help achieve our climate goals."

After the signing ceremony in Baku, President Ilham Aliyev and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen both emphasized their commitment to enhance and broaden cooperation in bilateral relations, especially in energy sector. "Today's memorandum is not the first document that was signed between us. We had MoU signed in 2006 and Joint Declaration on Southern Gas Corridor signed in 2011. So, we have a good history and good achievements. Energy projects initiated by Azerbaijan and supported by the European Union, and supported by our partners completely changed the energy map of Europe. We started with oil production, gas production, and constructing an oil pipeline that connected Caspian with the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Of course, the Southern Gas Corridor, which is a 3,500 km long integrated pipeline system that brings our gas to the European continent. It's less than two years that the Southern Gas Corridor has been working at full capacity, and all the segments are in place, but already we see the positive

benefits of this cooperation,” President Ilham Aliyev noted, adding that “issues of energy security today are more important than ever before. A long-lasting, predictable and very reliable cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan in the field of energy, of course, is a big asset. This year we started an energy dialogue between the EU and Azerbaijan, which covers many areas, including oil, gas, renewables, hydrogen, energy efficiency and other issues, and the great potential of renewable energy production in Azerbaijan also is appreciated already by the European Union.”

President Ilham Aliyev also noted that Baku has already conducted an initial study to assess Azerbaijan’s potential in renewable energy production. In the liberated lands of Karabakh and Eastern Zangazur, the potential of solar and wind power plants is 9,200 megawatts, and the potential of wind in the Caspian Sea is 157 gigawatts. Foreign investors are building three solar and wind power plants with a capacity of 710 megawatts in Azerbaijan. Two are already under construction, and preparations are under way for the construction of the third station, in Jabrayil district. Moreover, on July 15, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “according to the agreements we have already reached with foreign investors, there are plans to build solar and wind power plants with an additional capacity of 2,000 megawatts, as well as a further 2,000 megawatts. In addition, the generation capacity of hydroelectric power plants in Kalbajar and Lachin districts is being reevaluated, because after the war we calculated the generation capacity of only hydroelectric power plants destroyed by the Armenians. There used to be a total of 32 hydroelectric power stations there, which the Armenians savagely destroyed when leaving Kalbajar and Lachin,” adding that “we will

probably be able to receive more than a thousand megawatts from small hydroelectric power plants alone in the future. Within a year and a half, the construction of nine hydroelectric power stations has either been completed or will be completed by the end of this year. This will provide us with an additional 50 megawatts. In other words, this area was a priority for us even before the second Karabakh war, but it has risen to a completely new level now.”

This will also allow Azerbaijan the opportunity to export more electricity. Today Azerbaijan is exporting electricity through existing high-voltage lines. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that “in the future, however, we can organize the exports of electricity through the Zangazur corridor, and Europe has presented a new project. There is also a project to lay a cable from Georgia to Romania along the bottom of the Black Sea, and we are interested in this project as well. So there are great prospects in this area.” It will also create an opportunity to save more natural gas for export. Moreover, the new gas fields which we will start operating in next few years, which will also add to the production of natural gas. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that “we have envisaged the gas that will be produced from promising fields both for the domestic needs and for exports. So far, the Shah Deniz field is our resource base for exports, but in the near future, gas production is also expected at Absheron, Shafag, Asiman, Umid-Babek fields and the deep-water portion of the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli fields. So this is a tremendous resource, and extensive work is currently underway on all the projects I have mentioned. These are not just exploration projects – hard work is underway.”

In his press statement after the signing of the MoU on strategic partnership in the field of energy between the European Union and

Azerbaijan, President Ilham Aliyev also noted that “today’s memorandum actually is a kind of a road map for the future. Taking into account all that what we planned before we accomplished, I am sure that we will see great success. Among other issues we discussed today was the issue of connectivity, and taking into account the geographical location of Azerbaijan and modern transportation infrastructure, we need to work more actively on connecting our potential. Because here on the Western shore of the Caspian, Azerbaijan has the largest trade fleet in the Caspian, modern infrastructure, ship-building yard, new Sea Port and railroad connecting us with all our neighbors. And there is a significant demand for joint efforts to make connectivity as important in our relationship as energy.” President Ilham Aliyev concluded that “We are working on a new agreement between the EU and Azerbaijan. We just discussed it with Madam President, and hopefully, in the coming months, we can complete it. That will also be an important contribution to our bilateral cooperation. We work on a bilateral track within the framework of the Eastern Partnership program, and the EU is the main trading partner for Azerbaijan. Implementing our plans, of course, will increase the joint turnover to the benefit of our peoples and the relationship between the EU and Azerbaijan, I am sure, will have a great future and all we planned we would achieve.”

President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen also made a statement after the signing ceremony. President von der Leyen thanked Azerbaijan for stepping up and supporting the European Union. “Because already before Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, the Russian gas supplies to Europe were no more reliable. The European Union has therefore decided to diversify away from Russia and to turn towards more reliable,

trustworthy partners. And I am glad to count Azerbaijan among them. You are indeed a crucial energy partner for us and you have always been reliable. You were a crucial partner not only for our security of supply, but also in our efforts to become climate neutral. The Memorandum of Understanding that we have just signed makes our energy partnership even stronger,” President von der Leyen noted. In her press statement, President von der Leyen underscored three main moments from the MoU: increased gas supplies, cooperation on renewable energy, and synergy with the EU’s climate goals.

“The first is that we will double the supply of gas from Azerbaijan to the European Union. Indeed, with this MoU, we commit to the expansion of the Southern Gas Corridor. This is already a very important supply route for the European Union, delivering currently more than 8 billion cubic metres of gas per year. And we will expand its capacity to 20 billion cubic metres in a few years. From next year on, we should already reach 12 billion cubic metres. This will help compensate for cuts in supplies of Russian gas and contribute significantly to Europe's security of supply. The second point that is very prominent in the MoU is the topic of the renewables. Azerbaijan has a tremendous potential in renewable energy – you just described it, Mr President –, and in particular in offshore wind and green hydrogen. We discussed it extensively in our bilateral meeting. Today, with our MoU, we are laying the ground for solid cooperation in that area. So gradually, Azerbaijan will evolve from being a fossil fuel supplier to becoming a very reliable and prominent renewable energy partner to the European Union. Finally, our cooperation on gas has to be consistent with our responsibilities on climate. This includes, for example, the emissions of methane. Our MoU sets out commitments to reduce

methane emissions throughout the entire gas supply chain. And, as we have discussed, Mr President, I strongly encourage Azerbaijan to join the Global Methane Pledge, which is now supported by 119 countries. Azerbaijan has made enormous progress and has a lot to deliver,” von der Leyen underscored.

“Beyond energy, President Aliyev and I discussed the full range of our relation and cooperation. The EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council will meet tomorrow in Brussels and discuss how to take forward our bilateral cooperation. We are working right now on a new bilateral agreement that we hope to conclude soon. The aim is to further expand the strong economic partnership we do have. Indeed, the European Union is: the first commercial partner of Azerbaijan; its first export destination; and one of its most important sources of investments. And we want to expand this. We are investing EUR 60 million of EU funds in Azerbaijan until 2024. And the Economic and Investment Plan has the potential to mobilise up to EUR 2 billion in additional investments. It is already at work, supporting round about 25,000 Azeri small and medium companies, and making the Port of Baku a sustainable transport hub,” President of the European Commission added.

President von der Leyen also emphasized that the EU is interested in partnering with Azerbaijan to build connections to Central Asia and beyond. President von der Leyen concluded that “the European Union is committed to a secure, stable and prosperous South Caucasus. We are the leading donor in demining in the country, for example. We have also discussed this very important topic. We have now just announced a new EUR-4.25-million package for this purpose. But we are also willing to offer machinery and skills in this very important field. All in all, the European Union is firmly attached to your region, Mr

President. We value our partnership. And this partnership will consistently grow and deepen over time.”

II. Azerbaijan continues to boost ties with international organizations

On July 15, President Ilham Aliyev chaired a cabinet meeting on results of policy development in the first half of 2022 and future objectives. During the meeting, President Ilham Aliyev also touched upon several foreign policy issues, chief among them Azerbaijan’s mutually beneficial and successfully developing relations with a number of influential organizations. On the chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement, President Ilham Aliyev noted that the fact that Azerbaijan’s chairmanship of the NAM has been extended unanimously until 2023 shows that Azerbaijan has gained a great reputation among 120 countries and their confidence in Azerbaijan has increased over the years. As a responsible stakeholder and active chair of the organization, Azerbaijan has contributed extensively to the institutional development of the NAM. One of the major developments was the meeting of the Parliamentary Network of the Non-Aligned Movement Baku in 2022 and the creation of the Parliamentary Network. This major event held in Baku showed that the NAM has enormous potential. The Non-Aligned Movement is a very important platform for boosting solidarity, as well as broadening cooperation and mutual international support. At the same time, within the NAM, the Youth Platform is being created. A youth forum will be held and a Youth Network of the Non-Aligned Movement will be established. President Ilham Aliyev noted that “our chairmanship shows again that Azerbaijan remains true to its word. The role we play in the international arena, our

solidarity and support for countries in need – humanitarian support, financial support, especially our support for more than 80 countries related to COVID – have significantly enhanced our international reputation.”

During the 44-Day War, three permanent members of the UN Security Council—France, the United States, and Russia—tried to pass a resolution that would be contrary to Azerbaijan’s vital interests, as it would have no reference to the council’s earlier resolutions in 1993 which called for the withdrawal of Armenian troops from Azerbaijan’s sovereign territories. “But, our friends, members of NAM, at that time members of the UN Security Council, blocked an anti-Azerbaijani statement and blocked the attempt of accusation against Azerbaijan and thus, did not allow pro-Armenian global forces to attack Azerbaijan,” President Aliyev recalled in his address to NAM’s parliamentary network.

Azerbaijan also maintains intensive cooperation with other international organizations. Azerbaijan cooperates very extensively with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Just recently, the new Secretary General the Organization of Islamic Cooperation visited Baku, as well as the liberated lands of Fuzuli and Shusha. President Ilham Aliyev noted that during the meeting with the new Secretary General the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the sides also touched upon the issue of the vandalism committed by Armenia against Azerbaijan and its cultural heritage. “Everyone visiting the liberated lands now, whether they are Azerbaijani or foreign citizens, can see the manifestations of Armenian brutality with their own eyes. We will successfully continue our activities within the framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation,” the president added.

Azerbaijan also cooperates extensively with the European Union. Azerbaijan and the EU are closely working on a new agreement and a greater part of the text of the agreement has already been agreed. President Ilham Aliyev underscored that “I do hope that all issues will be agreed on in the near future. I have had several meetings and phone conversations with the President of the Council of the European Union and, of course, the main topic has been the normalization of Azerbaijan-Armenia relations,” adding that “at the same time, extensive discussions are being held regarding the future development of European Union-Azerbaijan relations. In the near future, an important document will be signed between the European Union and Azerbaijan – a document on energy security, which will raise our cooperation to a higher level.”

On July 4, President of the European Council Charles Michel made a phone call to President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. During the conversation the sides discussed the issues related to the Brussels agenda. President of the European Council pointed out the significance of ensuring stability, peace and security in the South Caucasus for the European Union. Charles Michel underscored that the European Union would continue its efforts towards the normalization of relations, the signing of a peace agreement, the delimitation of borders and the opening of transport and communication lines between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Pointing to the trilateral meetings held at the initiative and with the participation of the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and the agreements reached within this framework, President Ilham Aliyev expressed hope that the negotiations towards the normalization of relations and the signing of a peace treaty, delimitation and demarcation of borders, and the opening of transport and communication

lines between Armenia and Azerbaijan would yield real results. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the large-scale landmine problem Azerbaijan is facing in the liberated territories and underscored the significance of Armenian side's clarifying the fate of about 4,000 Azerbaijanis who considered missing since the first Armenia-Azerbaijan war.

On July 15, President Ilham Aliyev has received European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia Toivo Klaar. During the meeting, the sides exchanged views on the issues related to the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the signing of a peace agreement, the opening of communications, the landmine problem facing Azerbaijan, and the Azerbaijanis who went missing during the first Karabakh war. President Ilham Aliyev underscored the importance of implementing the agreements reached as a result of the meetings held in Brussels and fulfilling the obligations undertaken by Yerevan in accordance with the trilateral statement of November 10, 2020.

Azerbaijan has carried out active cooperation within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States. President Ilham Aliyev noted that "our contacts are expanding both within the organization proper and with individual member countries. This year, I have had three meetings with the President of Turkiye. In April of this year, the President of Kyrgyzstan visited Azerbaijan. At the same time, in June, I visited Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, had meetings with the Presidents of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and with the Chairman of the People's Council of Turkmenistan. The visit of the President of Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan is expected next month. In other words, these are just visible results, and they show how actively these contacts are developing. They are developing actively. Of course, our

relations with the Turkic states are one of our top priorities. Mutual political support is expressed, important projects are discussed – both in bilateral and multilateral formats. Active cooperation is being carried out in transport, energy and other fields."

Noting that enormous work has been done together with the main power centers, with neighboring countries, with Turkic states, and with the main international organizations in the last six months, President Ilham Aliyev concluded that "Azerbaijan is making headway in all directions. Our position has always been an independent one. We have always openly demonstrated our position, and this one of the reasons we have gained great respect in the world. We always keep our word. We are always loyal to the word we give. Of course, these international relations, the policy we are implementing in the region and the world as a whole allow us the opportunity to address internal problems with greater success. Because every country needs a positive international background to conduct domestic policy correctly – first of all, with its neighbors, and also in the world as a whole. Today, the results of the first six months show that we have been able to achieve that. I am sure this will continue to be the case. Because we already have an established and in-depth cooperation format, so to speak, with the major international players."

III. Armenia keeps delaying withdrawal of troops from territories of Azerbaijan

Despite the fact that almost two years have passed since the end of the 44-Day War, Armenia has yet to address the failure to honor its commitments under the trilateral statement signed by Azerbaijan, Russia and Armenia on November 10, 2020. One of these

obligations is the withdrawal of the Armenian troops from the territories of Azerbaijan, according to the article 4 of the trilateral statement. Armenia continues to violate its obligations by refusing to withdraw its armed forces from the territory of Azerbaijan. On July 15, in a cabinet meeting about the results of the first half of 2022, President Ilham Aliyev reiterated that Armenia was supposed to pull back all its armed forces from the region in accordance with the trilateral statement, noting that “this issue has not been resolved to this day. We have raised this issue many times, but Armenia keeps delaying it,” adding that “the Declaration of 10 November actually represents an act of capitulation on the part of Armenia, and as a side defeated in the war, Armenia assumed certain obligations. These obligations are explicitly stated there.”

On July 19, Secretary of the Security Council of Armenia Armen Grigoryan, in an interview with local media, declared that Armenia will withdraw its armed forces from the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan and Armenian military servicemen will no longer be deployed there. “This process is nearing completion and will end in September,” he added. This came as a surprise to local observers for several reasons. First, the Armenian side had been refusing to pull back its forces from the region and even declared its plans to deploy contract soldiers from Armenia to the area as recently as June 2022. Second, despite the Azerbaijani government’s assertions, many international observers, including the International Crisis Group, had erroneously reported earlier that “Armenia has withdrawn its forces [from Karabakh] to its territory and, with them, most of the heavy weaponry that was deployed against Azerbaijan during the fighting.”

At the same time, Armen Grigoryan noted that, “the Russian Federation assured us that the invading Azerbaijani forces must withdraw

[from Farrux village], and we hope that the Russian peacekeeping forces will ensure the withdrawal of the Azerbaijani units that have illegally invaded this area of responsibility for the Russian peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh.” Farrux is a village located in the zone that was under Russian peacekeeping forces’ control in Karabakh and Azerbaijan restored its control to this area in March 2022. Grigoryan also added that the military units of the Armenian separatist regime in Karabakh would remain operational and ensure the security of Armenians in Karabakh jointly with the Russian peacekeeping forces. Grigoryan’s statement demonstrates that Armenia still holds territorial claims to the Azerbaijani territories, although Yerevan had pledged to withdraw its troops from the Karabakh region. Farrux, where Grigoryan says Azerbaijan “illegally invaded,” is part of Azerbaijan’s sovereign territories as recognized by the United Nations Security Council. Just month before Grigoryan’s statement, on June 28, Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Armenian Armed Forces Sahak Sahakyan had openly admitted the transfer of Armenian military servicemen to Karabakh when he noted in an interview that the Armenian military and political leadership had decided that “contract servicemen will serve in Karabakh [instead of conscripts]”. “Our last call is the summer call of 2020 and demobilization will be held from July 1 to August 30, 2022, there will be no more conscripts in Karabakh,” Sahakyan said, adding that “a broad package has been created for the attractiveness of the service, according to which contract servicemen will serve”.

Such a glaring disregard of the Armenian leadership to its commitments outraged both the Azerbaijani public and government and raised questions about Moscow’s role in this process. During the cabinet meeting on July 15, President Ilham Aliyev criticized Russia’s

unwillingness to ensure the implementation of the trilateral statement. President Ilham Aliyev stated that this issue was raised during the negotiations with the Russian military leadership, pointing out that “high-ranking official of the Russian Defense Ministry, while on a visit to Azerbaijan a few months ago, promised to our Defense Ministry that Armenian armed forces would withdraw from Karabakh by June. It is the middle of July now, but this issue has not been resolved yet. Armenia does not fulfill this obligation in contravention of the 10 November Declaration. Russian peacekeepers – the Russian side also signed the 10 November Declaration – do not force them to do so, so to speak.”

President Ilham Aliyev underscored that “this is an intolerable situation because it is completely unacceptable for Armenian armed forces to remain on the territory of Azerbaijan. We are a victorious country and we have restored our territorial integrity. If Armenia does not intend to withdraw its armed forces from the territory of Azerbaijan, then it should let us know this in clear terms, and we will consider our further actions. What will be our response? It would probably be inappropriate to say it now, but this is a flagrant violation of the 10 November Declaration.”

Dr. Vasif Huseynov, Head of Department at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), noted that “the commitment that the Russian official undertook a few months ago demonstrates that, on the contrary to what is claimed by Armenians and some other observers, there is a consensus between the signatories of the trilateral statement [at least between Russia and Azerbaijan] about the 4th clause of the statement which envisaged the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from Karabakh in parallel with the deployment of the peacekeeping mission of the Russian

Federation. The failure of the Armenian leadership to fulfil this clause is, therefore, a breach of the agreement of November 10 and a grave threat to peace and security in the region.” He also added that “President Aliyev’s strong-worded statements about this situation reaffirmed Azerbaijan’s determination to ensure the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from the region. He has made it clear that the existence of the illegal armed forces of Armenia on the territories of Azerbaijan is seen in Baku as the violation of the country’s territorial integrity. No sovereign state in the world would agree with the deployment of illegal armed forces to its territories and Azerbaijan is no exception.” Dr. Vasif Huseynov underscored that “this issue distinguishes markedly from other elements of the trilateral statement that have yet to be implemented (e.g., the opening of transportation channels),” adding that “the 4th clause holds the highest potential to cause a military confrontation between the sides and spiral into another full-scale war should it remain unimplemented in the future.”

IV. Armenia continues to violate its obligations under the trilateral statement

Armenia not only refuses to withdraw its armed forces from the territories of Azerbaijan, Yerevan also appears to be uninterested in signing a peace treaty, recognizing territorial integrity of each other, and thus giving up its territorial claims towards Azerbaijan. Armenia is also delaying the unblocking of transportation corridors linking the Eastern Zangazur economic regions of Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan. In the meantime, Azerbaijan’s position on these issue has been very clear. The conflict has been resolved and Baku has been ready to move forward in its

relations with Armenia by signing a comprehensive peace treaty. However, the problem is that the Armenian government does not seem to be interested in signing a peace treaty with Azerbaijan. On the contrary, continued provocations and indiscriminate shelling of the military positions of Azerbaijan show that Yerevan is more interested in escalating the violence and destabilizing the situation on the ground. By escalating the tension and deepening the confrontation, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is torpedoing the trilateral format. To this end, Yerevan is purposefully aggravating the situation, openly violating the trilateral statement. Pashinyan is also trying to make the OSCE Minsk Group relevant again, although the group has completely outlived itself and in its current iteration is meaningless.

On July 15, President Ilham Aliyev chaired a Cabinet meeting on results of the first half of 2022. Addressing the meeting, President Ilham Aliyev spoke about the current situation and future prospects of the post-conflict realities in the region following the 44-Day War. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that “even though certain steps towards the normalization of Azerbaijan-Armenia relations were taken in the first six months of this year, unfortunately, there are no tangible results yet. Although a year and eight months have passed since the Patriotic War, unfortunately, Armenia has yet to fulfill the obligations it was forced to take upon itself.”

Touching upon the positive points, President Ilham Aliyev noted the first meeting of working groups on delimitation. “If we look at the positive points, I can only say that the first meeting of working groups on delimitation had been held. We see this as a positive step. This is something that took place on the initiative of our country because it was Azerbaijan that tried to take steps on the delimitation of the

border as soon as possible. The Armenian side was not particularly inclined to do this. However, the first meeting was held. Of course, this meeting was more of an introductory nature. A second meeting is scheduled for next month. I believe that the second meeting will be devoted to the discussion of specific issues. Of course, we do not expect quick results from our cooperation in this format because delimitation is a long process. But in any case, this process has started, and we can consider it as a successful development,” the president noted.

Another positive development is the fact that Yerevan accepted the five basic principles that will form the basis of the peace treaty at the initiative of Azerbaijan. “The Armenian leadership has officially accepted these five principles. The Azerbaijani public knows what these five principles are, so I won't repeat them. However, this initiative of Azerbaijan was praised during my discussions with all the counterparts I was in contact with. It is possible to say that the resolution of the conflict on the basis of these principles has been confirmed. Armenia has accepted and officially recognized that. We have discussed this issue with several neighboring countries – Turkiye, Russia and Iran, and this position has received support. The European Union, the United States of America – we have discussed this issue with these partners as well, and the basis for starting peace talks has now been created. Again, Azerbaijan put forward the initiative, we are the ones who developed these five principles, and if we had not taken this initiative upon ourselves, there would have been no progress in this direction to this day,” President Ilham Aliyev stated.

In this vein, on July 16, a bilateral meeting between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia was held in Tbilisi, Georgia. It became

the first such meeting between foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Two ministers touched upon the wide range of issues pertinent to the normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia and underscored the importance they attach to continued direct dialogue between the two countries. Minister Jeyhun Bayramov emphasized that based on the post-conflict realities emerged after the resolution of the armed conflict between the two states, all efforts need to be directed towards making progress in building good-neighborly inter-state relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In this context, the necessity of full implementation of all provisions of the Trilateral Statement signed by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia, in particular the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from the territory of Azerbaijan, was stressed. Touching upon the humanitarian issues, Minister Jeyhun Bayramov underscored the importance of bringing clarity to fates of close to 4000 Azerbaijani missing persons.

“Unfortunately, even though a year and eight months have passed since the war, apart from that, I cannot recall any positive development. Regrettably, there are more negative developments,” President Ilham Aliyev underscored. President Ilham Aliyev noted the lack of progress despite Yerevan’s apparent acceptance of the five basic principles. “It is true that while Armenia’s acceptance of our proposals aligned with international legal norms and principles is a positive development, there are no concrete steps yet.” The recent history of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict should have made it clear that the misuse of peace negotiations is a risky gamble and could result in an all-out war eventually. President Aliyev mentioned two such cases that reveal a contradiction between the deeds and words of the Armenian

government. First, the Armenian leadership, on the one hand, declares that Armenia had already recognized Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity in 1992, on the other hand distributes documents in international organizations which claim that “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic became an independent state in 1991”. Second, there was a verbal agreement amongst the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia during the talks on the trilateral statement on November 10 that the sides would not raise the status of Karabakh in future talks. Although the Armenian government kept this promise for a while, they have recently restarted talking about it at the highest level, President Ilham Aliyev noted. Therefore, for President Ilham Aliyev, despite frequent meetings between the officials of Armenia and Azerbaijan at varying levels and in different locations, there are few positive results that have so far been achieved. For him, the establishment of the international commission on the delimitation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border and Armenia’s consent to start the peace negotiations on the basis of the five principles Azerbaijan presented in early this year is some of few positive instances. The Armenian government, however, has yet to establish its working group for peace negotiations, start work on the construction of the railway and highway between the western parts of Republic of Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, and, more importantly, has yet to withdraw its armed forces from the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.

President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that it is stated in the trilateral statement that the link was supposed to be established between the main part of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and that Armenia agreed to this and assumed the obligation to provide the link. “But so far we have not been

given this opportunity. The Lachin road is open, and we made a commitment in the Declaration of 10 November that the Lachin road would work and that Azerbaijan guarantees the safety of that road. We have taken this upon ourselves as a commitment and we are following it. But we do not have the opportunity to go to Nakhchivan from the main part of Azerbaijan. Not only do we not have the opportunity to do that, we do not even see any work being done in this direction in the territory of Armenia,” President Ilham Aliyev noted.

President Ilham Aliyev underscored that “to date, there is no feasibility study for the railway to be built in the Mehri section of the Zangazur corridor. No project can be implemented without a feasibility study, and it takes several months to prepare a feasibility study for the construction of a railway. So this work has not been started yet. The route of the highway has not been given to us. A year and eight months have passed. I have raised this issue many times, including three times during meetings with the Prime Minister of Armenia and President of the Council of Europe. To this day, we have not been given the route. The distance there is just 40 kilometers away. There cannot be multiple routes. It is also clear that there are not so many road routes that can be used in all seasons and 24 hours a day. So there is a reason why this route has not been given to us. Work in this direction has not been carried out, the feasibility study has not been prepared – Armenia does not want to fulfill this obligation, but it does not admit that,” adding that “this is why we are demanding our own rights. If we are implementing all the provisions of the 10 November Declaration, we demand the same approach from Armenia. A year and eight months have passed since the end of the war, so everyone should take this into account.”

President Ilham Aliyev also noted that “another issue is that the head of Armenia has once again started talking about some status lately. However, when the war ended, when Armenia signed the act of capitulation, there was a verbal agreement between us, the leaders of Azerbaijan, Russia and Armenia, that the issue of status would not be touched upon again. Armenia followed this for some time but this talk has recently become commonplace. Their prime minister and then their foreign minister have talked about the status of Karabakh. I said shortly after the war where the status went and what happened to it. I don't want to repeat myself. If someone in Armenia has forgotten this, I can repeat it. But I think it is not necessary for now. Therefore, I think that it is very dangerous for Armenia to talk about the status because we can also start talking about the status, we can demand status for Zangazur, the Zangazur that was severed from us in November 1920. We are not talking about it, but we can and see what the result is. There are a quite a few negative points of similar nature. Attempts are still being made to revive the now defunct Minsk group. The Minsk Group has now left the stage. We, a country participating in this process, are saying that there is no need for the Minsk Group. There is no need for a group that has not produced any result in 28 years. This is what we say. To put it mildly, a cold war is going on between co-chairs of the Minsk Group. They have actually admitted that the Minsk Group is not functional any more. The Russian side says that the Minsk Group is no longer active and that the other co-chairs have put an end to this institution. The Armenian side, meanwhile, says every minute that the Minsk Group has done this and that. What does this mean? Simply put, we see a territorial claim against our country behind this. On the one hand, Armenia accepts and acknowledges our five principles, including the mutual recognition of

the territorial integrity of countries, the relinquishment of territorial claims against each other and other provisions, but on the other, it seems that the Minsk Group needs to be kept busy. Then the question is: what should it be doing? The Karabakh conflict has been resolved and the Karabakh issue has been closed. Karabakh is Azerbaijan! I said this, I said this quite rightly, and everyone is saying this now, including Armenia, which is forced to say this, says it unwillingly. All countries and organizations we are discussing this issue with are saying this.”

President Ilham Aliyev underscored that “negative trends are intensifying. In all

matters, in order to resolve a problem or perform a proper analysis, you need to identify these trends correctly. So far, this has not brought about any serious complications. But if these harmful tendencies are not nipped in the bud, they may have consequences one day. We don't want that. We want peace. We don't want war. We never wanted war. Whatever we have done, we have done it on the territory of Azerbaijan, and we have done it in such a way that everyone can envy our military operation. But it is also impossible not to see these trends. This is why we see them, detect them, and warn. Let everyone draw a conclusion from our warnings, as they say.”