



CENTER OF ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
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# BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

## Table of contents

- I. Liberation of Shusha  
2
- II. Armenia's military surrender and the end of the Second Karabakh War  
3
- III. Liberation of Aghdam and Kalbajar  
6
- IV. Environmental terrorism carried out by Armenia in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan  
9
- V. Use of mercenaries and foreign fighters by Armenia against Azerbaijan  
11
- VI. Azerbaijan condemns French Senate resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh  
13

## I. Liberation of Shusha

On November 8, the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan liberated the city of Shusha – an ancient town that is integral to the history of the Azerbaijani nation. It has not only historical and symbolic, but also military and strategic significance for Azerbaijan. The liberation of Azerbaijan's fortress city of Shusha, considered to be an impossible task by military experts, became the most important military achievement of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan. In a televised address to the nation on November 8, President Ilham Aliyev said that "it is with great pride that I declare that the town of Shusha has been liberated from the occupation! Shusha is ours! Karabakh is ours! I congratulate all the people of Azerbaijan on this occasion with all my heart. I congratulate all the people of Shusha with all my heart. Shusha, which was under occupation for 28 years and six months, was liberated! Shusha is free now! We have returned to Shusha! We have won this historic victory in the battlefield - 8 November 2020 will forever remain in the history of Azerbaijan. This history will live forever. This is the day of our glorious victory!". Emphasizing the significance of liberating Shusha militarily and rejecting the idea that the conflict did not have a military solution, President Ilham Aliyev reiterated that "we have won this victory in the battlefield, not at the negotiating table. I have said many times that, despite all the statements, there are military solutions to this conflict - the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, and we are proving it in the battlefield today".

President Ilham Aliyev also added that Azerbaijan had been under pressure from other international actors, which urged Azerbaijan to reconcile with the occupation. "Nearly 30-year of meaningless negotiations did not bring us any closer to the result. Our

ancient historical lands had been under occupation for almost 30 years. In the process of negotiations, Armenia simply wanted to gain time, strengthen the status quo and perpetuate it. Over the years, signals sent to Azerbaijan from various power centers were repeatedly urging us to put up with the situation. However, showing determination, courage and political will, we did not go for any agreement that did not meet the interests of the Azerbaijani people. I have repeatedly stated from all international rostrums that the restoration of our lands and territorial integrity is our main task and we are fulfilling this task. Negotiations did not yield any results. They were just trying to fool us. They were just trying to freeze the issue. We have won this victory in the battlefield, we have won this victory by sacrificing martyrs," President Ilham Aliyev noted.

The President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan congratulated Azerbaijan on the "liberation of the strategically important town of Shusha", saying that Turkey shares the happiness of Azerbaijani people, who have been liberating their occupied towns and Karabakh step-by-step. "The liberation of the Shusha town also implies that the liberation of remaining occupied territories is in sight," Erdogan added. Foreign and national defence ministers of Turkey Mevlut Cavusoglu and Hulusi Akar respectively paid a visit to Azerbaijan on November 8, as they said, to share the joy of Azerbaijan. Underscoring the significance of the visit of the Turkish ministers, President Ilham Aliyev said that Ankara's political and moral support played an important role in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. "The Turkish president, my dear brother Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has repeatedly expressed his support for Azerbaijan over the past month and before, giving us additional strength with his open statements and political and moral

support. At the same time, you, dear minister of defence, and our other brothers have repeatedly declared your support for Azerbaijan. You note that Turkey is next to Azerbaijan. Of course, these statements, this political and moral support also played an important role in resolving this conflict," President Aliyev noted during the meeting.

As Dr. Cavid Veliyev, the head of a department at the Center of Analysis of International Relations of Azerbaijan (AIR Center) noted, the resumption of the war was the result of lack of advancement in the peace negotiations process that have been going on for 26 years within the framework of the Minsk Group. Azerbaijan, along with implementing the four UN Security Council resolutions that were adopted in 1993, used its legitimate right of self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

## **II. Armenia's military surrender and the end of the Second Karabakh War**

In a televised address to the nation in the early hours of November 10, President Ilham Aliyev announced the historic signing of the ceasefire agreement to end the Second Karabakh War, declaring it a "glorious victory" for Azerbaijan. Based on the statement signed by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin, a complete ceasefire and a cessation of all hostilities in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh was introduced at 00:00 hours Moscow time on 10 November 2020. Under the agreement, Aghdam district had to be returned to the Republic of Azerbaijan by 20 November 2020. It was also agreed that Armenia had to return Kalbajar district to the Republic of Azerbaijan by 15

November 2020 and Lachin district by 1 December 2020. Based on the agreement, along the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the Lachin corridor, a peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation had to be deployed in the amount of 1,960 military personnel with small arms, 90 armored personnel carriers, and 380 units of the automobile and special equipment. The peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation had to be deployed in parallel with the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces. The period of stay of the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation was set for 5 years and would be automatically extended by a further five-year period if none of the Parties declares six months prior to the expiration of the period of its intention to terminate the application of this provision. In order to increase the effectiveness of control over the implementation of the agreements by the Parties to the conflict, a peacekeeping center was agreed to be deployed to exercise control over the ceasefire. Under the agreement, the Lachin corridor (5km wide), which would provide a connection of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia and would not affect the city of Shusha, would remain under the control of the Russian Federation's peacekeeping contingent.

By agreement of the Parties, a plan for the construction of a new route along the Lachin corridor had to be determined in the next three years, providing communication between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, with the subsequent redeployment of the Russian peacekeeping contingent to protect this route. It was also stipulated that the Republic of Azerbaijan would guarantee the safety of citizens, vehicles and goods traveling along the Lachin corridor in both directions. Under the agreement, internally displaced persons and refugees would return to the

territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent districts under the control of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The exchange of prisoners of war and other detainees and bodies of the dead will also be carried out. All economic and transport links in the region will be restored. According to the agreement, Armenia guarantees the safety of transport links between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in order to organize an unimpeded movement of citizens, vehicles and goods in both directions. It was stipulated that control over transport would be exercised by the bodies of the Border Guard Service of the Federal Security Service (FSB) of Russia. Under this agreement, the construction of new transport communications linking the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic with the western regions of Azerbaijan will also be ensured.

Describing the signing of the statement as a historic moment, President Ilham Aliyev expressed confidence that this would serve to achieve long-term peace and put an end to bloodshed and confrontation. "This is a triumph of norms and principles of international law," the president said. "I am happy that I signed this historic document. I am happy that we are going back to our motherland, to our native Karabakh, to Shusha, the crown of Karabakh. We will live forever on this land and nobody - nobody will be able to move us from this land," President Ilham Aliyev noted. The peace deal was signed by President Ilham Aliyev and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin via a video conferencing. President Ilham Aliyev also emphasized that it was Azerbaijan's "iron fist" had forced Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to sign the peace deal. Pashinyan had refused to join the proposed trilateral

video conference and instead signed the deal off camera.

"This is military capitulation [of Armenia]," President Ilham Aliyev added. "We have taken them down a peg. We have taught them a lesson. We have booted them out from our lands," the president said. President Ilham Aliyev also drew attention to the fact that the agreement did not stipulate giving any status to Nagorno-Karabakh. "There is not and will not be any status. There will be no status as long as I am president," President Ilham Aliyev added. Underscoring the importance of Clause 5 of the statement, the president emphasized that, along with Russian peacekeepers, Turkish peacekeepers would be present in a peacekeeping center to be set up to monitor the cease-fire.

On November 11, President Ilham Aliyev and First Vice-President Mehriban Aliyeva met a group of wounded servicemen undergoing medical treatment. Addressing the servicemen at the meeting, the president said that "the Patriotic War is over. Azerbaijan has won a brilliant victory in this war, our lands have been liberated from occupation, we have expelled the occupiers from our lands. I have come to congratulate you personally on this glorious victory, to express my gratitude to you, to express the gratitude of the Azerbaijani people to you for fighting heroically, for your exceptional contribution to evicting the enemy from our lands. You were wounded, you put your lives on the line and showed tremendous courage". "The second Karabakh War will go down in history as Azerbaijan's glorious victory," President Ilham Aliyev added, crediting the people for unity and solidarity in achieving the victory.

Reiterating Azerbaijan's commitment to resolve the conflict peacefully, President Ilham Aliyev said that Azerbaijan under his leadership negotiated for 17 years in vain,

adding that international mediators also assured Baku that the problem could only be resolved peacefully. However, over the past year, President Ilham Aliyev said, "we saw that we were simply being deceived and the peace process was almost paralyzed". The new leadership of Armenia has effectively disrupted the process of negotiations with unacceptable and harmful steps and statements and was making no secret of that in recent months, the president said. President Ilham Aliyev said Armenia made demonstrative steps to show both Baku and the whole world that the occupied territories would remain under occupation forever. "When we saw that they were simply deceiving us, trying to insult us and our holy places, we said our word and I did not hide it. During all this time, for 17 years, I had been saying that if this issue was not resolved peacefully, we would resolve it militarily. Whatever people may say, I still think the same and I am saying the same today. For the past 44 days, I received so many calls and so many signals to stop. I said that I had one condition for the enemy - leave our lands and we will stop. Let him say that he is leaving and we will stop. Let him provide a timetable, a date, and we will stop. But the enemy believed that they could stop our successful attack," the president added.

Speaking on his insistence that the Armenian prime minister sign the November 10 joint statement - "an act of Armenia's peaceful capitulation" - in a live format, in the form of a video conference, President Ilham Aliyev revealed that President Vladimir Putin asked him not to insist on that too much. "I thought that Pashinyan was already humiliated enough, was already punished for his ugly deeds, was already on his knees, and had already accepted all my conditions. The signed statement also approved a timetable for the

withdrawal of the occupying forces from Aghdam, Lachin, and Kalbajar districts. I said that I did not object to it. I told him to sign it wherever he wanted, in a dark room, in a warehouse, far away from the cameras. And that is what happened. All the people of Azerbaijan saw the signing ceremony between myself and President Putin. Pashinyan, where did you sign this document? It does not matter much, because it is impossible to find him now. And no-one can ask Pashinyan where he signed it," President Ilham Aliyev added.

During his visit to the liberated Fuzuli and Jabrayil districts on November 16, President Ilham Aliyev reiterated again that a status for Nagorno-Karabakh is out of the question and that there is a single Azerbaijani state. President Ilham Aliyev also reiterated that ethnic Armenians living in Azerbaijan are Azerbaijani citizens, just as members of any other ethnic or religious groups are. "I have said this in my numerous interviews over those 44 days [of war]: they [ethnic Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh] are our citizens, and they will see that they will live a good life under the Azerbaijani leadership, and they need to rid themselves of the cowardly junta regime." President Ilham Aliyev also noted: "Azerbaijan is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious progressive state. All Azerbaijani citizens, representatives of all ethnic groups and religions live a normal life in friendship and peace. [Ethnic] Armenian people will also live this kind of a life. We have nothing against Armenian people."

President Ilham Aliyev went on to say that the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan had defeated the Armenian army built by that country's previous leaderships under former President Robert Kocharyan and former President and former Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan. "We have defeated the Kocharyan-Sargsyan army... [Armenian Prime Minister Nikol] Pashinyan is a

nobody. Kocharyan and Sargsyan, the slaughterers of Azerbaijani people, the Khojaly slaughterers - we have defeated you, we have defeated your army. If Armenia had not signed the instrument of surrender, they know how this war would have ended," President Ilham Aliyev added. "The iron fist has smashed your head and from now on nobody will speak to us in the language of ultimatums," the president also warned.

During his visit to the liberated districts, President Ilham Aliyev also underscored Baku's intention to sue Armenia for destruction in the occupied territories. "Here is the center of the town of Jabrayil," President Ilham Aliyev said, standing against the background of ruins in the distance. "There is not a single intact house, they have left not a single building. They only built a military unit for themselves over there. The rest, the infrastructure, homes, buildings, schools, public facilities have all been demolished by the enemy. They will be held accountable; they will answer in international courts." President Ilham Aliyev said that international experts would arrive in Azerbaijan to calculate the damage caused over the past 30 years and a case would be brought against Armenia to make it pay restitution.

Dr. Vasif Huseynov, a senior adviser at the Center of Analysis of International Relations of Azerbaijan (AIR Center) noted that "the war has significantly changed the social and political environment in Azerbaijan, generating unanimous public support to the government and its policies concerning the conflict". Vasif Huseynov also added that "the government enjoys the support even of the oppositional forces who used to be critical of the government before the war. Hence, not only did the 44-day war restore Azerbaijan's control over the occupied part of its internationally-recognized territories but also

created remarkable solidarity in Azerbaijan which has the potential to serve as a favorable ground for future economic and political reforms".

### **III. Liberation of Aghdam and Kalbajar**

Aghdam became the first of three occupied districts due to be handed back by Armenia as part of the Russian-brokered peace deal following the six-week war. In a televised address to the nation on November 20, President Ilham Aliyev congratulated the nation on the return of Aghdam and said Azerbaijan's victory on the battlefield had conditioned its political victory. "Aghdam District is being returned to us without a single shot, without a single casualty. This is our major political success," President Ilham Aliyev said. President Ilham Aliyev reiterated again that the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is over and Baku's next step now is to rebuild the regained areas, adding that the government is working on a grand return plan. President Ilham Aliyev also criticized the Armenian leadership and said that Armenia's main mistake was maintaining its hatred towards Azerbaijan and laying claims to neighbours' lands on the basis of a false history. President Ilham Aliyev said that Azerbaijan was interested in peace in the region and good-neighborly relations with Armenia, adding that all peoples, including ethnic Armenians, living in united Azerbaijan had equal rights. "I am confident that the Armenians currently living in Nagorno-Karabakh will one day realize that the only way for them is to live side by side with the Azerbaijani people as neighbours," the president noted. The president pointed out that there were now attempts by Armenia to falsely state that 90,000 people had been

displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh during the latest war, when, in fact, around 60,000-65,000 Armenians had lived in Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas before the six-week war.

At the same time, the president warned Armenia against any possible future provocations. "If Armenian fascism lifts its head up again and if any provocation is committed against us, they will get a ten-time bigger response, and no-one can stop us," President Ilham Aliyev said. The president said that Azerbaijan was ready to build normal relations with Armenia if sound political forces came to power there. "But we can have no ties with butchers, with those who shed the blood of Azerbaijani people," President Ilham Aliyev noted.

"A military defeat, particularly such a shameful defeat, can of course lead to turmoil in any country. Therefore, if sober-minded forces come to power in Armenia now, after the crisis, we are ready to establish normal relations with such sound forces. From now on, we will move even faster along the path of development. We have achieved what we wanted on the battlefield. Our soldiers and officers showed their prowess. We have shown our strength in the political sphere, and the trilateral statement fully meets our interests," President Ilham Aliyev added.

According to Dr. Vasif Huseynov, the war brought about sharply different consequences for Armenia shocking the society who had been persuaded of the invincibility of the Armenian army and its absolute superiority over the military capabilities of Azerbaijan. Dr. Huseynov added that "the Russia-brokered peace deal was a cold shower for millions of Armenians who were constantly deceived by

their political and military leadership during the war. This, on the one hand, caused a nation-wide distrust in the ruling forces, on the other hand sparked a fierce political crisis".

On November 23, President Ilham Aliyev visited the newly liberated Aghdam district. "Today, standing here in front of this mosque damaged by vandals, I can say that I am a happy person," President Ilham Aliyev said. "I am thankful to God that he has heard my prayers and given me this strength. We have mobilised our strength and are now witnessing these historic days," adding that "all these years we had one goal, one wish - to return to these lands, and we have done so. We have destroyed the Armenian army... We have destroyed the army of Kocharyan and Sargsyan... I am standing here in front of the mosque you destroyed, in the town of Aghdam you destroyed, I have come here with my army, I have come as the victor. You will live your miserable lives to the end as losers and cowards."

President Ilham Aliyev also criticized some Western actors for raising concerns about the security of Christian shrines in the territories liberated by Azerbaijan. "Let no-one be concerned, especially leaders of Western countries who flare up Islamophobic sentiments. Those who turn a blind eye to the insults of Islamic saints and even justify those who commit the insults. First, they have no right to raise these issues. Second, all shrines on our territory are our historical wealth," President Ilham Aliyev said, noting that all historical monuments in the country were protected by the state. President Ilham Aliyev also criticized envoys of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair countries, which have mediated a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh

conflict for the past 27 years, for their failure to report destruction of the Aghdam mosque. "Why did they not raise this issue? Why did some Western leaders not get concerned about the matter? That is it is alright to insult Muslim mosques, to keep pigs and cows there, to destroy them. If so, let them say this clearly and go and mind their own business in their own countries, let them not poke their noses in our business. Let no-one get into our way," the president said.

After an initial extension of the withdrawal of Armenian troops from Kalbajar District for another 10 days on humanitarian grounds by Azerbaijan at Yerevan's request, Armenian forces withdrew from Kalbajar District on 25 November in line with the 10 November ceasefire deal signed between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia. Azerbaijan also restored its sovereignty over the Soyudlu (Zod) gold deposit in Kalbajar District, where Armenians had illegally mined gold since 2006. Azerbaijan did not have access to it while it was under Armenian occupation but satellite images showed that Armenia illegally operated the Azerbaijani part of the deposit. The Zod gold deposit was discovered in 1951, and the larger part of it - 75% - is in Azerbaijan.

In a televised address to the nation on November 25, President Ilham Aliyev congratulated the Azerbaijani nation for the liberation of Kalbajar district from occupation. "Dear people of Kalbajar, may you rejoice! Your native district has been liberated from occupation. The people of Azerbaijan have been looking forward to this day for years. Kalbajar district was occupied on 2 April 1993. Innocent people were savagely expelled from their ancestral lands. The historical sites and nature of Kalbajar have been severely

damaged. The occupation of the Kalbajar district was a great tragedy," President Ilham Aliyev added.

President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that "after the fall of Shusha and Lachin district in May 1992, the occupation of Kalbajar also created a geographical link between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Everyone knows that the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region did not have a border with the Republic of Armenia. Armenia was separated from Nagorno-Karabakh by the Lachin district and the Lachin corridor. The occupation of Lachin, Shusha and then Kalbajar districts established a geographical connection between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh over a large area, and that was the enemy's objective. After the occupation of Kalbajar, a link was established between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh in many ways. First of all, weapons, equipment and manpower were sent there from Armenia. At the same time, it provided significant advantages for Armenia's subsequent policy of aggression."

President Ilham Aliyev also pointed out that those Western circles who want to express their concern about the churches in the liberated areas, which are Azerbaijan's cultural heritage, look at destroyed mosques, the Aghdam, Shusha, Zangilan, Jabrayil, Fuzuli and other mosques, adding that "these mosques have either been destroyed or desecrated – pigs were kept in them. Why isn't this causing concern? Why has no-one raised this issue for 30 years except for us? I have repeatedly raised this issue from international rostrums and in interactions with my foreign colleagues. Why wasn't anyone worried about that? Why didn't anyone want to send an international delegation on this issue? The Azerbaijani

people want answers to these questions. We know the answer. Therefore, I repeat it - those who wish to interfere in our work or accuse us of something should first look in the mirror.”

In his address to the nation, President Ilham Aliyev also noted that “all international organizations, the leaders of all great powers I was in contact with, have repeatedly said that there was no military solution to the conflict. These statements are also available in the media. What was I insisting on? I said there was one! I said that if necessary, we would liberate our lands by military means. I said that war could never be ruled out. During the talks, it was repeatedly proposed that the Azerbaijani side renounced the path of war. I never agreed to that. Then they started accusing me, saying that Ilham Aliyev wanted to start a war. I said that I wanted to resolve the issue peacefully, but I want to resolve it. What did Armenia want? Maintain the status quo and perpetuate it. They believed that if they had managed that in 26-27 years, they would continue to do so. They thought that their patrons would always defend them, stand behind them and fight for them. Generally, they believe that the whole world owes them something. They want to run their country with this harmful and sick mentality that someone must help them. What are you capable of? If you always cling to someone and expect some privileges, then what are you good for? This mentality has led their society astray. Today, they are displeased with everyone. Even today, people are asking questions about why no one defends them. Why should anyone protect you? You are an independent country – supposedly – so live as an independent country. This is the first. Second, you have invaded someone else's land. You have left a million people homeless.

You have destroyed all buildings, houses and cities. You have acted like a savage. Justice is not on your side, nor is international law. Historical truth is not on your side, either.”

As Dr. Farid Shafiyev, Chairman of the Center of Analysis of International Relations, pointed out “the Azerbaijanis, who were forced to leave their homes as a result of the Armenian occupation, took the keys of their homes with them in the hope that they would be able to return to their native lands. Unlike the Azerbaijanis, the Armenians, leaving Kalbajar district, are looting and burning all our property, communications lines and cutting down forests. All this is a clear manifestation of the fact that these lands have always been and remain alien to the Armenians”.

#### **IV. Environmental terrorism carried out by Armenia in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan**

Media reports showed Armenians in Kalbajar burning houses, cutting down trees, and setting fire to forests before they left the region. It has been reported that they did not shy away from burning down schools and hospitals and butchering the cattle. President Ilham Aliyev noted that “there are extensive forest areas in the Kalbajar district - 24,000 hectares of woods. That is our great asset. The hated enemy cut down, looted and sold those trees,” adding that “there was also environmental terror against us. Armenia is a terrorist state, and there are many signs of that terror. There are signs of the destruction of our historical sites, the genocide against our civilian population, deforestation, changing the course of our rivers and others. The water of the Tartar River, which originated from Kalbajar, was first collected in the Sarsang water reservoir and then in the Sugovushan

water reservoir, thus serving the occupier's interests. In contrast, we did not get water at all."

"Armenia is damaging both the environment and the material and cultural monuments of Azerbaijan," Hikmat 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, said on November 15. Further, he added that Armenians carried out illegal archaeological excavations near occupied Aghdam District and took findings to Yerevan. "As reported by the Armenian media, objects discovered in excavations, which are part of the cultural heritage of the Azerbaijani people, have been taken to Armenia. All these are serious violation of the requirements of international conventions. Azerbaijan is always sensitive to the preservation of material and cultural heritage," Hikmat Hajiyev added.

As Vasif Huseynov has noted, "not only did Armenians leaving Azerbaijani territories burn the houses they had lived in, but also cut trees and set fire to forests in order not to leave something valuable to Azerbaijanis. This comes extra to the destruction Armenia has carried out in the territories it has held under control over the last thirty years. Despite potential consequences not only for the territories of Azerbaijan, but also for the larger region, there were calls by Armenians to destroy the entire fauna and flora of the Karabakh region, before handing this to Azerbaijan. For example, Stepan Danielyan, Chairman of the Center for Partnership for Democracy, even proposed to "blow up the Sarsang reservoir, poison the rivers going to Azerbaijan, burn all the forests, and in the extreme case spread the waste of the nuclear power plant" in the territories of Karabakh. Unfortunately, his call for eco-terrorism has been supported by many people".

On many occasions, the international organizations sounded alarms against the devastation of the environment of the Karabakh region and beyond caused by the occupation. In January 2016, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Resolution 2085 that condemned the fact that the occupation by Armenia of Nagorno-Karabakh and other, adjacent areas of Azerbaijan had created humanitarian and environmental problems for the citizens of Azerbaijan living in the Lower Karabakh valley. They called on the Armenian authorities to cease using water resources as tools of political influence. According to the report "Environment and Security: Transforming Risks into Cooperation – The Case of the Southern Caucasus" prepared by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) in October 2004, the occupation represented a major challenge for the environment and the security of Azerbaijan, and posed specific problems such as the long-term impacts of overuse of pastureland, clearing of forests, stockpiling of waste, and irrational use of land in Nagorno-Karabakh. The report of the environmental assessment mission led by the OSCE to fire-affected territories in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region, conducted from 2 to 13 October 2006, concluded that the areas burned were extensive and the impacts on people, the economy, and the environment were significant. The report prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan also paints a shocking picture of illegal economic and other activities in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan: "The exploitation of the natural resources accompanied by associated ecological disasters, such as tailing dumps and water pollution, has reached such a fast and

unobstructed pace that even Armenia-based environmental organizations, including the Pan-Armenian Environmental Front (PAEF), raised [a] red flag.” The environmental crimes committed by Armenia for many years are also evidenced by Azercosmos satellite images. These pieces of evidence show that the most valuable examples of flora and fauna in the occupied territories have been obliterated. According to preliminary estimates by experts, the damage to the environment and natural resources is valued at about \$265.3 billion.

As Naghi Ahmadov, a leading adviser at the Center of Analysis of International Relations of Azerbaijan (AIR Center) noted, “as a consequence of the occupation, Nagorno-Karabakh has experienced massive destruction of the ecosystem that can be characterized as “ecocide,” which calls for assigning criminal responsibility. As a result of the liberation of the territories from occupation, Azerbaijan has discovered new incidences of environmental terror carried out by the Armenians on these lands for almost 30 years. In order to ascertain the true condition of the flora and fauna of the liberated territories, it is necessary to conduct an appropriate investigation and objective scientific assessments on the spot and determine the damage caused to nature”, adding that “expanding biodiversity and rehabilitating the ecosystem in the region will require the development of a comprehensive program. It may take decades to restore the flora and fauna, as some plants have been completely destroyed and others are on the verge of extinction. As soon as specialists assess the damage caused to the environment, it will be possible to determine the legal mechanisms to bring those who are responsible for the crime of ecocide to justice and demand compensation”.

## V. Use of mercenaries and foreign fighters by Armenia against Azerbaijan

Various international mercenaries and terrorist groups sided with the Armenian Armed Forces to fight against the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan during the 44-day Karabakh war. The involvement of mercenaries from Syria and Georgia's Abkhazia and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions in the Karabakh war on the side of the Armenian army has been extensively documented. The Armenian Martyr Nubar Ozanyan Battalion, affiliated with PDY/YPG terrorists in Iraq and Syria, was involved in the Second Karabakh War on the Armenian side. Along with this battalion, the Baghramyan Armenian Battalion, who committed atrocities in Abkhazia in the 1990s and 2008 and ethnically cleansed the region from Georgians, also moved to Karabakh to fight against Azerbaijan.

The Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center) has published a [report](#) detailing the involvement of foreign fighters, including mercenaries, on the side of Armenia during the military operations conducted within the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan. The report notes that the issue of the Armenian side deploying foreign fighters is not new. During the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988–94), soldiers of both Armenian and non-Armenian descent actively fought and committed war crimes, including the 1992 Khojaly Genocide, in the Karabakh region. A prominent example is the California-born international terrorist Monte Melkonian, imprisoned in France for acts of terror in the 1980s, who was involved in military operations against Azerbaijani civilians in Karadagly, Khojaly, and other settlements in Azerbaijan. In 1996, Melkonian, a member of the terrorist organization ASALA and a war

criminal, was elevated to the status of a national hero in Armenia.

According to the report, during the Second Karabakh War, the illegal deployment of foreign fighters and mercenaries on the side of the Armenian Armed Forces continued. According to the *Cairo24* News Agency as well as intelligence sources, “Armenia’s efforts led to the transfer of hundreds of armed terrorists from Suleymaniyah, considered to be a stronghold of the PKK in Iraq, to Nagorno-Karabakh via Iran.” As stated by intelligence sources, Armenia has deployed PKK terrorists to Shusha to fight against the Azerbaijani Army. According to the captured Armenian serviceman, Mikayelyan Albert Yervandi, Armenia brought 1,500 Kurdish mercenaries to Karabakh. At the same time, the citizens of different countries, motivated by the call from the Armenian authorities, have travelled to Armenia to fight against Azerbaijan in Karabakh. One of their main reasons for joining the armed forces in Karabakh was to demonstrate their Christian solidarity to Armenians. For example, a Greek national, a former non-commissioned officer in the Greek army who fought in the wars in Kosovo and Afghanistan, explained that the reason behind his decision to go to fight in Karabakh was to help his brothers [Armenians] “because they are Christians. I am a Greek.” As stated by *Radio France Internationale*, about 30 foreign fighters arrived from Syria, Lebanon, and Latin America. In Russia, it was alleged, the Union of Armenians listed 20,000 volunteers prepared to fight for Armenia.

Moreover, the special military-patriotic public organization VoMA, which is short for *Ողջ Մնալու Արվեստ* (the art of staying alive), founded by Vova Vartanov and operating from Yerevan, appealed to the Armenian diaspora, calling on them to participate in accelerated military training courses with the aim of

establishing a mountain rifle battalion under the command of the Ministry of Defense of Armenia. The report notes that, according to information provided by the law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Azerbaijan, citizens of Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, France, Greece, India, Jordan, Lebanon, Mexico, the Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine and the USA attended such training to fight in Karabakh. Most of the total of 108 people who arrived in Armenia were citizens of these countries of Armenian descent (89 persons). The remaining 19 citizens from Brazil, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, India, Mexico, the Russian Federation, Sweden, Ukraine, and the USA were not of Armenian origin. The organization covered the travel expenses, all necessary equipment, and clothing for the recruits. It seems that the vast majority of volunteers arriving in Armenia to participate in the ongoing fighting obtained their preparation trainings from VoMA. According to *Reuters*, hundreds of diaspora members from all across the world, including a student called Aghasi Asatryan who lived in Germany for more than seven years, had already joined training organized by the VoMA Survival School. Karapet Aghajanyan, a combat instructor in Yerevan, also told *Reuters* that around Lebanese-Armenians, who arrived in Armenia from Beirut after the fighting broke out in late September to go to the front line, had received training in his camp. The activities of VoMA in the Russian-speaking segments of social networks indicate that the recruiting process included the territory of the Russian Federation. According to organizers, upon completion of all training courses, the battalion was “put into combat operations in the assigned territories” under the leadership of the Armenian Defense Ministry. However, the most interesting issue seems to be the availability of access for Russian citizens as

well. For Armenians from the Russian Federation, charter flights from Moscow to Yerevan were organized on October 9 and 25 by NordStar Airlines. On 28 September, the president of the Armenian Union of Russia (Союз армян России), Ara Abramyan, announced that 20,000 Russian Armenians were going to travel to Armenia and fight for the regime in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. He also mentioned that there were around 1,000 Russians who also wanted to join.

According to the Sputnik Hellas news agency, at least 500–800 Greek citizens said they were ready to join the Armenian army “to fight the Turks.” In addition, according to Minas Hovhannisyanyan, the head of the Hayastan cultural center in Greece, Armenians there called on their compatriots to join the Armenian army voluntarily. In three days more than 100 people answered the call. According to *France 24* and *Новая Газета*, several men with French citizenship actively participated in the fighting against Azerbaijan. For example, French Armenian Artur Oganisyan told a correspondent that he simply arrived in Armenia without providing any documents, received a machine gun, and joined the army. The *France24* news agency has published several video reports telling the stories of a war veteran named Vardan33 and a 28-year-old French citizen, Sipan Muradyan, who returned to their homeland to participate in the war by joining a group of volunteers. The French *Liberation* news agency also reported on Marc de Cacqueray-Valmenier, the notorious neo-Nazi and leader of the far-right group Zouaves Paris (ZVP), who left to fight on the Armenian side and published a photo on social media photo as evidence of his presence on the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. An article in Spain’s *El Confidencial* narrates the story of Zareh, who had also fought on behalf

of Armenia during the last year of the 1988–1994 Karabakh war, coming to fight in Nagorno-Karabakh all the way from Barcelona, Spain. He mentions that he has seen compatriots from Belgium and the United States. Anush, another member of the Armenian diaspora in Spain, also proudly tells the story of “brave Armenians living abroad” who were ready to be mobilized for the war on the territories not legally belonging to the state of Armenia, among them her father. The author also claims that, according to his sources, several dozen Armenians in Spain have seriously considered traveling to Armenia to volunteer, though not necessarily on the front line.

In conclusion, the report published by the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center) [notes](#) that “Armenia and its diaspora have been involved in the process of recruitment, use, financing, and training of mercenaries and foreign fighters, locally and abroad, for the purpose of participating in a concerted act of violence aimed at undermining the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. This is a gross violation of international law, international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and international refugee law”.

## **VI. Azerbaijan condemns French Senate resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan has described as “completely biased” and “a provocation” the resolution on “The need to recognize the Nagorno-Karabakh republic” adopted by the French Senate on November 25. In a statement on its official website, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan said that while the resolution adopted by the Senate had no legal force, it nevertheless cast

doubt on France's role as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as part of the OSCE Minsk Group. "Instead of adopting biased resolutions, engagement of the French Senate in activities that serve peace, stability and progress in the region would respond to the interests of France and lead to the sustainable development of the region," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement read. Hikmat 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, noted that the resolution "is nothing more than a piece of paper" for Azerbaijan. "As such, it has been adopted merely for the sake of narrow political ambitions while flagrantly violating international law norms, the UN Charter and relevant UN Security Council Resolutions," Hikmat Hajiyev pointed out in a comment published on his Twitter account. "Furthermore, it raises serious questions regarding France's intentions and objective performance, be it as the Minsk Group co-chair country or a UN Security Council permanent member." Hikmat Hajiyev also emphasized the fact that the latest resolution was a vivid example of rising Islamophobia in France. Hikmat Hajiyev said that France's openly pro-Armenian position had impeded the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict's peaceful resolution and blamed the French Senate for keeping silent about the occupation of Azerbaijani lands over

the past 30 years. He accused France of attempting to derail the peace deal on Nagorno-Karabakh and reignite the conflict. The Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan at its session on November 26 condemned the French Senate resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh and MPs called for France to be removed from the OSCE Minsk Group that has been mediating a peaceful resolution to the conflict for the past 27 years.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan summoned the French ambassador and submitted to him a note of protest over the French Senate's non-binding resolution on "the necessity to recognize the Nagorno-Karabakh republic". The Foreign Ministry of France reiterated later that the Paris government does not recognize Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent state. Although the French Senate resolution recognizing the independence of the puppet regime in Nagorno-Karabakh is of no importance for Azerbaijan, it is still a brazen attempt to push the French government to violate the basic norms and principles of international law. It also goes against commitments undertaken by France within the framework of the EU's global strategy on foreign and security policy, including documents on the territorial integrity of states, consistently adopted by the Council of the EU since 2016.