



CENTER OF ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
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# BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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## I. Azerbaijan's Fight Against the COVID-19 Pandemic

In April 2020, amidst the pandemic and the accompanying global economic crisis, Azerbaijan took a set of extra measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus in the country and mitigate the economic difficulties caused by the crisis. The restrictions imposed on the people's normal activities were progressively expanded as the rate of daily infections marked a quick rise to 108 on April 8. The fact that the authorities had started to take such measures immediately after the first infection was confirmed in the country on February 28 played a critical role in the containment of the spread of the virus and minimization of the deaths.

The social isolation measures which had begun to be implemented since mid-March were maintained and extended in early April. Most importantly, the government set up free messaging service that required people to ask permission to leave their homes via a cellular text message, originally intended to be in place between 5- 20 April. In a move to stop the imported cases of coronavirus during this period, Azerbaijan also suspended entry into and exit from Azerbaijan, via air and road transport, except for cargo transportation. Few days before the end of this quarantine regime, the government announced that both the messaging service and the suspension of

the travelling from and to Azerbaijan will continue to be effective until May 4.

The government also took precautionary steps to get ready for potential uncontrolled rise of the number of coronavirus patients and to boost the capacity of healthcare service. Towards this end, a new hospital, inaugurated in late March, began operating. With 70 intensive care units and, initially, 100 beds for coronavirus patients the hospital helped easing the pressure on the healthcare system in the country.

The infection rates recorded in the second half of the month showed progress in the fight against the virus as the above-mentioned measures started to pay off. Importantly, starting from April 14, the number of the daily recovered patients started to exceed that of new cases of infection on most days. As of April 21, the confirmed cases accounted for 1480 with 20 people died and 865 people recovered.

The government adopted social and economic packages as part of its policies concerning adverse socio-economic consequences of global economic recession caused by the pandemic. This also included taking measures to protect the national companies, entrepreneurs, workers, etc. who had been hit hard by the special quarantine regime, in accordance with the presidential decree "On a number of measures to reduce the negative impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) and sharp fluctuations as a result of

coronavirus in the global energy market and stock market, on the economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, macroeconomic stability, issues of employment in the country and business entities” dated March 19.

Compared to the latest sharp decline in oil prices in 2014-2015 which led to devaluation of national currency twice in 2015, Azerbaijan is now, thanks to a complex set of economic reforms implemented since then, more prepared against the crisis. This has allowed Baku to protect the national currency in April despite the unprecedented fall of prices in global energy market.

Towards this end, all the banks and insurance companies were declared to be exempted from making payments to the Central Bank of Azerbaijan in April. On April 9, Sahil Babayev, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of Population mentioned that 3 billion manats (\$1.7 billion) will be allocated for issues of employment and business entities, as well as 400 million manats (\$235.2 million) to support social welfare.

Azerbaijan, stressing the importance of multilateralism to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic and global economic downturn, sought to strengthen the cooperation with its international partners. Baku had already contributed a significant amount of donation (\$5 million) in voluntary financial aid to the COVID-19 Solidarity

Response Fund, administered as part of the Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP) of the World Health Organization (WHO) in early March.

The April statement of the United Nations Office in Azerbaijan commended Azerbaijan’s policies concerning the pandemic, appreciated the country’s aid to the WHO and underscored the importance of the cooperation between the Azerbaijani government and the UN Office in Azerbaijan to mitigate the negative socio-economic consequences of COVID-19.

Azerbaijan, being the current chairman of Turkic Council, initiated also a multilateral cooperation and cross-border crisis responses amongst the Turkic speaking countries. On April 10, at the initiative of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, the Council’s members convened a virtual summit to discuss the theme of “Solidarity and Cooperation in the Fight Against the COVID-19 Pandemic”. Importantly, apart from the leaders of each member state, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov as well as WHO Director General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus joined the event.

The summit served as a unique opportunity for cooperation within the Turkic Council to effectively deal with the consequences of the pandemic in various spheres. Member states agreed upon

some joint measures in order to alleviate negative social, economic, moral and psychological repercussions of this period. An agreement was reached by the state leaders on the cooperation amongst their respective ministers of health to exchange information, discuss national pandemic action plans, share expertise and treatment methods.

The participating states underscored the importance to maintain economic and trade cooperation and prevent the emergence of any impediments for the passage of freight vehicles across their borders. This was highlighted as an important measure to ensure food security and stable supplies of essential goods amid internal and inter-state travel halts necessitated by the pandemic.

## **II. Illegal elections in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan**

On March 31 – April 14, the so-called “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic”, a puppet structure established by Yerevan in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, held presidential and parliamentary elections, violating the internationally adopted documents concerning the status of the territories and disregarding the threats to the local community posed by the outbreak of the coronavirus in the region.

The government of Azerbaijan, denouncing the political games Armenia

orchestrated in the occupied territories, declared that any elections in the region will be only “possible after the withdrawal of the Armenian occupying forces, the return of the expelled Azerbaijani population to their places of origin, and restoration of dialogue and cooperation between the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities of the region”.

The United Nations Security Council resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884 of 1993, the resolutions the European Court of Human Rights, Council of Europe, the European Parliament, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and many other international organizations constitute the legal basis of Azerbaijan’s position.

Azerbaijan also denounces Armenia’s claims about the nature of the political processes in Nagorno-Karabakh and their request for international support to the regional democratic build-up. It is clear that the existing circumstances in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan are at odds with the basic standards of democracy which, inter alia, necessitates inclusive citizenship. The fact that the ethnic Azerbaijani portion of the local community has been expelled from the region through vicious ethnic cleansing and their fundamental rights are consistently denied is a clear contradiction to democracy.

It is important to note that Azerbaijan’s position was widely supported by the international community, including the

European Union (EU), Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), NATO, Turkic Council, GUAM, European Parliament, Council of Europe (CoE) and a large number of individual states (e.g. Turkey, Czech Republic, Georgia, Finland, Germany, Iran, Italy, and the United Kingdom), who did not recognize the so called “presidential and parliamentary elections” in Nagorno-Karabakh region

The EU declared that it “does not recognize the constitutional and legal framework in which the so-called presidential and parliamentary elections are held”, adding that “This event will have no effect on future determination of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh or the outcome of the ongoing negotiation process... The EU is ready to continue supporting efforts aimed at a swift and peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.”

The Council of Europe (CoE), reaffirming its full support to the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, stated that “any elections held in contradiction or outside of the constitutional order of a member state have no legal effects and should not be recognized/considered as such”, particularly underlining that, “The same holds concerning the recent so-called elections held in Nagorno-Karabakh”.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the organization of 120 member states currently chaired by Azerbaijan, issuing also a similar statement, criticized the holding illegal elections in the occupied

Karabakh region and reiterated its support to the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

The “elections” drew criticism also from the OSCE Minsk Group, the body that is tasked to coordinate the settlement of the conflict. The Co-Chairs of the institution (the United States, France and Russia) stated that they “do not accept the results of these ‘elections’ as affecting the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh and stress that the results in no way prejudice the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh or the outcome of the ongoing negotiations to bring a lasting and peaceful settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.”

### **III. OSCE-mediated virtual meeting of Azerbaijani and Armenian Foreign Ministers**

On April 21, a video conference was held between the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and Elmar Mammadyarov, with the mediation and participation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs Igor Popov (Russia), Stéphane Visconti (France), Andrew Schofer (USA), and Andrzej Kasprzyk, the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.

The sides held discussions about the situation in the region, the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the settlement process of the Armenia –

Azerbaijan conflict along with other recent developments in the region.

While the talks did not deliver any tangible outcome with an immediate effect on the resolution process, the joint statement by the Foreign Ministers and Co-Chairs shared following the meeting expressed the hope that “the resolve seen in the global pandemic response will bring a creative and constructive impetus to the peace process.”

The Co-Chairs also underscored the importance of the measures to ease tensions and observe ceasefire between the two conflicting parties. This was particularly highlighted as the existing situation related to the pandemic makes it even more important to have stability in the region. A separate note about the ceasefire violations turned out necessary as Armenia’s military forces have consistently violated ceasefire in the region over the last weeks and carried out provocative actions against Azerbaijani side.

A few hours before this meeting, Russia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, speaking about the resolution process of the Armenia – Azerbaijan conflict at an online roundtable organized by the Gorchakov Foundation, reiterated support to the step-by-step approach of the conflict resolution in accordance with the Madrid agreements, documents prepared by the Russian side in 2010-11, the so-called Kazan principles, and projects distributed a year ago in Moscow at a

meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia with the participation of the Minsk Group’s Co-Chairs.

While Azerbaijan’s expert and political community appreciated Lavrov’s statement and considered Russia’s support for the settlement of the conflict as highly important, a premature optimism was nonetheless avoided in Baku as similar statements by the Russian leaders had been made before without any real consequences.

However, quite contrary to Azerbaijan, the statement was found outrageous by Armenia, as Foreign Minister Mnatsakanyan, in a clear disregard to the international efforts for settlement of the conflict and disrespect to the OSCE Minsk Group’s initiatives, stated that the step-by-step approach described by Lavrov is unacceptable for Armenia and Yerevan will make no concessions in this process.

Hikmet Hajiyev, Assistant to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Foreign Policy Issues and Head of Foreign Policy Affairs Department of the Presidential Administration, condemning the destructive statement of the Armenian Foreign Minister, declared that this deals a serious blow to the negotiation process and disrupts the talks.

In view of these statements, in general, the developments concerning the conflict over the last month reaffirmed

the disinterest of the Armenian leaders in any breakthrough, who instead focused on obstructing the negotiation process with their unconstructive statements. Hence, Hikmet Hajiyev has rightfully stated that “if Armenia aims to withdraw from the negotiation process by making such destructive statements, then it must declare its position openly.”