

BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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I. Armenia's UN Security Council gambit highlights Armenia's failed tactics

On August 16, the United Nations Security Council convened to discuss the situation in Azerbaijan's Karabakh region. Armenia had initiated this meeting with the hope of garnering international support for its policies related to the peace process, particularly concerning the future of Karabakh. However, the Security Council's outcome, or rather the lack thereof, left Armenian authorities disillusioned as no resolution or statement was adopted. UN Security Council meeting highlighted Armenia's failed tactics. It underscored that external solutions are not the answer to the ongoing disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The meeting made it abundantly clear that there are currently no external solutions to the local disputes. Armenia's efforts to secure international intervention did not yield the expected outcomes. This event serves as a stark reminder that lasting solutions must originate from within the region itself. The refusal of Karabakh Armenian representatives to meet with Azerbaijani counterparts, despite prior agreements, remains a perplexing issue. Similarly, the rejection of internationally-supported arrangements for reopening the Aghdam-Khankandi road and facilitating passage through the Lachin road raises questions. Clarity on these matters is essential for building trust and finding common ground.

Armenia's repeated attempts to manipulate the United Nations Security Council for its own political agenda, persistent efforts to instrumentalize the UN Security Council for what appears to be a campaign of political

blackmail have once again met with failure. This pattern of exploitation not only hinders progress toward post-conflict normalization but also undermines the credibility of this esteemed international body. Azerbaijan emphasizes that the path to a solution lies in constructive engagement, the good-faith implementation of international law, and adherence to commitments made within this framework. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize the significance of sovereignty and territorial integrity as the foundation for peace and stability in the region.

Azerbaijan firmly believes that the solution to regional issues lies in constructive engagement and the sincere implementation of international law and commitments made within this legal framework. This approach aligns with the principles upheld by numerous UN Security Council members, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity, both in rhetoric and in actions. The debate in the UN Security Council reaffirms that the international community is receptive to Azerbaijan's offer regarding the use of the Aghdam-Khankandi road. Armenia's continued obstructions in this matter need to be abandoned, enabling the transparent and law-based delivery of goods to the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan. This step is crucial for advancing post-conflict normalization and promoting stability and cooperation in the region.

Furthermore, the recognition of Azerbaijan's valid security concerns by select member states represents a hopeful development in addressing specific regional challenges. As articulated during the debates, Azerbaijan has

extended an olive branch to Armenia by proposing a path to peace based on mutual acknowledgment and respect for each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and border inviolability. Simultaneously, Azerbaijan is actively pursuing a policy of reintegrating the ethnic Armenian residents of the Karabakh region as equal citizens, ensuring their full access to the rights and freedoms enshrined in Azerbaijan's Constitution and supported by relevant international human rights mechanisms to which Azerbaijan is a signatory. Our unwavering commitment to both of these approaches remains steadfast. We are resolute in defending our sovereignty and territorial integrity, employing all legitimate means as sanctioned by the United Nations Charter and international law. Azerbaijan maintains its dedication to constructive engagement with all parties genuinely interested in advancing the normalization agenda. Azerbaijan stands ready and capable of contributing to the realization of long-awaited peace and stability in the region.

The strategy employed by Armenia thus far has proven to be counterproductive and is likely to remain ineffective for several compelling reasons. Above all, the past three years following the conclusion of the 2020 war, coupled with recent developments concerning the Lachin road in recent months, have underscored the prevailing significance attached to the principle of territorial integrity. This principle has gained fresh impetus, especially in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which blatantly violated Ukraine's territorial integrity under the pretext of safeguarding the Russian-speaking minority. Given these circumstances, Armenia's

attempts to advance self-determination or remedial secession claims, with the aim of garnering international support to detach the Karabakh region from Azerbaijan's sovereignty, are likely to face insurmountable challenges.

Baku has unequivocally communicated its unwillingness to compromise on matters pertaining to territorial integrity and national sovereignty. Azerbaijan's demands include the complete withdrawal of Armenia's armed forces from the Karabakh region, the disbandment of illegal armed groups affiliated with the separatist regime, the utilization of the Aghdam-Khankandi road for the transportation of goods to the region, and the full restoration of Baku's control over this territory. President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan has recently revealed his government's plan to grant municipal rights to the Armenian community in Karabakh, thereby eliminating any discussions of autonomy or special rights.

Despite Armenia's recognition of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, encompassing Karabakh as a part of it, this stance contradicts Baku's efforts to consolidate its sovereignty over the region and hinder the process of reintegrating the area into Azerbaijan's legal and economic framework. The conflicting strategies pursued by the Armenian government have resulted in a stalemate in the broader peace negotiations, and the prospects of overcoming this impasse in the near future are becoming increasingly challenging.

Further complicating the situation, certain international actors are actively encouraging Armenia to maintain its unyielding stance. Foremost among these actors is France, as

evidenced by their overt support for Armenia's propaganda campaigns surrounding the alleged "blockade" of the Karabakh region. Regrettably, France's involvement in this regard contributes to the problem rather than offering a constructive solution. Despite Azerbaijan's provision of alternative routes for transporting essential supplies like food and medicine to the Karabakh region and Baku's willingness to enhance passage along the Lachin road, France, and similar international actors, undermine efforts to resolve the ongoing disputes within the framework of international law and, crucially, respecting the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

It is reasonable to assume that the support provided by France and others played a pivotal role in the separatist regime's decision to decline the Yevlakh meeting and reject the simultaneous opening of both the Aghdam and Lachin roads. Conversely, the discussions within the Security Council made it abundantly clear that Armenia's aspirations for international intervention, sanctions, or other forms of pressure against Azerbaijan are not rooted in reality. Azerbaijan's policies regarding its territorial integrity adhere to the norms and principles of international law. Consequently, the pursuit of external solutions to the local disputes between Baku and Yerevan not only obstructs progress in the peace process but also jeopardizes any remaining opportunity for a peace treaty in the foreseeable future.

Armenia's misuse of the UN Security Council as a tool for political maneuvering has once again been thwarted. The path to resolving regional issues, including the delivery of goods to the Karabakh region, lies in constructive

engagement, adherence to international law, and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. The international community's support for Azerbaijan's initiatives underscores the importance of transparent, law-based solutions. Armenia's cooperation in this regard is essential for the betterment of all parties involved and the broader goals of peace and stability in the region.

II. Performative politics at the Lachin border checkpoint: Unpacking Armenia's political grandstanding

On August 30, Armenia delivered several trucks to the Lachin border checkpoint without prior agreement with Azerbaijan, a move that is driven by political considerations rather than practical necessity. Armenia's recent actions at the Lachin border checkpoint with Azerbaijan have raised questions about the motives behind these deliveries. Moreover, the involvement of foreign politicians and representatives in these actions has further complicated the situation. Azerbaijan's Assistant to the President and Head of the Foreign Policy Department, Hikmat Hajiyev, has characterized Armenia's actions as political theatrics lacking any substantial purpose.

"Yesterday, several corrupt European politicians who are supporters of the Armenian lobby and are under their influence arrived at the border with Azerbaijan as part of this theatrical drama. Such steps do not make any sense. Instead of resorting to cheap show, it's better to deal with real issues on the spot," Hikmat Hajiyev pointed out. According to Hikmat Hajiyev, Armenia's actions appear to be motivated by populism rather than genuine

efforts to address real issues. He argued that such theatrical gestures lack any substantial purpose and would be better replaced with concrete efforts to tackle existing challenges.

The situation further escalated when a group of foreign politicians, including the Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo, accompanied the "humanitarian cargo" vehicles sent by France to the Lachin border checkpoint. This move prompted a diplomatic response from Azerbaijan, with French Ambassador to Azerbaijan Anne Boillon being summoned to the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan and handed a note of protest. Azerbaijan expressed its displeasure over the provocative statements made by the French leaders and their involvement in actions that undermine regional stability. During the speech at the Ambassadorial Conference in late August, Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of France, Catherine Colonna wrongly claimed that "efforts are being mobilized to provide the Nagorno-Karabakh population with the opportunity to live there, as well as to respect their rights, culture and history" and "the suppression strategy to incite the exodus of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh is illegal and immoral." Responding to such baseless accusations, Aykhan Hajizada, Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, [noted](#) that "Such statements by Catherine Colonna, Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, which do not serve peace and stability in the region and demonstrate one-sided pro-Armenian position, are unacceptable."

Armenia's assertions of a "blockade" and "humanitarian crises" in Azerbaijan have been met with skepticism and scrutiny. What may

seem like a humanitarian concern on the surface is, in reality, a calculated and irresponsible political campaign aimed at undermining Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity. For nearly three decades, Armenia has brazenly ignored the significance of four resolutions passed in 1993 by the United Nations Security Council, along with a series of Presidential Statements. These resolutions unequivocally called for the complete, immediate, and unconditional withdrawal of occupying forces from Azerbaijani territory. This refusal to adhere to international resolutions has raised serious questions about Armenia's commitment to peace and stability in the region.

Armenia's recent appeal to the Security Council is seen as just another element of its ongoing campaign to manipulate and mislead the international community. Rather than genuinely seeking to address humanitarian issues, Armenia's actions appear to be driven by political hypocrisy, attempting to divert attention from its own non-compliance with international law.

Although agreements have been reached to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Karabakh region through multiple routes and plans have been made for a meeting between a Special Representative of the Central Authorities and representatives of local Armenian residents, the Armenian side refused to comply with these agreements. These agreements could have been implemented much sooner, as they were recently within practical reach. However, Armenia's own refusal to cooperate has been a significant obstacle to progress. This further raises doubts about the sincerity of Armenia's

intentions and its willingness to engage in constructive dialogue to address the humanitarian situation.

In the first instance, the removal of concrete blocks and all physical barriers placed by the Armenian side on the Aghdam-Khankandi road was essential to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to local residents. Subsequently, the plan was to expedite the utilization of the Lachin road by the ICRC within 24 hours. Notably, all relevant parties, including the Russian peacekeeping contingent and the ICRC, were fully prepared to initiate the implementation of this agreement within just one hour. Regrettably, this crucial detail was not mentioned by the distinguished representative of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Regarding the second case, an agreement had been reached to hold a meeting between representatives of the central authorities and local Armenian residents in the nearby city of Yevlakh. However, on August 5, Armenia, through its unlawfully installed regime, unexpectedly reneged on both agreements at the eleventh hour. This abrupt reversal was characterized by politically motivated and illegitimate preconditions and various pretexts.

Despite Azerbaijan's persistent engagement with key stakeholders such as the Russian Federation, the United States, the European Union, and the ICRC in an earnest effort to find solutions to the ongoing situation, Armenia has consistently hindered diplomatic initiatives. There is but one plausible

explanation for this behavior: Armenia does not seek to be a part of the solution. Instead, it actively stokes tensions in the region with the aim of perpetuating its manipulation and misleading tactics on the international stage.

Armenia's claims of a "blockade" and "humanitarian crises" in Azerbaijan must be examined with a critical eye. Rather than a genuine concern for humanitarian issues, these assertions are part of a larger political agenda aimed at undermining Azerbaijan's sovereignty. The international community should continue to press for meaningful dialogue and adherence to existing resolutions to achieve a lasting resolution to the conflict in the region.

The breach of the agreement regarding the delivery of humanitarian aid by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on August 5 is just one instance in a series of actions illustrating Armenia's relentless politicization of the presence and operations of this humanitarian organization. Armenia's actions demonstrate a reckless attempt to exploit humanitarian issues for political gain, all while challenging the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and obstructing the reintegration of local ethnic Armenian residents.

The following factual incidents paint a clear picture of Armenia's misuse of humanitarian matters for its political agenda:

1. ***Azerbaijan's Offer of Logistic Support:*** Immediately following the end of the 2020 war, Azerbaijan extended its logistics and infrastructure support to the ICRC for the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Karabakh

region. In 2021, the ICRC transported goods to Barda city with the intent to distribute them to the area. However, the Armenian side rejected this offer and prevented the ICRC from carrying out its humanitarian assistance mission.

2. ***Azerbaijan's Willingness to Facilitate:***

As eco-activist protests erupted on the Lachin-Khankandi route, Azerbaijan proactively reached out to the ICRC, expressing its readiness to provide full logistical and infrastructural support for the delivery of goods needed by local residents. Astonishingly, the ICRC conveyed that the Armenian side did not wish to receive any supplies through Azerbaijan, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

3. ***Abuse of ICRC for Smuggling:***

Armenia resorted to an unprecedented action, misusing the ICRC to smuggle dual-use technologies, including micro-chips, into the Karabakh region. This action forced the ICRC to acknowledge a breach of its humanitarian mandate, severely tarnishing its reputation.

4. ***Rejection of Medical Personnel:***

Armenia declined to accept the ICRC's proposal to deploy international medical personnel based in Baku to Khankandi. This proposal was aimed at facilitating medical evacuations and addressing medical issues on the ground and had the support of Azerbaijan. Armenia's refusal to accept this assistance further compounded

the humanitarian challenges faced by the region.

In summary, Armenia's actions regarding the ICRC reveal a troubling pattern of exploiting humanitarian efforts for political purposes, which not only hinders the delivery of vital aid but also undermines the credibility and impartiality of humanitarian organizations like the ICRC. These actions run counter to the principles of humanitarian assistance and obstruct the genuine efforts to address the complex humanitarian situation in the region.

Armenia's exploitation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for its political objectives underscores the fact that calls for increased international presence, including UN-affiliated organizations, have little to do with genuine humanitarian concerns. Instead, they appear to be part of a broader strategy aimed at acquiring additional tools for political manipulation.

The Karabakh region is internationally recognized as the territory of Azerbaijan, and the ethnic Armenians residing there are considered Azerbaijani residents. The Government of Azerbaijan is firmly committed to ensuring the access of these residents to essential goods and creating suitable living conditions for them. These objectives align entirely with international law and the principles of international humanitarian law, underscoring Azerbaijan's unwavering dedication to upholding these global standards.

The so-called "Lachin Corridor" is a road located within the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan, devoid of any extraterritorial status. Its primary purpose, as stipulated in the

Trilateral Statement of November 10, 2020, is to facilitate the movement of citizens, vehicles, and goods. Azerbaijan, in adherence to its commitments outlined in the Trilateral Statement, has allowed continued use of this road. This status quo remains unchanged even after Azerbaijan established a border checkpoint at its border with Armenia.

The establishment of the border checkpoint by Azerbaijan was done in exercise of its inherent right to protect its sovereignty and security. This measure was taken to counter Armenia's repeated and blatant misuse of this route for unlawful military activities, including the rotation of approximately 10,000 military personnel illegally stationed in Azerbaijani territory, the transfer of weaponry, ammunition, landmines, and foreign nationals, as well as terrorists into the region. Furthermore, it aimed to curb the illicit extraction and transfer of natural resources from this territory. In doing so, Azerbaijan sought to safeguard its territorial integrity and prevent further violations of international law on its soil.

The International Court of Justice's unanimous ruling on July 6, 2023, which rejected Armenia's plea for an interim measure to remove the checkpoint, unequivocally extinguished Armenia's claims of the illegitimacy of the Lachin checkpoint. The establishment of this border checkpoint has not hindered civilian movement along the Lachin road. In fact, there has been a noticeable increase in such movement until June 15, 2023. However, on that particular date, Armenia engaged in yet another unwarranted provocation. Its Armed Forces launched an attack on Azerbaijani border

guards, alongside Russian peacekeeping forces. This unprovoked attack resulted in severe injuries to an Azerbaijani border guard and simultaneously posed a direct threat to ICRC staff and civilians passing through the checkpoint.

If Armenia's concern for the well-being of the local residents in the region were sincere, it would not have objected to the use of the Aghdam-Khankandi road for transporting goods to the Karabakh region. This road is intricately connected to Azerbaijan's major transportation routes, providing a reliable link to international markets. In contrast to the challenging 59-kilometer-long Lachin-Khankandi road, which meanders through rugged and winding terrain, the Aghdam-Khankandi road covers a mere 18 kilometers between Aghdam and Khankandi. During their visit to Aghdam, diplomatic representatives accredited in Azerbaijan, including those from the UN Resident Coordinator's Office and other UN institutions, had the opportunity to personally witness that this road was fully operational and ready for transporting goods.

Manipulations under the guise of humanitarian concerns are not occurring in isolation from an escalation of illegal and provocative military activities. In recent weeks, Armenian armed forces, which are unlawfully present in Azerbaijani territory, have blatantly violated international law and Armenia's commitments outlined in paragraph 4 of the Trilateral Statement signed by the leaders of Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation, and Armenia on November 10th. These actions include an intensification of military engineering efforts and other military build-ups.

Of particular concern is the unauthorized deployment of radio-electronic warfare equipment in Azerbaijani sovereign territory. Over the past weeks, this equipment has interfered not only with civilian aircraft operated by Azerbaijani Airlines but also with aircraft from foreign countries, thereby posing a significant safety risk.

While verbal statements by Armenia's leadership expressing recognition of Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including the Karabakh region, have generated cautious optimism for peace, Armenia must now translate these words into concrete actions. Armenia should refrain from questioning Azerbaijan's sovereignty, including under the pretext of addressing the "humanitarian needs" of local Armenian residents in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. Armenia must refrain from provocations, cease its actions that undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, avoid interference in Azerbaijan's internal affairs, and genuinely participate in negotiations aimed at normalizing post-conflict relations. It is crucial not to miss the historic opportunity for lasting peace in the region.

III. Azerbaijan reaches out to Karabakh's Armenians with humanitarian aid

In contrast to Armenia's theatrics, Azerbaijan has demonstrated a commitment to addressing the needs of Armenian communities living in the Karabakh region. On August 29, the Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society organized a food delivery operation to support

people of Armenian origin in the area. The initial plan involved the delivery of 40 tons of flour along the Aghdam-Khankandi route, showcasing Azerbaijan's readiness for constructive engagement with the local population. Azerbaijan's approach appears to prioritize practical solutions over political posturing, reflecting a willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue and support for the well-being of the region's residents. Azerbaijan has always reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to establishing peace, security, and stability in the region while respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states involved. Azerbaijan is determined to reintegrate Armenian residents in line with its national legislation. The constant rejection of Azerbaijan's proposals by the Armenian side reveals that the situation is primarily political rather than humanitarian. While overlooking critical facts such as Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani lands for nearly three decades, its systematic policy of ethnic cleansing against Azerbaijanis, heinous acts of genocide and mass killings, and the resultant displacement of nearly one million Azerbaijanis into the status of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), along with the violation of their basic rights, one cannot ignore the destruction and looting of Azerbaijani cities and villages, as well as the obliteration of Azerbaijan's rich cultural and historical heritage. Furthermore, the failure to curtail Armenia's political-military provocations following the 44-Day War and its reluctance to withdraw its armed forces from the territories of Azerbaijan are glaring instances of an approach that is both illegal and morally indefensible.

In stark contrast, the Republic of Azerbaijan is steadfastly committed to the principles of its national legislation. Within this framework, Azerbaijan is dedicated to making earnest efforts to reintegrate Armenian residents residing in the Karabakh region into the political, social, and economic spheres of the country. Any allegations of a policy aimed at expelling Armenian residents from the region are entirely baseless and misguided. Azerbaijan's proposal entails the establishment of multiple routes, with the Aghdam-Khankandi road being a key component. This road boasts enhanced logistical capabilities, making it a more efficient means of reaching the Karabakh region, thanks to Azerbaijan's extensive reconstruction efforts.

"The opening of the Aghdam-Khankandi road, the existence and functionality of this road were reflected in corresponding statements and Armenia's own authority also accepted the existence and possibility of using this road at the Brussels meetings," Hikmat Hajiyev [underscored](#) at the post created for Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society's food cargo on Aghdam-Khankandi road, adding that "However, they deny it in the next actions. The opening of the Lachin road can be ensured in the next days, that is, within certain conditional times, as the next component of this process. The factor of territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan is very important in the matter of opening the road to Lachin. At the same time, these should be ensured by fully complying with the laws of the Republic of Azerbaijan and relevant laws related to border control and border security in this regard, as well as the rules of the customs regime."

Hikmat Hajiyev also pointed out that "During our visit on August 15, we witnessed the great transmission capacity of the Aghdam-Khankandi road together with the representatives of the diplomatic corps," adding that "Unfortunately, Armenia and the so-called criminal regime in the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan which was created by Armenia and still supported by it to this day, hinder the opening of this road through political manipulations. It was stated by Azerbaijan repeatedly that the Aghdam-Khankandi road operates, and any cargo can be delivered to Khankandi and surrounding areas in a very short time through this road. We can evaluate the rejection of this road as racism and discrimination."

The current impasse surrounding convoys highlights the complexity of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process. Since the pivotal Brussels summit on May 14, where both nations acknowledged each other's territorial integrity, the situation has taken a concerning turn. While there had been notable progress in the peace talks even after the establishment of a checkpoint on the Lachin road on April 23, recent events have soured the atmosphere. Azerbaijan expects Armenia to fully adhere to Azerbaijani regulations at the checkpoint and uphold its commitment to recognize Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, which includes Karabakh. However, Armenia insists on unregulated access to Azerbaijani territory, raising tensions. Control over the Lachin road holds particular significance in Baku, as it is viewed as crucial to securing the liberated territories and preventing the flow of support to the separatist movement.

Another contentious issue revolves around Azerbaijan's proposal to use the Aghdam-Khankandi road instead of the Lachin road for humanitarian supplies. Baku wishes for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to utilize this route and coordinate its operations with the Baku office of the Committee, rather than the office based in Yerevan. Armenia interprets these demands from Baku as an attempt to reassert Azerbaijani control over the Karabakh region, an assertion that aligns with international law. Azerbaijani officials do not deny their intention to re-establish sovereignty over the part of the Karabakh region temporarily overseen by Russia's peacekeeping mission. In Baku, this is seen as in line with international legal principles. Supporting Baku's claims, recent rulings from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) rejected Armenia's request to withdraw personnel deployed along the Lachin Corridor since April 23, 2023. These rulings indirectly affirmed the legality of the checkpoint, further complicating the situation.

Efforts to encourage dialogue between Baku and the representatives of the Armenian community in Karabakh have yielded no tangible results. The criminal regime currently holding the local Armenians hostage remains unyielding in its stance. Their intransigence is, in part, bolstered by the support of international actors who are not inclined toward the complete dissolution of the criminal entity or the region's reintegration into Azerbaijan.

Notably, Russian interests partially align with those of the local separatists. It was unsurprising to witness Alexander Bordov, the

head of the recently established local Russian community facilitated by Russian peacekeepers, calling on Russian President Vladimir Putin to annex Karabakh. Numerous statements and actions from Russian officials indicate that Moscow, similar to the illegal regime in Karabakh, is dissatisfied with the current pace of the peace talks and the Armenian government's recognition of Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan. Moscow perceives this as a direct threat to Russia's military presence in Karabakh and, potentially, even in Armenia in the long term.

Conversely, the criminal regime finds encouragement in the support it receives from France and certain political circles in other Western nations. France's dispatch of humanitarian aid to the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, despite the predictable fate it shares with prior Armenian deliveries, has been largely viewed as a symbolic gesture and a tool to exert pressure on Azerbaijan. Instead of acting as a responsible international actor seeking a collaborative resolution to the crisis, France appears to be a divisive player with its own agenda. The criminal leaders seem to believe that the convergence of France and Russia's positions, if not their interests, in this conflict will eventually compel Azerbaijan to reconsider its stance.

For Azerbaijan, compromising its efforts to restore sovereignty over Karabakh is not an option. "The policy of Azerbaijan is that it will not accept the presence of any gray zone in its territory. If anyone thinks that they will continue the status quo and continue to live in separatist status and ensure the existence of this illegitimate regime, they are mistaken," Assistant to Azerbaijani President-Head of

Foreign Policy Affairs Department of the Presidential Administration Hikmat Hajiyev stressed at the post created for Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society's humanitarian cargo on Aghdam-Khankandi road.

The stubborn resistance of the leaders of the illegal entity, coupled with external support for them, has led to a stalemate, with both sides entrenched in their positions and the stakes continually rising. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan pointed out that despite a series of extensive consultations and diplomatic efforts, an agreement regarding the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Karabakh region through various routes and the organization of a meeting between the Special Representative of Azerbaijan and local Armenian residents was ultimately derailed. This unfortunate turn of events occurred due to Armenia and separatists in Karabakh introducing politically motivated and illegitimate preconditions and various pretexts at the last moment. Armenia's actions in this regard are a clear manifestation of what can only be described as cynical behavior on the international stage. The objectives that Armenia seeks from the international community could have been achieved if not for its own obstructionist approach, characterized by confrontation and propagandistic tactics against Azerbaijan.

From a legal standpoint, individuals born in the Karabakh region are considered Azerbaijani citizens. However, during the Armenian occupation of Karabakh, Yerevan pursued an annexation policy by illicitly issuing passports to nearly all of the region's Armenian residents. Consequently, Karabakh's Armenian residents must formally apply for Azerbaijani

citizenship. This application signifies their recognition of Baku's sovereignty and adherence to Azerbaijani laws. Conversely, Azerbaijan is committed to safeguarding the linguistic, cultural, religious, and municipal rights of Karabakh's Armenian population. Azerbaijan is a party to various international conventions, including the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM). Under these conventions, Azerbaijan is prepared to guarantee the individual rights of Armenian residents in the Karabakh region.

The genuine solution lies on the ground. Azerbaijan has extended an invitation to Karabakh Armenians for direct engagement to discuss and establish an agenda addressing social, political, and other matters with the goal of progressing, fostering the reintegration process, and reopening access routes. Azerbaijan places its trust in international law and hopes that the principle of territorial integrity will ultimately prevail over competing claims. Concurrently, Azerbaijan is taking proactive measures to ensure that the local Armenian population has alternative options for humanitarian supplies should they face the threat of starvation. The dispatch of humanitarian aid and the declaration of Baku's willingness to provide more are tangible demonstrations of this policy. Many regional observers and the Azerbaijani government itself propose that the only viable path out of the current impasse in Karabakh is the simultaneous reopening of both the Aghdam and Lachin roads. Such a move could create the necessary conditions for the delivery of humanitarian aid to the local population and

facilitate progress in peace treaty negotiations between Baku and Yerevan.

Azerbaijan remains committed to the policy of reintegrating ethnic Armenian residents of the Karabakh region as equal citizens, ensuring their full enjoyment of all rights and freedoms outlined in the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and all relevant international human rights treaties to which Azerbaijan is a signatory. Azerbaijan's unwavering dedication to these principles is matched only by Azerbaijan's resolute defense of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, in strict accordance with the principles enshrined in the UN Charter and international law.

IV. Fact-checking: Luis Moreno Ocampo's flawed report

On August 7, Luis Moreno Ocampo, a former prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), issued an expert opinion titled "*Genocide against Armenians in 2023*". Some international media outlets referenced this opinion without conducting independent fact-checking, thereby presenting a skewed perspective of the actual events on the ground. In response to these allegations, Azerbaijan has enlisted the expertise of legal professional Mr. Rodney Dixon KC to dismantle the groundless accusations presented in Ocampo's report, who described the report as "fundamentally flawed." Dixon's evaluation dismisses Ocampo's claims as lacking credible substantiation and manifesting a conspicuous absence of impartial and rigorous expert analysis, a crucial requirement for reporting in complex and sensitive circumstances.

In this context, it becomes evident that what Ocampo has presented is not an expert legal opinion but rather a form of political advocacy and consultancy with a pro-Armenian bias. To illustrate, apart from providing a vague and superficial discussion of crucial legal matters, the Opinion makes use of historical parallels and delves into topics such as "Russia's geopolitical interests" and the "Ukraine war," while proposing "institutional solutions to disputed territorial claims before 2025." Additionally, it offers recommendations on how the EU and the US should employ "traditional diplomatic methods" to exert influence on Azerbaijan's foreign policy and decision-making processes, among other subjects. Such content, which advocates for advancing Armenia's interests in relation to Azerbaijan, deviates from the typical standards of reputable expert legal opinions, which are expected to maintain a neutral and objective stance without engaging in partisan political advocacy.

One of the most significant revelations about Luis Moreno Ocampo is his involvement in managing companies based in notorious tax havens while serving as the ICC's chief prosecutor. This information, now widely known, has cast a shadow over his tenure at the ICC. While serving in a prestigious international legal position, Ocampo's involvement with offshore companies and questionable associations have raised concerns about his ethical conduct. Critics argue that someone tasked with prosecuting international criminals should have maintained impeccable ethical standards in their personal and professional life.

Another alarming disclosure comes from investigative journalism by "Mediapart.fr" and the European Investigative Collaborations network. They reported that Ocampo supported a client who was suspected of aiding war criminals in Libya. In 2015, shortly after leaving the ICC, Ocampo defended the interests of a billionaire businessman with ties to the former Gaddafi regime, who was alleged to support potential war criminals in Libya. Ocampo received a substantial sum of \$750,000 for his services in this case, raising questions about his motivations and ethical judgment.

Ocampo's connections to controversial political leaders have also drawn scrutiny. His association with Armenia's ex-president, Serzh Sargsyan, is particularly concerning. Sargsyan is accused of orchestrating the Khojaly genocide in 1992, during the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The massacre resulted in the deaths of innocent Azerbaijani civilians, and Sargsyan's welcoming of Ocampo highlights the former prosecutor's questionable associations with individuals accused of serious human rights violations.

One of the primary criticisms levied against Moreno Ocampo's report is the presence of numerous factual and conceptual errors. Ocampo's casual use of terms like "genocide" and "blockade" without providing legal substantiation has raised serious concerns. Such manipulation of international law and legal terminology to fit a biased narrative is not only unprofessional but also disrespectful to all victims of genocide. It is essential to adhere to rigorous legal standards when addressing sensitive matters of this nature.

Ocampo's report references a decision by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on February 22, attempting to implicate Azerbaijan in a "blockade." However, it is crucial to clarify that the ICJ's decision did not blame Azerbaijan for any blockade. Instead, the Court took into account Azerbaijan's commitment to ensuring safe and "unimpeded" passage through the Lachin road, as outlined in the Trilateral Declaration. Furthermore, on July 6, 2023, the ICJ rejected Armenia's request to modify its judgment from February 22. This development underscores the importance of accurately interpreting legal decisions within their proper context.

On April 23, Azerbaijan reestablished its border control with Armenia by constructing a border crossing point in Lachin, where it commenced rigorous checks on individuals and vehicles, including those belonging to the Russian peacekeeping force. Armenia criticized this action as a "blockade," whereas Azerbaijan maintained that it was part of routine border control procedures. Consequently, Armenians have been able to enter and exit Karabakh, subject to passport and cargo inspections for personal and business goods.

However, tensions escalated on June 15, when the Armenian army opened fire on Azerbaijani border guards in Lachin, resulting in the injury of an Azerbaijani soldier. This incident disrupted the flow of people and goods through the Lachin crossing point for several days. In a separate development, on July 11, vehicles associated with the International Red Cross (IRC) were caught transporting undeclared goods through the Lachin crossing point. The IRC issued a statement expressing

"regret" and acknowledged that four hired drivers had attempted to transport commercial goods in vehicles temporarily displaying the ICRC emblem. Subsequently, the Lachin border crossing point was temporarily closed pending an investigation into potential smuggling involving the IRC.

On July 15, the sixth meeting between President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan took place at the invitation of EU Council President Charles Michel, within what is commonly referred to as the "Brussels format." During this meeting, the parties discussed alternative routes to the Lachin road for the transportation of IRC's humanitarian aid, including the Aghdam road. President Charles Michel's press release highlighted the importance of both aid transportation options and encouraged humanitarian deliveries from both sides to ensure the well-being of the population. However, the Armenian side has taken measures to physically blockade the Aghdam road, rendering it inaccessible for vehicles.

At the same time, in contrast to advocacy papers, expert opinions prioritize the foremost principles of credibility and expertise. In the case of Ocampo, his credibility has been a subject of scrutiny both during his tenure at the International Criminal Court (ICC) and in the period following his departure. For example, an investigation by the European Investigative Collaborations unveiled that Ocampo managed multiple offshore companies located in some of the world's most infamous tax havens while serving as the chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Court in The Hague. This was evidently in violation of the requirements outlined in the ICC Statute.

A separate inquiry conducted by Spiegel exposed that Ocampo received undisclosed funds amounting to millions from individuals alleged to be criminal billionaires in Libya through various offshore accounts. The investigation concluded that Ocampo's actions "betrayed the ideals and ethos of the ICC." Moreover, a Financial Times investigation revealed that "Luis Moreno Ocampo's interactions with Hassan Tatanaki, who has more recently been associated with a Libyan militia accused of extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations, continued long after his departure from the ICC when he transitioned into a private consultancy role." In response, the ICC issued a statement noting that Fatou Bensouda, the current prosecutor, had urged Ocampo to "refrain from any public statements or activities that could potentially interfere with the functions of the office or tarnish its reputation."

Crucially, Ocampo has not disclosed the funding or other arrangements with the Armenian government and related organizations for his current assignment, which is considered best practice in the realm of expert consultancy for international matters.

The fundamental requirements of impartiality and credibility, essential for crafting an expert opinion, are notably absent in this instance. Given the credibility concerns associated with Mr. Ocampo and his ongoing assignment, it is advisable for international organizations, journalists, and courts of law not to accord significant weight to his politically charged opinion.

Moreover, Ocampo has asserted that he accepted an assignment from Arayik Harutyunyan, who is self-proclaimed as the "president" of "Nagorno-Karabakh." It's important to note that Harutyunyan is facing allegations of being an international war criminal, with criminal charges against him lodged by Azerbaijan. In addition to his leadership of an unrecognized regime in Karabakh, Harutyunyan publicly acknowledged responsibility in 2020 for ordering a ballistic missile strike on Ganja, one of Azerbaijan's major cities. This missile strike resulted in the tragic death of 21 Azerbaijani civilians and left 70 others injured, marking one of the highest civilian casualties in a single day during the entire conflict. Ocampo's acceptance of an assignment from someone who is, on the face of it, a war criminal, raises ethical concerns within the realm of expert engagement. It can be likened to accepting an assignment from Ratko Mladić, the principal figure behind the Srebrenica massacre, regardless of the justifiability of his actions under international criminal law. These facts cast a shadow over Ocampo's overall credibility.

From a technical standpoint, it is worth noting that Ocampo publicly proclaimed on August 3, a mere three days after taking his assignment from Harutyunyan on July 29, his allegations against Azerbaijan. He accompanied these allegations with hashtags supporting Armenia. This suggests a rushed opinion lacking in proper fact-finding. Furthermore, Ocampo's ties to the Armenian government are unquestionable. In 2010, he held a meeting with Armenia's President Serzh Sargsyan, who

was one of the architects of the Khojali massacre in 1992.

Ocampo's potential predisposition against Azerbaijan is also evident in his earlier writings on Just Security, where he labeled Azerbaijan's efforts to liberate its occupied territories under Armenian control as "aggression." As an international legal expert, he is undoubtedly aware of the right of states to self-defense, as stipulated in Article 51 of the UN Charter, in order to liberate their territories under occupation. However, his choice to use the term "aggression" to describe Azerbaijan's exercise of its right to self-defense under international law, without mentioning Armenia's occupation, indicates a bias and preconceived judgment against Azerbaijan.

In addition to distorting the realities on the ground, Ocampo's discernible bias in selectively presenting facts and conspicuously omitting several critical details significantly taints the credibility of his Opinion. Notably, the Opinion fails to acknowledge the following substantial facts:

- a) Presently, Armenians have unrestricted access to enter and exit Karabakh via the Lachin border crossing post, allowing them to transport supplies freely. This explains why there is an adequate supply of food provisions and no indication of "starvation."
- b) Azerbaijan currently permits the continuous flow of electricity and gas shipments from Armenia proper to Karabakh.
- c) Azerbaijan has extended offers to provide food and medical supplies to the ethnic Armenian population in Karabakh.

d) Azerbaijan has extended invitations on multiple occasions to representatives of the ethnic Armenian population in Karabakh for negotiation.

e) Armenia, along with forces under its control in Karabakh, impedes the delivery of humanitarian aid by the International Red Cross (IRC) via the Aghdam road by placing concrete barriers on the route. This suggests that political considerations, rather than genuine humanitarian needs, underlie Armenia's reluctance to allow the IRC's provisions.

f) There are more than 12,000 Armenian army units still unlawfully stationed in Karabakh, raising concerns about potential diversion of food and provisions at the expense of the civilian population. Furthermore, the presence of this illicit force poses a significant security threat to Azerbaijan.

g) Azerbaijan has not yet gained full control over the entire Karabakh region due to the presence of the Russian peacekeeping contingent temporarily deployed in Azerbaijan's Karabakh region, which illegally restricts the access of Azerbaijani authorities to the local Armenian population.

h) The separatist regime in the territories where the Russian peacekeeping contingent temporarily deployed consistently rejects any offers for negotiation and collaboration with Azerbaijani authorities, even in matters pertaining to humanitarian concerns. These authorities have effectively held the local Armenian population hostage as part of their political agenda.

i) Armenia's occupation of a substantial portion of Azerbaijani territory and the resultant displacement of one million Azerbaijani citizens from these occupied regions constitute international offenses, encompassing war crimes, breaches of humanitarian law, violations of the laws of armed conflict, and genocide allegations, particularly in the case of the Khojali massacre in 1992.

j) The resolutions of the UN Security Council in 1993, addressing the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, as well as the UN General Assembly's 2008 resolution mandating the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied territories, underscore the international community's stance.

k) Armenia's extensive destruction of Azerbaijani cities, towns, villages, and cultural heritage amounts to an international war crime.

l) Decisions made by the leadership of the separatists to reject humanitarian aid and obstruct alternative routes to Karabakh should be duly considered.

The exclusion of these significant facts is not a matter of oversight; it appears to be a deliberate choice. These omitted facts, when taken together, would challenge the validity of Ocampo's theory regarding both the *actus reus* (the act or omission) and the presence of *mens rea* (intent). An impartial expert should have taken into account the entirety of the facts on the ground to evaluate the allegations and establish a reasonable foundation for acknowledging these facts. Unfortunately, Ocampo did not fulfill this requirement.

Ocampo's interpretation of the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) regarding the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict within the framework of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) is seriously flawed.

A central argument in Ocampo's analysis suggests that the ICJ's orders on provisional measures effectively acknowledged the existence of the "material elements" of genocide as defined in Article II (c.) of the Genocide Convention (p. 15). Specifically, Ocampo contends:

"The ICJ's order deemed it plausible that the rights of an ethnic group, namely the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, were impacted by the blockade of the Lachin Corridor. Consequently, the ICJ assessed that the 'persons affected belonged to a particular ethnic group' as mandated by the Genocide Convention."

According to Ocampo, as the ICJ found that "at least some of the rights" (such as the "right to freedom of movement" and the "right to public health, medical care, social security, and social services") under CERD's Articles 2 and 5 were plausible (as indicated in the ICJ Order § 39), and that there could be irreparable harm to such rights, he concludes:

"Such a determination points to the possibility of conditions being imposed on the affected group that are designed to result in the physical destruction of that group."

Firstly, it is important to clarify that the ICJ did not employ the term "blockade," as wrongly

suggested in the Opinion. Instead, the ICJ used the term "interruption of movement" along the Lachin Corridor as the foundation for its analysis. Furthermore, the ICJ did not attribute this "interruption of movement" to Azerbaijan.

Secondly, Ocampo fails to acknowledge that the ICJ's practice of employing the 'plausibility test' in interim measure decisions is aimed at establishing that the rights claimed by applicant states could potentially exist under international law. It does not equate to the ICJ making conclusive factual determinations regarding a legal violation, such as a "blockade," nor does it imply a finding of violation of alleged rights under international law. In fact, the ICJ, in its order pertaining to the Armenia-Azerbaijan case, did not render any factual findings concerning the existence of a "blockade" or violations of CERD. Due to the urgency of protecting these plausible rights, the ICJ ordered "unimpeded movement" in the Lachin corridor as a provisional measure pending a final decision.

Notably, Ocampo attempts to draw an unwarranted connection between CERD and the Genocide Convention for misguided reasons. The Opinion fails to recognize that the ICJ's order regarding provisional measures under CERD does not automatically imply a violation of the Genocide Convention, nor does it work the other way around. These conventions possess distinct material and temporal scopes that must be considered separately.

The revelations surrounding Luis Moreno Ocampo's past have raised serious doubts about his integrity and suitability for a high-profile position such as Chief Prosecutor of the

ICC. His involvement with offshore companies, alleged support for war criminals, and associations with controversial leaders have all contributed to a tarnished reputation. As the international community continues to grapple with issues of justice and accountability, the spotlight on Ocampo's past actions serves as a stark reminder of the importance of upholding ethical standards in positions of authority and responsibility. Considering Ocampo's controversial reputation and preconceived notions regarding Azerbaijan, it is imperative to subject the Opinion to thorough scrutiny when it is utilized by international organizations, media outlets, and judicial bodies. This critical examination is warranted due to the Opinion's shortcomings in both legal and factual aspects.

V. Debunking Armenian narratives of cultural heritage destruction in post-war Karabakh

Following the 44-Day War, one prevailing narrative in pro-Armenian circles focused on claims of the "destruction of Armenian cultural heritage" in the recently liberated Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. While safeguarding cultural heritage remains of paramount importance and remains a sensitive issue within the narratives of both Armenia and Azerbaijan, it is essential for the scholarly and expert community to exercise caution against one-sided accusations.

Starting from the onset of the conflict in 1987–1988, Western media exhibited a bias towards the Armenian narrative, including concerns about cultural heritage. This bias can be attributed to an Orientalist perspective that

avored Christian heritage over Islamic heritage in the context of the conflict. Over the three decades of Armenian occupation, numerous Azerbaijani and Islamic monuments suffered deterioration or were intentionally destroyed, with minimal attention from Western media outlets.

The 44-Day War in 2020 thrust the fate of the region's cultural heritage into the global media spotlight. Leading international media outlets widely disseminated reports alleging the destruction of Armenian churches by the Azerbaijani military.

In June 2023, the US-based organization Caucasus Heritage Watch (CHW) released its fifth edition of the "Nagorno-Karabakh Monitoring Report," which strongly accuses Azerbaijan of destroying, damaging, and endangering Armenian cultural heritage in the Karabakh region. The organization claims to base its reports on information purportedly collected through "high-resolution satellite imagery." The report identifies "eight historical Armenian objects" that were allegedly intentionally destroyed by the Azerbaijani military after the liberation of Karabakh. However, it conspicuously omits any reference to the numerous Azerbaijani cultural heritage sites that were vandalized during the years of occupation.

It is worth noting that the composition of the organization's "research team" includes three individuals of Armenian descent, and three out of the six sponsors of the "research" are Armenian organizations, such as the Armenian General Benevolent Union, the Aragats Foundation, and the USC Institute of Armenian Studies. This affiliation raises questions about

the impartiality of the organization's findings. To address concerns about its perceived bias, the organization released a special report in April 2023 focusing on Armenian actions regarding Azerbaijani heritage during the 30-year occupation period. Predictably, this report falls far short of portraying the extent of damage inflicted by Armenians in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. Furthermore, it makes inaccurate claims, asserting that most Azerbaijani historical monuments "remained untouched" during the occupation, denying any Armenian state policy of damaging historical monuments, and suggesting "no attempt to systematically erase the material of Azerbaijani history and cultural life." These assertions starkly diverge from the actual situation on the ground.

According to the latest CHW report, it alleges that eight pieces of "Armenian heritage" have been "destroyed," ten "damaged," and over twenty "threatened" by the Azerbaijani side since the liberation of the occupied territories. Many of these claims, labeled as facts in the report, appear to be fabricated and rooted in misinformation disseminated by Armenian propagandists. These claims sharply contrast with the true stance of the Azerbaijani side toward the historical and religious heritage of the region.

In accordance with the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, states can only be deemed responsible for the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage, such as the vandalism perpetrated by Armenia to erase Azerbaijani cultural heritage during the 30-year occupation of the Karabakh region. During the 44-Day War, the Azerbaijani Armed Forces

demonstrated a commitment to sparing religious structures and other civilian targets. While some incidental damage occurred during the conflict, the Azerbaijani side has expressed its dedication to the restoration of all religious monuments affected by the war.

For the record, an Armenian church, known as the Church of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, was constructed in the capital of Azerbaijan. This historical and cultural monument of significant national importance, built in 1869, still stands in the heart of the city adjacent to Fountain Square. Nevertheless, the Armenian media frequently disseminates fabricated information to spread misconceptions about Azerbaijani "looting and appropriation" of pieces of Armenian "cultural heritage."

In 2021, when Azerbaijan expressed its intention to restore the Gazanchi Church in the recently liberated city of Shusha, which had incurred some incidental damage during military operations, Armenians began accusing Azerbaijan of "appropriating" an "Armenian" church. Azerbaijani state agencies are actively engaged in the restoration efforts for this church in Shusha.

Similar allegations surfaced in Armenian media concerning the "appropriation" of the Holy Ascension Church located in the Lachin district of Azerbaijan. The construction of this church in 1998, during the period of occupation, was unlawful as the establishment of places of worship, including churches, on the legal territory of Azerbaijan is subject to international regulations. Any construction without the requisite permissions from relevant authorities is blatantly illegal.

Interestingly, according to some assertions by Armenian experts, the number of purported "Armenian churches" discovered in the Karabakh region has surged to nearly 190, a staggering increase that surpasses the total number of new churches built across the entire nation of Armenia. Labeling these newly built churches and appropriated monuments as "historical heritage" violates the relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and Azerbaijan's national law.

Since November 3, 2020, the State Service for the Protection, Development, and Restoration of Cultural Heritage within the Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan initiated a preliminary assessment of monuments in the recently liberated territories. During this assessment, they examined 433 out of the 706 historically and culturally significant sites already registered by the state, along with 182 newly discovered monuments bearing historical, architectural, and archaeological importance in these areas. Additionally, 864 cultural institutions underwent inspection.

Throughout this comprehensive examination, it became painfully evident that a majority of these monuments had suffered deliberate destruction, arson, theft, or various forms of defacement. Disturbing acts of sacrilege occurred in sacred places of religious and spiritual significance such as cemeteries, mosques, and tombs. Original architectural features of numerous historical and cultural landmarks were intentionally altered, and these monuments were reprehensibly repurposed for military uses, resulting in the erasure and distortion of their ethnic identity. The Armenian occupation led to the looting and devastation of historical monuments,

museums, books, manuscripts, and archives that belonged to the Azerbaijani people. Among the most grievous losses were the Islamic religious sites, including mosques, tombs, and other places of worship, which were razed to the ground. Regrettably, many of the historical monuments within the liberated territories have been completely obliterated.

Notably, the report published by the CHW failed to acknowledge any of these distressing facts, unequivocally highlighting the organization's biased stance. The ongoing information warfare conducted by Armenia and its diaspora against Azerbaijan, despite the cessation of armed conflict, remains evident.

VI. Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan continue to forge stronger ties

On August 22, the leaders of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan met in Baku to deliberate on enhancing their bilateral relations and promoting the efficient transportation of goods along the Middle Corridor. This corridor is a strategically significant trade route that stretches across an extensive Eurasian expanse, linking China and Europe through the countries of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. The meeting between President Ilham Aliyev and President Shavkat Mirziyoyev reaffirmed the commitment of both nations to fostering economic cooperation, enhancing transportation and transit networks, and expanding their engagement across various sectors. President Ilham Aliyev noted, "Significant groundwork has already been laid for bilateral cooperation across multiple domains. This includes our personal

interactions, regular meetings in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and elsewhere, as well as close collaboration among government representatives." At the heart of their discussions lay the Middle Corridor, a strategically important trade route that spans vast Eurasian terrain, connecting China with Europe through the nations of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. Recognizing the immense potential for trade and economic growth along this corridor, both leaders underscored their commitment to boosting cargo transportation and transit.

To facilitate the smooth flow of goods and further develop logistics infrastructure, President Ilham Aliyev and President Shavkat Mirziyoyev agreed to establish a joint logistics company. This company will play a pivotal role in enhancing the efficiency of transportation networks not only in Baku but also in ports located in third-party countries.

The bilateral talks extended beyond the realm of economics, with a strong emphasis on expanding cultural exchanges, educational programs, and technological advancements. This cultural synergy aims to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of each other's rich heritage, while educational collaborations will undoubtedly contribute to the intellectual growth of both nations.

In a world where global challenges know no borders, the two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to active multilateral dialogues within international organizations. Their shared goal is to collectively address pressing issues such as international terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, and cybercrimes. This united front not only strengthens the

security of both nations but also contributes to global stability.

A pivotal moment of the meeting was the signing of an agreement to establish a Supreme Interstate Council between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. This move underscores the commitment of both nations to deepening their partnership in various fields, including culture, competitive development, economy, energy, transportation, media, and youth policies.

In addition to the Supreme Interstate Council, President Ilham Aliyev and President Shavkat Mirziyoyev signed a protocol amending an agreement on visa-free travel for Azerbaijani citizens. This will further facilitate people-to-people interactions and promote tourism between the two countries. They also agreed upon a roadmap for 2023-2024, outlining the concrete steps needed to enhance their comprehensive strategic partnership.

During the state visit, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva and President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, his wife Ziroatkhon Mirziyoyeva have attended a ceremony to inaugurate the secondary school named after Mirzo Ulugbek in Fuzuli. Financed by the government of Uzbekistan through President Mirziyoyev's personal initiative, the construction of this school marked a substantial undertaking. President Ilham Aliyev, during a joint press briefing, characterized it as a gracious gift from Uzbekistan, intended to contribute to the post-liberation reconstruction efforts in the Karabakh region.

Encompassing an impressive expanse of 3 hectares, equivalent to 7.4 acres, this two-story school has been thoughtfully designed to cater to a maximum capacity of 960 students. It boasts an array of remarkable amenities, including 40 spacious classrooms, six well-appointed laboratories, two dedicated computer rooms, five specialized study areas, a generously-sized 500-seat assembly hall, a well-equipped gymnasium, a cafeteria with seating for 320 individuals, and a meticulously curated library. Moreover, the facility includes

a football field, recreational spaces, running tracks, discussion rooms, a secured checkpoint, a heating system, water storage facilities, and a transformer substation. This newly established educational institution, situated in Fuzuli, represents the second in a series of educational complexes inaugurated in the recently liberated regions of Azerbaijan. It follows the opening of a secondary school in the Aghali village, located within the Zangilan district.