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BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

Table of contents

- I. Meeting of Azerbaijani and Armenian Foreign Ministers in Switzerland, Geneva
2
- II. 30th Anniversary of Black January
3
- III. World Economic Forum Annual Meeting
4
- IV. Azerbaijan-EU Relations
5

I. Meeting of Azerbaijani and Armenian Foreign Ministers in Switzerland, Geneva

On January 28-30, Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia held talks on the resolution of the Armenia – Azerbaijan conflict with the mediation of the OSCE’s Minsk Group Co-Chairs, who, along with Andrzej Kasprzyk, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, also met with the two ministers separately.

The two days meetings, which lasted for eleven hours in total (seven hours on January 29, and four hours on January 30), were one of the most comprehensive meetings between the sides, as later the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan confirmed in its official statement that “The meeting in Geneva was marked with the most intensive discussions held between the sides over the last years”.

Following the meeting, the Co-Chairs published a joint statement declaring that: firstly, Co-Chairs and Ministers discussed the implementation of agreements and proposals raised in 2019 and possible next steps to prepare the populations for peace; secondly, the principles and elements forming the basis of a future settlement, in particular, the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict based on the requirements and principles of the Helsinki Final Act, and lastly, the ways of furthering the settlement process. The

Ministers agreed to meet again in the near future under Co-Chairs’ auspices to continue the discussions.

Thus, the Geneva meeting did not produce any tangible progress and was undermined, among others, by the attempts of the Armenian side to change the format of the negotiations and to bring in the representatives of the so-called “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic”. This proposal, which aimed to prolong negotiations and maintain the status-quo for an indefinite period of time, has been repeatedly rejected by Azerbaijan and the Minsk Group. Azerbaijani leaders emphasize that, according to the founding documents of the OSCE’s Minsk Conference (1992), the elected and other representatives from the Nagorno-Karabakh region will join the negotiations only after a certain progress is achieved between the sides. The fact that the negotiations are currently in the stalemate does not provide certain pre-conditions for the participation of those representatives in the process. Hence, the insistence of the Armenian government on the amendment to the negotiations format has no legal ground and serves only the goals which are ultimately destructive for the peace efforts.

Another unconstructive move by the Armenian side was made by the Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan himself. Visiting the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region and the surrounding districts on the same days when the Foreign

Ministers were meeting in Geneva, Pashinyan showed disrespect to the peace efforts by the international community. This, coupled with the above-discussed developments, demonstrate that the government in Armenia holds a position, in regard to the conflict, that is not different from its predecessors.

II. 30th Anniversary of Black January

On January 20, 2020, Azerbaijan commemorated the tragedy its people had to face thirty years ago when the Soviet military forces, violating the international law and the Soviet Constitution, invaded Baku in an attempt to suppress the national independence movement in the country. The invasion which took place by the official order of Mikhail Gorbachev, the leader of the Soviet Union at that time, was carried out by involvement of 26,000 Soviet troops who opened fire on civilians without warning.

The attack, resulted in the loss of 147 civilians and more than 700 hundred people being injured, has been engrained in the memories of the Azerbaijani people and hailed as the heroic story demonstrating the will of the Azerbaijanis for independence. Thousands of people pay tributes to the memory of the victims, by visiting the Martyr's Lane, where they rest, on January 20, named as Black January.

On January 17, 2020, ADA University, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, commemorated the 30th anniversary of Black January. Hafiz Pashayev, Rector of ADA University, Hikmet Hajiyevev, Head of the Foreign Policy Affairs Department of Azerbaijan's Presidential Administration and Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, spoke about the history of the Black January tragedy and its implications for the national unity of Azerbaijani people.

Mr. Hajiyevev pointed out that the leadership of the Soviet Union targeted to break the people's faith in the independence and the sovereignty of the Azerbaijani nation. The people killed that night were innocent civilians, seeking and demanding freedom and justice. For Mr. Hajiyevev, this event was a crime against humanity and its initiators and executors must be punished. Mr. Hajiyevev also suggested that Mikhail Gorbachev should be deprived of the Nobel Peace Prize as he was one of the main perpetrators of this crime.

Mr. Mammadyarov addressed some of the allegations from Armenia on the Sumgayit events of February 1988, by stressing that the event was preceded and caused by the brutal expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Soviet Armenia in 1987-88.

In the meantime, the Armenian Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan earlier stated that the events of January 20th were not planned against civilians, but rather

aimed at fighting “Azerbaijani nationalists.” In this statement, he tries to stress that radical groups were protesting the Soviet government, thus endorsing the action of the Soviet army. The Human Rights Watch report entitled “Black January in Azerbaijan” states: “Indeed, the violence used by the Soviet Army on the night of January 19–20 was so out of proportion to the resistance offered by Azerbaijanis as to constitute an exercise in collective punishment. Since Soviet officials have stated publicly that the purpose of the intervention of Soviet troops was to prevent the ouster of the Communist-dominated government of the Republic of Azerbaijan by the nationalist-minded, noncommunist opposition, the punishment inflicted on Baku by Soviet soldiers may have been intended as a warning to nationalists, not only in Azerbaijan, but in the other Republics of the Soviet Union.”

I. World Economic Forum Annual Meeting

The World Economic Forum Annual Meeting (WEFAM) was held on January 21-24, 2020 in Davos-Klosters, Switzerland. The event was attended by 3,000 people, with representatives from business, government and international organizations, as well as celebrities and activists (qz.com, 21/01/2020). The theme for this year’s event was “Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World” which focused on

several key areas including “How to Save the Planet, Society & Future of Work, Tech for Good, Fairer Economics, Better Business, Healthy Futures, and Beyond Geopolitics” (WEF, 2020).

As it was during previous years, Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan attended this year’s conference, including panel discussions and a significant number of panel discussions and personal meetings with heads of state, and leaders of other organizations and company leaders. Mikayil Jabbarov, Azerbaijan Minister of Economy, notes that “[Within the framework of the forum] direct discussions related to the economies of various countries [were] held, and important investment projects [were] presented; in brief, opinions [were] formed and decisions [were] made at the bilateral and multilateral meetings during the discussions, sessions...” (trend.az, 29/01/2020).

As stated by President Aliyev, in a prelude to the WEFAM, the Azerbaijani economy has grown 80% between 2007 and 2019. Poverty levels have decreased by more than four times, and unemployment has decreased to 4.9% (WEF, 01/18/2020). Additionally, in the Doing Business 2009 and 2019 reports Azerbaijan was twice recognized as a top business-reformer country. In the Global Competitiveness Report released by the World Economic Forum, Azerbaijan rose to 35th (formerly 64th in 2006-2007) among 137 countries in 2017-2018. In

2019, Azerbaijan came in second in the category of “Electricity access”, ranked third in terms of “Burden of government regulation” and “Ease of hiring foreign labour”, fifth in “Government’s responsiveness to change”, eighth in “Time to start a business”, and 10th in “Government long-term vision” The Azerbaijani leadership has been focused on governmental reforms, in efforts to stimulate the economy, and attract foreign investment. As the government of Azerbaijan continues to reform the economy, it is expected that there will be an increase in foreign investment emphasizing the importance of the WEFAM, as a pathway to establishing these connections.

Additionally, a notable achievement from the WEFAM is concerning the plans for the creation of a regional center of the World Economic Forum in Baku. Minister of Economy, Mikayil Jabbarov stated that, "Azerbaijan is one of the rare countries with which a corresponding document is signed. As part of the document, discussions will be held with the relevant Azerbaijan’s structures and organizations over the next months" (azernews.az, 1/2/2020). The creation of a regional center in Azerbaijan exemplifies the economic trends in Azerbaijan, growing global recognition, reliability, and emergence as a regional leader. The center will hopefully bring additional attention to Azerbaijan and employ Azerbaijan’s ability to hold multilateral engagements without aligning itself with any single global

power.

II. Azerbaijan-EU Relations

On 21 January 2020, the final conference of the EU-funded project “Support and Strengthening Capacity of the WTO Department of the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the WTO Accession Negotiations” was organized by the EU delegation, DMI Associates and Ekvita to present the activities implemented and the results achieved by the project. Officials of the Government of Azerbaijan, including representatives of the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, representatives of the European Union Delegation to Azerbaijan, private sector and academic institutions attended the conference. Topics discussed primarily concerned technical assistance in trade policy and how Azerbaijan benefits from this.

On 22 January 2020 a conference dedicated to the finalization of the “EU support to the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan to reach European standards” technical support project completed in joint cooperation between the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan and European Union, was held in Baku. The conference was attended by Mr. Tahir Budagov, Chairman of the State Statistical Committee, Mr. Ali Ahmadov, Deputy Prime Minister, Chairman of the National Coordination Council on Sustainable Development of Azerbaijan Republic and

Mr. Kestutis Jankauskas, Head of the EU Delegation in Azerbaijan, among other project and government leaders. Notably, this is the third Twinning project with joint cooperation between the EU, and the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan (stat.gov.az). The completion of this projection signals continued EU-Azerbaijan relations and investment of the former towards the continued modernization of Azerbaijan. Discussed briefly at both events and in an interview of Hikmet Hajiyev (21/01/2020), Head of the Foreign Policy Affairs Department of Azerbaijan's Presidential Administration, was the formation of a new EU-Azerbaijan partnership plan. The relations between the two sides are based on a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement which has been in force since 1999. The EU and Azerbaijan launched negotiations for a new comprehensive agreement in February 2017. Both parties have mentioned that the negotiations are at the final stage, and Mr. Hajiyev noted that the text is 90% finalized. He emphasized that in the negotiations, Azerbaijan is looking for more engagement in trade from the EU, highlighting the importance of Azerbaijan's internal reform process and desiring a more inclusive and individual approach from Eastern Partnership Program. However, both sides have expressed a commitment to the negotiations and optimism in building future relations.