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BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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I. **Armenia accelerates its illegal settlement program in the occupied territories**

Following a catastrophic explosion in Beirut on August 4, the Armenian government has sought to exploit a worsening political and economic situation in Lebanon as a pretext for illegally resettling ethnic Armenians from Lebanon in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. The head of Armenia's occupation regime Arayik Harutyunyan proposed to resettle 100-150 Armenian families from Lebanon to the occupied territories, and several families have already been resettled, according to the Public Radio of Armenia. Commenting on the announcement, Leyla Abdullayeva, spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, noted that "by this statement, Armenia confirmed its intention to consolidate the results of the ethnic cleansing carried out in Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan and adjacent districts." As Vasif Huseynov, a senior adviser at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), has noted, the Armenians living abroad, especially in the Middle East, "are seen as the favourite people for this purpose, as local Armenians protest the proposals to allow the inflow of other nations to their strikingly monoethnic and remarkably nationalist society."

For many years Armenia's illegal settlement program in the occupied territories has been a major concern for Azerbaijan. In 2016, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan published a report that scrupulously described "consistent measures undertaken by Armenia in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan with a view to further consolidating the current status quo of the

occupation." According to the report these activities have been "carried out in a pre-planned and organized manner with clearly defined objective and geographic focus."

The fact of illegal settlement by Armenia's occupation regime has also been confirmed by the relevant reports of the OSCE fact-finding missions in 2005 and 2010. In January-February 2005, the Mission of the Minsk Group of the OSCE visited the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and found out that 17,000 persons had been transferred to the occupied Azerbaijani territories. At the time, the Co-Chairmen of OSCE Minsk Group pointed out that the "prolonged continuation of this situation could lead to a fait accompli that would seriously complicate the peace process" and "any further settlement of the occupied territories should be discouraged", urging the parties "to avoid changes in the demographic structure of the region, which would make more difficult any future efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement." In another fact-finding mission in October 2010, the Minsk Group discover new illegal settlements of around 14.000 persons in the occupied territories.

Matthew Bryza, the former US co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, has noted that resettlement of ethnic Armenians from Syria and Lebanon in Nagorno-Karabakh "is not in keeping with the spirit of searching for a negotiated settlement that characterizes the Minsk Group." He also added that during his tenure as a co-chair of the Minsk Group, this sort of move by the Armenian government was inconceivable since it would have been a sign that Armenia was not serious about a mediated settlement under the auspices of the Minsk Group. Matthew Bryza also warned that "under these circumstances, it is very difficult

to regenerate progress in the Minsk Group format.”

Attempts at changing the demographic composition of the occupied territories through illegal settlement programs are gross violations of international humanitarian law. Azerbaijan has repeatedly emphasized that the establishment of illegal Armenian settlements in the occupied territories is a war crime under the Geneva Convention of 1949 and its Additional Protocols. Such programs serve to prevent the Azerbaijani community of Karabakh from returning to their homes by creating new “facts on the ground”. According to Vasif Huseynov, “the immigration of Armenians based in foreign countries is part of Armenia’s policy to populate the occupied territories to consolidate the occupation and create a fait accompli for the future negotiations on the status of the region.”

Trying to impose a fait-accomplis is the ultimate goal that many on the Armenian side do not even hide. Already in 2015, during a fundraising event for a new village expansion project in the occupied territories sponsored by the Armenian Cultural Association of America (ACAA) Artsakh Fund, it was noted that the primary task now “is to create facts on the ground –resettlement, economic development – that will consolidate our hard-won victories on the battlefield.” In March 2019, while visiting the occupied Azerbaijani territories, Armenia’s former National Security Director Artur Vanetsyan echoed this sentiment, openly declaring that such settlement programs “send a clear message to all our people and the world that we have no intention to give an inch of land.” Bako Sahakyan, the previous head of Armenia’s occupation regime, designated the expansion of illegal settlements as a priority for 2017-2020 and, in 2018, for the first time, funds in

the amount of \$800,000 were allocated for the development of these settlements.

As Vasif Huseynov has noted, “the major states and international organizations that hold the power to affect the process and help the de-occupation of Azerbaijani territories seem reluctant to take action. This happens against the backdrop of the loud criticism and practical measures by those states in the case of, for instance, the settlements of Israel in the Palestinian territories. Not only do such inconsistent international policies and the maintenance of double standards threaten the international peace and security, but also ultimately legalize the illegal activities and encourage others to reach their unlawful objectives through the use of force and violation of international law and norms.”

II. Azerbaijan is concerned about intensive arming of Armenia by Russia

The attack on the units of the Azerbaijani army in July 2020 showed that the extensive military support that Armenia enjoys from its external patrons is enabling Yerevan to behave more provocatively and use every single opportunity to try to occupy even more territories of Azerbaijan. The extend of the military support makes the Armenian government feel emboldened to push the envelope in an attempt to realize their new military strategy of “new wars for new territories.” Recently Armenia has also increased its reconnaissance and sabotage activities. Over the last two months, Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan has reported shooting down several Armenian tactical UAVs and capturing First Lieutenant Gurgen Alberyan, the commander of the sabotage-reconnaissance group of the Armenian forces. As Dr Esmira

Jafarova, a board member at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), has noted “what adds more fuel to the fire in this grim and potentially explosive picture is the news about the role played by the Russian Federation, one of the three co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group tasked to mediate the resolution of the Armenia – Azerbaijan conflict, in arming Armenia.”

In a phone call with President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on August 12, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev pointed out that the intensity of the shipment of military supplies from Russia to Armenia in the immediate aftermath of the clashes on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border “raises concern and serious questions among the Azerbaijani public.” Emphasizing that the primary purpose of the phone call was to clarify this issue, President Ilham Aliyev drew the Russian President’s attention to the fact that “the volume of the military cargo transported from Russia to Armenia via the air space of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran immediately after the military clashes on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border to date exceeded 400 tons.”

On August 25, during his visit to Baku to participate in the opening ceremony of the “Sea Cup” international contest, Russia’s Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu met with President Ilham Aliyev. Dismissing reports of the arms shipment to Armenia, Shoigu claimed that Russia did not act against Azerbaijan. Shoigu also insisted that cargo shipments carried out daily by IL-76 military planes via the route Rostov-Mineralnye Vody-Aktau-Turkmenbashi-Novoshehr-Rasht-Meghri-Yerevan did not contain weapons, but only

construction materials for Russia’s military base in Gyumri, Armenia.

However, the explanation for the intensive military cargo airlift between Russia and Armenia following the immediate attack on the Azerbaijani troops in July, which also continued throughout August, offered by Russia’s Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu failed to convince Baku. On August 29, 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, publicly stated that “the explanations of the Russian side aren’t convincing enough for us. Azerbaijan is waiting for clarification regarding grounds on which the intensive arming of Armenia continues”, adding that “during the [recent] events related to Azerbaijan’s Tovuz, Armenia has demonstrated that it continues its aggressive policy. We aren’t satisfied with the answer that allegedly the [Russian] planes transport construction materials, since they can be also transported in other ways.” A day later, on August 30, Armenia’s Defence Minister Davit Tonoyan announced that Yerevan is in talks with Russia for the acquisition of an additional batch of Su-30SM fighter jets.

Some observers have always argued that without continued military support from Russia, Armenia would not have been able to sustain the occupation of Azerbaijani territories. Armenia is a member of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and, over the years, it has signed several bilateral defense treaties with Russia, mainly about the establishment of a joint air defense system in the South Caucasus and a permanent joint Russian-Armenian

ground force by integrating the 4th Corps of the Armenian Army into the Russia's Southern Military District.

As Dr Esmira Jafarova has noted, "the repeated free of charge delivery of military equipment from the Russian Federation to Armenia over the years, alongside the very recent delivery of Iskander missiles to the latter may cast a shadow to Russia's role as an objective and non-tendentious mediator in the lingering conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan", adding that "hopefully these questionable and worrying developments related to Russia's military shipments to Armenia will soon be clarified as one does not wish to assume that the Russian Federation has chosen to abandon its role as an unbiased mediator in Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict in favour of pandering to Armenia's provocations."

III. Azerbaijan eases the special quarantine regime

Azerbaijan has registered 36,732 cases of the coronavirus and 538 COVID-19-related deaths, as of September 3. A total of 935,396 tests have been conducted so far. After an initial easing of quarantine restrictions in late May, an uptick in daily COVID-19 cases in June and July pushed the government to reintroduce some lockdown measures, specifically in major cities with high infections rates such as Baku, Sumgait and Ganja, as well as some smaller town and districts. By taking swift actions the government was successful in containing the spread of COVID-19. As a result, the 14-day

cumulative number of Covid-19 cases per 100,000 people dropped from a peak of 76.2 on July 8th to 28.6 on August 12th, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. In August, the government has started the gradual reopening of businesses in the industry, manufacturing and services sectors. However, some regulations and series of social distancing measures, such as restrictions on inter-city and inter-regional travel, and the closure of shopping malls has remained place. Employers were required to comply with the hygiene and sanitary guidelines issued by the government to avoid another coronavirus outbreak. Going forward, to prevent another outbreak of COVID-19 cases, the government will remain cautious and ease special quarantine measures in several stages. While the risk of a second wave of infections is still high, Azerbaijan has proven adept at containing the coronavirus. With comprehensive testing and efficient contact tracing, the government hopes to avoid the risk of widespread lockdowns in future. Azerbaijan has also been successful in instrumentalizing its strong fiscal position to respond to the coronavirus pandemic. The government will continue to support households whose livelihoods were severely disrupted by the pandemic. Until 2021, businesses in the sectors worst hit by the pandemic will receive various tax benefits and tax breaks. The government also announced that it will allocate 600 million manat (\$352.9 million) to fight COVID-19 in 2021.