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BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

Table of contents

- I. “A new stage in relations with Ukraine”: President Zelensky’s visit to Azerbaijan
2
- II. The 9th General Assembly of TURKPA
3
- III. The 2nd round of the EU-Azerbaijan Security Dialogue
4
- IV. The 8th Trilateral Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia
5

I. “A new stage in relations with Ukraine”: President Zelensky’s visit to Azerbaijan

On December 17th, the president of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky paid a two-day official visit to Azerbaijan. During his visit, president Zelensky attended a closed-door meeting with his counterpart president Ilham Aliyev, which was later followed by negotiations in an expanded format with the participation of the delegations. President Zelensky also had a working lunch with the Prime Minister of Azerbaijan, Ali Asadov, and took part at the Ukrainian-Azerbaijani Business Forum.

Indeed, the visit by Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky to Azerbaijan can be viewed as a new stage in relations between Kiev and Baku, and the beginning of a more fruitful cooperation. During the negotiations, both in one-on-one format with President Aliyev and in the expanded format, various aspects of the Ukrainian-Azerbaijani bilateral relations were widely discussed and a broad exchange of views on the further development of these ties were held regarding the fields of trade, energy, transport, agriculture, mutual investments and tourism.

In his statement following the meetings, President Ilham Aliyev reflected on the historically friendly relations between the two countries, recalling that a representative office of Ukraine was one of 16 foreign diplomatic missions operating in Baku back in 1918-1920, during the period of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.

Later, President Aliyev touched upon the volume of trade between the two countries, stating that the trade turnover grew by almost 20 percent this year, but there was still way to go, hence the opening of the trade houses of Azerbaijan in Ukraine in 2018, as well as of

Ukraine in Azerbaijan, - which coincided with President Zelensky’s visit to Baku, - would give a significant impetus to this matter. The president of Azerbaijan also drew attention to the fact that over 90 companies from Ukraine and more than 100 companies from Azerbaijan were represented at the Azerbaijani-Ukrainian business forum, which was quite indicative of the level of interest in such events. President Aliyev then noted the prolonged inaction of the Ukrainian-Azerbaijani bilateral intergovernmental commission over the past few years, and emphasized that the two countries would hold a meeting of this commission in January 2020 in order to implement measures to increase mutual trade.

President Aliyev also noted that specific proposals were discussed regarding the joint investment projects in many areas that would further strengthen the bilateral cooperation. The two sides also agreed to take specific steps in expanding SOCAR’s activities in Ukraine, which was already operating 60 gas stations and four oil terminals in that country. The president of Azerbaijan also mentioned the potential role of the Caspian and the Black Sea Transport Corridors, such as the East-West corridor, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and the Viking project in strengthening the cooperation between two countries. The Intergovernmental Commission, in turn, is also expected to work on the liberalization of aviation and road transportation, as well as the development of railway connection between the countries taking into account the logistical opportunities of the Black Sea, as well as on involvement of Azerbaijani companies in the restoration of Ukrainian roads and participation in concession projects.

President Zelensky, in turn, praised the bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Ukraine. “Our relations have stood the test of time. We have always been a support [system

for] each other in difficult times. Azerbaijan has always been a reliable friend and an important strategic partner for Ukraine, and it is still the case now,” he stated. Zelensky also mentioned the acquisition by Azerbaijan’s mobile operator “Bakcell” of Vodafone Ukraine shares as a successful case that would help increase the level of services in the respective area. The president of Ukraine then praised the work of SOCAR in his country, and reassured that he would do his best to provide all possible support for the production and transportation of oil and gas products.

President Zelensky’s main focus during his speech was on the question of national and regional security: “We discussed the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the conflict in eastern Ukraine. We support each other in the issue of restoring the territorial integrity and sovereignty of our countries. We are talking about the restoration of internationally recognized borders. From this point of view, this principle covers our cooperation both at the bilateral level and within the framework of international organizations. This is an indicator of the level of relations between our countries. We advocate a single position both at the regional and global levels,” he stated. During his speech, the president of Ukraine also wished Azerbaijan a successful presidency in GUAM in 2020.

Notably, on December 12th, a regular meeting of the heads of government of GUAM member states was held in Kiev, at which issues of political interaction, inter-parliamentary dialogue, the development of industry cooperation and interaction with other states and international organizations were discussed. The transfer of the presidency of GUAM to Azerbaijan beginning from January 2020 was also confirmed during the meeting.

The expanded negotiations, in turn, resulted in the signing of four documents in the presence

of the presidents of both countries: 1) The Protocol of intent between the city of Ganja and the city of Odessa; 2) The Agreement on cooperation between the city of Guba and the city of Truskavets; 3) The Agreement on cooperation in the field of business regulation; 4) The Agreement on the establishment of an interstate government communication line between Baku and Kiev.

II. The 9th General Assembly of TURKPA

The 9th plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Turkic Speaking Countries (TURKPA) was organized by Milli Majlis, the Parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in Baku on December 18th. The event brought together delegations of member countries led by speakers of parliaments, as well as representatives of Turkic cooperation institutions and other international organizations.

In his opening speech, Mustafa Shentop, the chairman of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, reflected on the common history of the Turkic-speaking nations, emphasized the fact of occupation of Azerbaijan’s internationally recognized territories and reassured Turkey’s unconditional support for Azerbaijan. Later, Mr. Shentop officially handed over the TurkPA Chairmanship to the speaker of the Milli Majlis Ogtay Asadov. The latter, in turn, expressed gratitude to his Turkish counterpart for his commendable work during his chairmanship over TurkPA that significantly contributed to the cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries. Asadov stressed that TurkPA has become an influential parliamentary organization and expressed confidence that it will successfully pursue the works launched in the previous years. The

chairman of Milli Majlis noted that raising the organization's international stance and conducting observation missions will be among the priorities of TurkPA for 2020.

The parties also discussed the ways to further enhance the cooperation between the member countries within the TurkPA, as well as the future expansion of the organization. On that note, the heads of delegations welcomed the participation of the Uzbek delegation in the session, which was considered as another historical event for the Turkic world, and which will inevitably boost the organization's ambitions and magnitude within the international arena. Furthermore, the observer status was granted to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC) during the session.

The plan of activities and the budget project for 2020 were confirmed during the plenary session. A number of other documents were also adopted, including the resolutions on the establishment of separate TurkPA parliamentary groups involving only women and youth; the Statute on the Secretariat of the Organization; as well as the model bills "On Tourism" and "On the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Turkic World". Moreover, it was mentioned that the model bill "On the Fight against Terrorism" would be prepared during Azerbaijan's chairmanship over the organization. The report of the international observation mission of the organization on the snap elections in Kazakhstan was also heard before the adoption of Baku Declaration and the announcement that the next meeting of the Assembly would be held in Kazakhstan next year.

III. The 2nd round of the EU-Azerbaijan Security Dialogue

The 2nd round of the European Union (EU) - Azerbaijan Security Dialogue was held on December in Baku on December 19th. The event is already established as an annual meeting between the EU and Azerbaijani foreign policy officials. The high-level EU delegation was led by Mr. Jean-Christophe Belliard, Deputy Secretary-General for political affairs at the European External Action Service and included experts in the field of security. The Azerbaijani delegation was led by Mr. Ramil Usubov, the Secretary of the Security Council of the Republic of Azerbaijan and included experts from relevant state institutions.

Within the framework of the Dialogue, extensive consultations were conducted on pressing political and security issues of mutual interest, including conflict resolution and crisis management, as well as threats and challenges to regional and international security, such as terrorism, extremism, separatism, organized crime, threats to cyber security. The parties then further examined the prospects for practical cooperation.

According to the EEAS press service, the delegations reconfirmed their adherence to the norms and principles of international law as enshrined in the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act and underlined the importance of strict observance of these principles as a basis for rules-based international order. "The EU delegation reiterated the position expressed earlier by high-level EU officials, in particular President of the European Council Donald Tusk and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini, on

the EU's support for the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of Azerbaijan", said the statement.

In light of the recent inauguration of Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and forthcoming completion of Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), the EU delegation reiterated the importance of the Southern Gas Corridor in ensuring the diversification of energy supplies for European markets, and highly valued the contribution of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Europe's energy security. Indeed, with the timely finalization of these projects, which constitute the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), Europe will begin receiving natural gas from an entirely new source. The SGC's potential future expansion, in turn, will reinforce Azerbaijan's role both as a supplier and a potential transit country to Europe for other Central Asian energy producers.

The parties emphasized the need to complete the negotiations on draft new EU-Azerbaijan Agreement. The delegations also agreed to continue the dialogue on security issues and to hold the next round of the security dialogue in the second half of 2020 in Brussels. The first Security Dialogue between the parties, in turn, was held in November 2018, in Baku and Brussels. Additionally, the European Parliament, since earlier this year, has identified other prospective areas of cooperation, including information security as well as countering dangerous disinformation activities. Notably, in February 2019, the two sides also launched a high-level "Transport Dialogue" to discuss trans-regional logistics-infrastructure opportunities involving Azerbaijan, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway, Port Baku facilities, as well as the North-South and South-West transport corridors.

IV. The 8th Trilateral Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia

The eighth trilateral meeting of the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey was held in Tbilisi on December 23rd. In turn, Georgian FM David Zalkaliani, Azerbaijani FM Elmar Mammadyarov and Turkish FM Mevlut Chavushogly took part at the event. During the meeting, the sides assessed the progress in trilateral cooperation and discussed contemporary regional and global developments.

The sides touched upon the large-scale, regional energy and transport projects jointly implemented by Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, including the Southern Gas Corridor and Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, and exchanged views on the prospects for further cooperation. All three countries expressed their readiness to continue coordination for full-fledged implementation of a trilateral energy corridor. On this note, the ministers decided to encourage holding trilateral meetings of the ministers responsible for the energy sector. Additionally, the ministers emphasized the importance of expanding cooperation among relevant companies from the three countries and highlighted the importance of establishing a trilateral electricity market. The parties agreed to continue working on expanding the traffic capacity of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, and consented on the need to agree on customs procedures in order to increase the volume of the trade. The meeting highlighted the special role of the three countries in rebuilding the historic Silk Road, which would further deepen cooperation between the two countries and strengthen contacts between peoples. The parties also took a joint approach on

developing cooperation between business circles, holding tripartite business forums and stimulating small and medium-sized enterprises.

Having agreed on the importance and uniqueness of the trilateral format of cooperation between three countries, the Azerbaijani, Georgian and Turkish FMs signed an action plan for the period 2020-2022 regarding the enhancement of cooperation in various political, economic and cultural fields between the three countries. In the statement issued, the three foreign ministers expressed strong support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and internationally recognized borders of all three countries. The parties once again emphasized the importance of a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali in Georgia, as well as Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, in accordance with the principles and norms of international law, in particular, on the basis of the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of internationally recognized state borders, as well as relevant resolutions of the UN, OSCE and Council of Europe. The parties also noted the need for safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Emphasizing the MOU on Defense Cooperation of 2018 and welcoming the trilateral meeting of the defense ministers in Gabala on June 12th this year, the foreign ministers also underlined the necessity for further cooperation in the fields of defense industry, as well as trilateral trainings, exercises and high level meetings. Furthermore, the parties reiterated “their firm commitment” to cooperate in fight against

terrorism, violent extremism and separatism, as well as various forms of crime, including transnational organized crime, human trafficking, money laundering, cybercrime, and disinformation campaigns.

Within the framework of the trilateral meeting, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov also had a one-on-one meeting with the prime minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia. The two sides discussed the basis for the further development of bilateral relations, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan export oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline and other regional cooperation projects between the two countries. The sides stressed that these projects contribute to the establishment of stability and security in the region as a whole. The ministers also touched upon the current progress on the resolution of the Davit Gareja dispute between two countries, exchanged views on the activity of the relevant state commissions on delimitation and demarcation of the state borders between Azerbaijan and Georgia and confirmed that the next meeting of the commission on delimitation of the state border would be held soon.

Indeed, since its establishment in 2012, the trilateral mechanism of cooperation between the abovementioned countries of the region has reached a significant level of strategic partnership, and has proven effective in contributing to the strengthening of regional peace, stability and security, as well as promoting cooperation in economic, transport, energy, tourism, cultural exchanges and other areas of mutual interest.