

BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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I. President Ilham Aliyev attends the Eastern Partnership Summit

The 6th Eastern Partnership Summit was held in Brussels on December 15. Speaking at the Eastern Partnership summit, President Ilham Aliyev praised Azerbaijan's relations with the European Union and underscored the significance of the "Partnership Priorities" document signed between the EU and Azerbaijan in 2018. Pointing out that more than 90 percent of the work on a new partnership agreement between Azerbaijan and the EU had been completed, President Ilham Aliyev expressed his hope that the rest of the document would be agreed in the near future. President Ilham Aliyev commended cooperation with the EU as very successful, adding that Azerbaijan signed and adopted documents and agreements on strategic partnership with nine EU member states.

President Ilham Aliyev also emphasized the role of the President of the European Council Charles Michel in the normalization process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, thanking him for keeping regional issues on the agenda and for his contribution to and support for these processes. President Ilham Aliyev noted the role the European Union played in creating constructive atmosphere between Baku and Yerevan. President Ilham Aliyev stressed the absolute importance of continuing the efforts to build a lasting peace in the region. The head of state stressed that in previous years the Armenian leadership had usually made baseless accusation against Azerbaijan during international events. This time, President Ilham Aliyev commended the lack of provocative statements, pointing out that he, in turn, had not spoken directly against Armenia. President Ilham Aliyev noted that this provided a fertile ground for the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. President Ilham Aliyev also

noted that Azerbaijan itself had resolved the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by military-political means, underscoring once again that "the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict no longer exists," urging all parties "to look to the future."

President Ilham Aliyev also touched upon the role of the OSCE Minsk Group, underscoring the fact that the talks held for 28 years had not yielded any results. The head of the stated said that Baku expected the OSCE Minsk Group to respond to new geopolitical realities in the South Caucasus region. President Ilham Aliyev said that that Azerbaijan believed that the Minsk Group could help prepare a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as contribute to the delimitation of borders, establishment of contacts between communities, confidence building and other issues.

President Ilham Aliyev also urged EU countries to render technical and financial assistance to Azerbaijan in clearing of mines the territories it liberated during the 44-Day War. President Ilham Aliyev said that Azerbaijani civilians had been suffering from their presence, adding that about 200 people had been killed or injured in mine explosions to date.

The President also emphasized the cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan in the field of energy. Pointing out that the 3,500-kilometer-long Southern Gas Corridor was one of the most notable infrastructure projects of the 21st century, President Ilham Aliyev said that Azerbaijani gas was being delivered to Europe with the launch of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, the final element of the project. President Ilham Aliyev noted that Azerbaijani gas was already being delivered to three EU countries – Italy, Greece and Bulgaria. In the future, Baku intends to broaden the geography of gas exports to other EU member states. Underscoring the fact that gas from Azerbaijan

was being delivered to the EU market as a reliable and new source, the President noted that the recent events had also shown the significance of diversification in terms of energy security.

At the end of the 6th Eastern Partnership Summit a joint declaration was adopted. The joint declaration emphasized a number of issues of importance for Baku, including the EU support to the territorial integrity of all partner countries, including Azerbaijan, within its internationally recognized borders, welcoming the ongoing negotiations on a new draft bilateral agreement between Azerbaijan and the EU, and the completion of the Southern Gas Corridor project in terms of its contribution to the diversification of sources and routes of gas supplies to the EU. The joint statement also called for global solidarity, enhanced cooperation and multilateralism in preventing the pandemic, mitigating and eliminating its consequences. This is in line with Azerbaijan's chairmanship priorities in the Non-Aligned Movement to combat COVID-19.

At the same time, Azerbaijan adopted the joint declaration with the proviso. Commenting on the reservations of Azerbaijan to the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan noted that "Azerbaijan has always been against the establishment of the Eastern Partnership program in a confrontational manner. This principle is reflected in the Joint Declaration itself. It is noted that the EaP is based on constructive cooperation and is not directed against anyone. Our country's position is that EU member states and partner countries should not export the challenges and difficulties in their relations with third countries to the EaP program. On the other hand, the EaP program should serve not only the relations of partner countries with the EU,

but also the development of relations between them. The EaP program should not pursue policies that undermine the high-level relations that partner countries have established with third countries outside the program. Due to the fact that the views expressed on Belarus in the Joint Declaration do not comply with the principles of Azerbaijan's foreign policy, Azerbaijan has adopted the Joint Declaration with the proviso. In other words, Azerbaijan has stated that it does not share the position on Belarus in paragraph 11."

Another reservation of Azerbaijan to the joint declaration was related to "territories affected by the conflict" in the technical appendix of the document. In its statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan noted that "according to the document, the EU will support organizations operating outside the capitals, in areas affected by the conflict. Azerbaijan, with its reservation, stressed the need to carry out activities in these territories at the request and with the consent of the country to which the territory belongs. This position is based directly on international law and the sovereign rights of states."

II. President Ilham Aliyev visits NATO Headquarters

On December 15, within the framework of the EU Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev visited NATO Headquarters at the invitation of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. During the visit, President Ilham Aliyev met with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. President Ilham Aliyev also participated in a joint meeting of the North Atlantic Council with the Republic of Azerbaijan within the "30 + 1" format. NATO and Allied officials applauded the exemplary

merit of the military contingent of the Republic of Azerbaijan, involved in the protection of troops and various staff tasks at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul under the command of the Turkish forces to ensure security at Kabul International Airport and create conditions for a safe evacuation process in the last days of the “Resolute Support” operation.

Within the visit to the NATO Headquarters, President Ilham Aliyev and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg have held a joint press conference. Commending the service of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan in the Resolute Support operation in Afghanistan, Jens Stoltenberg noted that “Azerbaijan made essential contributions to our former mission in Afghanistan. Azeri forces played an important role in providing security at Kabul airport during this summer evacuation.” The peacekeepers of the Republic of Azerbaijan were the last servicemen to leave Afghanistan, having contributed to the evacuation of more than 120,000 people through the Kabul airport. Pointing out that Azerbaijan was a valuable partner of the Alliance, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg thanked President Ilham Aliyev for his support. Jens Stoltenberg also noted that security and stability in the South Caucasus were essential for NATO, stressing that the Alliance supports the normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

During the briefing, President Ilham also noted that Azerbaijan “proved to be a reliable partner of NATO,” adding that “we started our peacekeeping duties in Afghanistan in 2002 and ended at the end of August this year, and Azerbaijan's military servicemen were among the last military servicemen of coalition forces who left Afghanistan.” Noting that this is his seventh visit to NATO headquarters, President Ilham Aliyev underscored the dynamism in

NATO-Azerbaijan relations. Baku participates in NATO's military training, while simultaneously carrying out separate joint military drill with Turkey, which is one of the active and leading NATO members, President Ilham Aliyev said. In fact, only in 2021, Azerbaijan had seven joint military trainings with Turkey. These joint military training are “serving the cause of peace and stability in the region”, President Ilham Aliyev added.

On the post-war situation in the South Caucasus, President Ilham Aliyev underscored that “Azerbaijan is committed to peace, stability and predictability, and our efforts aim to minimize risks of any new war in the region. For that purpose, the best way is to open communications to establish active dialogue and learn to be neighbors again. Our policy is very open and straightforward, and I hope that if there is goodwill from the Armenian side, we can start as we proposed working on a peace agreement between the two countries and put an end to hostility”.

On the discussion that the President of Azerbaijan and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg had over the issue of energy security in the region, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “today Azerbaijan is a reliable natural gas supplier to four NATO members. I am sure that in the coming years the number of them may grow. It's also crucial for regional stability, security because energy security is already a part of the national security of the countries,” adding that “in general, we are very glad to have this high level of interaction with NATO, and we are very glad that NATO appreciates our efforts.”

On the Zangazur corridor, President Ilham Aliyev said that the proposal of opening this part of communications in the region is reflected in the 10 November Trilateral Declaration and “it is a kind of obligation for

Armenia to provide all the necessary facilities.” Pointing out that it was not easy to move forwards during more than one year, President Ilham Aliyev also noted that “at this stage, we have achieved an agreement on building the railroad connection from Azerbaijan through Armenia to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and also an agreement on the construction of the highway. But the exact route of the highway has not yet been identified; it’s a matter of future discussions.”

Touching upon the issue of the legal regime of the Zangazur corridor, President Ilham drew parallels between the status of the Lachin and the Zangazur corridors. President Ilham Aliyev stressed that “with respect to the legal regime of the Zangazur Corridor, it should be exactly the same as Lachin Corridor because in Trilateral Statement clearly says that Azerbaijan provides security and unimpeded access for connection between Karabakh and Armenia, and Armenia should provide the same unimpeded access and security for connections between Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. So, today there are no customs on Lachin Corridor there. Therefore, there should be no customs on Zangazur Corridor. If Armenia would insist on using their custom facilities to control the cargos and people, then we will insist on the same on Lachin Corridor. This is logical, and the decision is to be made by Armenia. We are ready for both options. Either no customs on both, or both customs on the two.”

President Ilham Aliyev also pointed out the net benefit that the opening of the communication links and integration of the transportation lines will provide for the region, including Armenia itself.

“With respect to connectivity, it’s really a big opportunity for the region to integrate the regional transportation links because Zangazur

Corridor is not only for us to get access to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic but also for Armenia to get a railroad connection with Iran through the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. It’s for Armenia to get a railroad connection with Russia through the territory of Azerbaijan. Today they don’t have this railroad connection. So, it really will create a special positive atmosphere in the region and a win-win situation for everyone. Therefore, I think that the evaluation of these opportunities is very important. The proper evaluation is important in order to plan our peaceful future. But again, we are ready. We have already made several public statements that we want to turn the page of hostility and work on a peace agreement,” President Ilham Aliyev noted.

Commenting on the meeting between President Ilham Aliyev and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Vasif Huseynov, a senior advisor at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), noted that “the statements and documents of the NATO following the war demonstrated that the Alliance accepts the new realities in the region created by the liberation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and thus treats the conflict as over. For instance, as opposed to expectations of some Armenian observers, the Communiqué of the NATO summit in Brussels in June this year did not mention the former Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict,” adding that “the NATO-Azerbaijan relations have been buttressed by the Alliance’s unequivocal support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. This support was reflected at the final documents of several summits which, on the one hand, expressed support to Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, on the other hand, stressed the importance of resolving of the conflicts in the South Caucasus, including

the former Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, on the basis of norms and principles of international law.”

Vasif Huseynov also underscored the fact that Azerbaijan “was one of the first countries to declare unwavering support to the United States after 9/11 and sent troops to Afghanistan and, later, Iraq. While other countries reduced their troop presence in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, as the only Muslim-majority partner of the NATO in the mission, increased boots on the ground from ninety-four to 120 in early 2018, reaffirming its support of its Western allies. Azerbaijan has also provided critical transportation passage for NATO; approximately forty percent of cargo destined for NATO troops in Afghanistan passed through the country. From 2015 to August 2021, Azerbaijan participated in the NATO Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. Azerbaijan’s support for the Afghanistan mission continued even after the Taliban announced it would take full control of the country. A 120-man peacekeeping unit from the Azerbaijan Army, together with Turkish troops, ensured the security of Kabul International Airport until the end of August, providing the necessary security for the safe evacuation of civilians and troops.”

III. The EU-mediated meeting between Azerbaijan and Armenia in Brussels

On December 14, President Ilham Aliyev had a meeting with Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and President of the European Council Charles Michel at the sidelines of the EU Eastern Partnership Summit. The meeting was hosted by President of the European Council Charles Michel and became the first meeting between the leaders

of Azerbaijan and Armenia mediated by the European Union after the 44-Day War.

Speaking before the trilateral meeting in Brussels, President Ilham Aliyev said that Baku and Yerevan had agreed to construct a railroad and a highway linking mainland Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan through Armenia. The exact route of the highway has not been defined yet and is the subject of further discussions, the president said. President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan also held a second informal meeting in Brussels at the initiative of the President of France Emmanuel Macron.

Following the meeting, the European Union issued a statement in which it was noted that “Prime Minister Pashinyan and President Aliyev reconfirmed that key commitments undertaken in the framework of the two trilateral statements of 9 November 2020 and 11 January 2021 would be honoured and that understandings reached in Sochi on 26 November 2021 should be built upon.” The EU commended the establishment “of a direct communication link between the Ministers of Defence of both countries, facilitated by President Michel,” adding that “this mechanism can serve to prevent future incidents and make a positive impact by helping de-escalate tensions on the ground.”

In its statement, the EU also recognized the importance of resolving key humanitarian issues, noting that “President Michel stressed that resolving key humanitarian issues is of crucial importance. He welcomed the recent release of ten Armenian detainees by Azerbaijan and the handover of all remaining mine-maps by Armenia. He called for the full and speedy resolution of all outstanding humanitarian issues, such as the release of further detainees and addressing the fate of missing persons, while recognising that

humanitarian gestures by both sides also promote confidence and help create an environment conducive to progress towards peace and reconciliation. The EU will continue to support humanitarian de-mining efforts, including by providing expert advice, and assistance to conflict-affected populations, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The EU will also continue to support confidence building measures between Armenia and Azerbaijan.”

Another issue emphasized by the EU in its statement on the results of the trilateral meeting was economic cooperation and connectivity noting that the leaders discussed “the EU’s intention to launch an economic advisory platform to build confidence, contribute to peaceful coexistence and build up economic cooperation in the region,” adding that “the EU is ready to support the development of connectivity links, in line with its Economic and Investment Plan. The proposed economic advisory platform can also support this process.”

The meeting in Brussels was significant because it represented a new promising model for the post-war peace process between the sides. Commenting on the importance of the EU-mediated meeting between the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Vasif Huseynov, a senior advisor at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), noted that “it is a remarkable development against the backdrop of declining role of the Minsk Group of the OSCE and the Russia’s emergence as the sole powerbroker in the post-war peace process. For Azerbaijan, the EU would be a more desirable mediator than the Minsk Group which had proved to be rather ineffective and often controversial due to the embedded pro-Armenian bias in the policies of France, one of the co-chairs of the group along with the United States and Russia.” The meeting in Brussels also defined the agenda of

the EU mediation. “Based on the outcomes of the meeting and the subsequent statements, we can infer that the EU’s mediation is instrumental more in the settlement of “soft issues” like those of humanitarian or economic nature. In this regard, the fact that no documents were adopted as a result of the meeting, unlike the two Russia-mediated trilateral meetings (January 11 and November 26) that produced programmatic documents with clear objectives, is a telling detail,” Vasif Huseynov noted, adding that “in Brussels, the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan reaffirmed their will to normalize relations and build upon the agreements adopted since the war of last year. They confirmed that the sides would soon launch the border delimitation and demarcation process which is largely seen as a critical milestone towards a comprehensive peace treaty between the sides. The EU promised to provide an expert mission/consultative group to support the border delimitation and demarcation issues by providing technical assistance to both countries.”

IV. Key takeaways from President Ilham Aliyev’s interview with El Pais

On December 14, President Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by the Spanish El Pais newspaper in Brussels. Touching upon the revival of revanchist sentiments in Armenia, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “Armenia, unfortunately, did not put down the attempts to take revenge. Their loss in the second Karabakh war was very painful for them. It was absolutely demolishing their ideological grounds, their propaganda for almost 30 years about the unbeatable army, about their strength, about the bravery of their soldiers and commanders. During the 44 days of the

war, the Armenian army was totally destroyed. They had to sign the capitulation act on November 10 last year, agreeing to give back the territories that we did not manage to recapture during the 44-day war. Therefore, the signs of revanchism are visible in Armenian society, in their political spectrum. Therefore, understanding that it is impossible in the area where the Russian peacekeepers are serving, they try to make military provocations on the state border.”

President Ilham Aliyev also pointed out the issues stemming from the absence of clear delimitation and demarcation of the borders with Armenia. “The occupation of that part of Azerbaijan was taking place at the beginning of the 1990s, right after the restoration of the independence of both countries. Therefore, it was impossible to demarcate and delimitate the border physically and politically. Therefore, when the second Karabakh war ended last November, the climatic situation in that area was different from other parts. It was highly mountainous, and it was full of snow. So the snow started to melt in May this year. As soon as it happened, Azerbaijani forces were moving towards the state border and took the positions on the state border based on our understanding of where this border was going. So, that was the story, and unfortunately, Armenia started to claim that Azerbaijan was interfering in Armenia's territory without any grounds. So we are standing now where we think it's our territory.”

President Ilham Aliyev stressed that Azerbaijan offered Armenia to start working on delimitation immediately after the 44-Day War ended. “From the very first days of the end of the Karabakh war, we proposed that Armenia start working on delimitation, establish a joint working group on delimitation, and clarify all the disputes on the table. During this more than one year after the war ended, Armenia

has made several attempts to make military provocations on the state border. All of them failed. As a result of all these attempts, they lost their military positions, and Azerbaijan strengthened this position on the state border,” the president added.

Commenting on the possibility of signing a comprehensive peace treaty with Armenia, President Ilham Aliyev noted that Azerbaijan has repeatedly called for Armenia to start working on a peace agreement. “There has been no answer from Armenian leadership so far because I made such a statement for more than six months, several times. So, this shows that they don't want it. Because peace agreement, if signed, one of the main provisions of this peace agreement will be mutual recognition of territorial integrity of both countries. Armenia doesn't want to recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. The world recognizes Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and Karabakh as an integral part of Azerbaijan. Armenia doesn't say they do not recognize; doesn't say they recognize. Before the second Karabakh war, they said, and their Prime Minister publicly said that Karabakh is Armenia-period. That statement has ruined the negotiation process and was one of the elements of their bitter defeat last year. But now, it is as if Armenia has no position on that. We say that openly; we want to start immediate negotiations on a peace agreement with Armenia,” President Ilham Aliyev stated.

On the issue of opening borders and unblocking transportation lines, President Ilham Aliyev stressed that “we are willing to open the borders. So far, there have been several rounds of negotiations in the framework of a trilateral working group headed by the deputy prime ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Russian Federation. The primary purpose and the task

of this working group is to open communications. Several rounds of talks have been relatively successful. So, now the complete agreement about opening the railroad connection between Azerbaijan and Armenia is on the agenda. We started building the demolished railroad on the liberated territories towards the Armenian border. At the same time, Armenia was objecting to the highway's opening in previous months. But now we managed to persuade them that it's inevitable and they also agreed on that. So, there is understanding. Now we discussed the legal regime of these corridors. Zangazur Corridor will go through Azerbaijan to Armenia and further down to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan. The legal regime - here, we have specific issues that are still open. But I think both countries recognize that this must happen. During the trilateral meeting in Sochi last month held by President Putin, we adopted a Declaration that really talks about the opening of communications."

President Ilham Aliyev also praised the role that the EU has played in the normalization process between Azerbaijan and Armenia. "We in Azerbaijan highly appreciate the activity of the European Commission and personally President of the European Council, Mr. Charles Michel, who is contributing a lot to the creation of ground for normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. President Michel's visit this summer to the region was very productive. By the way, his initiative to establish a direct link between defense ministers of both countries is also working. So, this channel of communication is already efficient. So, this clearly demonstrates the willingness and readiness of the European Commission to facilitate the creation of a stable environment in the Southern Caucasus, and in the future, to facilitate the establishment of the trilateral format of

interaction among the three Southern Caucasus countries," the president underscored.

Regarding the post-war reality in the region, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized once more that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is resolved and that all sides should move forward to build a secure, stable, and prosperous region. "Azerbaijan's position is absolutely open and transparent. We want peace; we don't want war. We won the war, and we are the winner, and this reality should be taken into account. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been resolved. There is no return to any discussions about the so-called status of Nagorno-Karabakh or something of that sort. We resolved it ourselves by force and by political means. We implemented the UN Security Council resolutions unilaterally after 27 years of being adopted," adding that "It is a new reality, which Armenia must take into account in the first place. It is a development of the post-war situation, and the leading international actors have already accepted the new reality. They are trying to build the future based on this new reality. Armenia should refrain from any hostile actions against Azerbaijan and refrain from territorial claims to Azerbaijan. I said a couple of times that we have much more historical grounds to have territorial claims to Armenia. They have to work on a peace agreement and comply with the expected behavior in the 21st century. We are neighbors. None of us is going to fly away to another planet. Therefore, we must learn to live side by side and slowly, step by step, preparing grounds for normalization of relations, including people-to-people contact."

President Ilham Aliyev underscored once again that "so far, we don't receive any positive signs from Armenia. It seems that in Armenia's internal situation and, as I said before, the frustration and, mildly speaking,

disappointment after the loss in the war created a kind of psychological trauma in their society due to exaggerated expectations and unrealistic assessment of the military and political potential. Therefore, for the government of Armenia, it's crucial to lead the process of normalization. Not to be behind the public opinion, which was based on the cultivation of hatred against Azerbaijanis. To lead the public opinion, to make critical steps to persuade the people that the only way for Armenia to develop is to normalize relations with Azerbaijan, to normalize the relations with Turkey, to become a neighbor, a normal neighbor, not a hostile neighbor, and to refrain from territorial claims. So, I think that if the Armenian government and political elite accept this formula, we have a chance for progress. As far as we are concerned, our position is straightforward. I several times articulated that publicly. And once again, I am saying that we want peace; we want stability, security and a prosperous future for the Caucasus.”

Answering the question on the difference between the EU-mediated meeting with Armenia in Brussels and Russia-mediated meeting in Sochi, President Ilham Aliyev noted that there are no major differences from the practical point of view. “I don't see any differences because I see Russia and the European Union's genuine desire to help normalize relations between the two countries. Otherwise, they wouldn't spend time with us and spend hours in these negotiations. Russia and the EU are among the leading international actors. There are many things for them to do, an extensive agenda. If they spent time and effort and not once but regularly to convene with leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia to discuss these issues, that means that their genuine desire is to help. And we appreciate that. We don't see any kind of

rivalry here though some may think that a kind of competition. Not at all. We see that these efforts are complementary as far as we are concerned. These efforts can support the peace process. I also know that there have been interactions between President Putin and President Michel discussing many issues, including the relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. So, I think that these efforts of an international community of institutions and countries interested in long-lasting peace may result in something very positive. Because after so many years of occupation and hostility, international players definitely should support the process. Also, if Armenia agrees to engage with us in elaborating the peace treaty, of course, we will need international expertise. We will need international partners to help us formulate the chapters, formulate the basic principles, and find a solution. So, my expectations are related to this,” the president added.

V. Inaugural meeting under the “3+3” format in Moscow

On December 10, the first meeting of the “3 + 3” regional format – the initiative that was put forward by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and the President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan – took place in Moscow at the level of Deputy Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Iran, Russia and Turkey. During the inaugural meeting, Deputy Foreign Ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Russia, and Turkey discussed the potential for the development of regional cooperation and acknowledged the need to focus on practical matters that are of interest to all its participants such as confidence-building, restoration, reconstruction and expansion of economic and transport ties in the region.

Answering the media's question about the meeting in a "3 + 3" format in Moscow, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan Khalaf Khalafov noted that the parties to the format at the level of Deputy Ministers will meet at least twice a year, on a rotating basis in each participating country. Meetings and discussions will be conducted under the coordination and leadership of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs with the participation of the Ministries of Economy and Transport and, if necessary, other sectoral bodies. According to Deputy Foreign Minister Khalaf Khalafov, depending on the development of the consultation mechanism, higher-level meetings and discussions could be organized. The mechanism will be based on the principle of consensus. Common regional issues, as well as initiatives and projects of mutual interest to the parties, contributing to regional stability and prosperity, could be discussed at the meetings.

VI. Azerbaijan hands over Armenian detainees to Yerevan

On December 29, proceeding from the principles of humanism, Baku handed over five Armenian servicemen to Armenia. The detainees were handed over through Hungary's mediation. Baku also handed over to Yerevan another Armenian citizen Armen Verdyan. "On December 29, a civilian of Armenian origin was handed over to Armenia, namely, Armen Verdyan, born on April 24, 1971, who had previously lost his way and crossed to the territory under the control of Azerbaijani military personnel. Remaining committed to the principles of humanism, Azerbaijan handed him over to Armenia," the State Commission on Prisoners of War, Hostages and Missing People was quoted as saying. Baku has already returned 21

Armenian servicemen to Armenia on November 26, December 4 and December 19. They were all detained by the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan while preventing another Armenian provocation near liberated Kalbajar region along the state border on November 16.

Answering the question on the issue of the detainees in his recent interview, President Ilham Aliyev noted that "Azerbaijan, after the Second Karabakh War ended, released all the prisoners of war before Armenia. International observers can attest to it. Those now in detention cannot be considered prisoners of war because most of them have been sent to the liberated territories at the end of November, almost twenty days after the war ended, to commit acts of terror. And they committed these acts of terror as a result of which several servicemen and civilians were killed, and they have been detained and brought to justice. Some of them were released on humanitarian grounds. We released so far more than one hundred detainees. But those who committed crimes have been sentenced. So by no international convention, these people can be considered prisoners of war. Another thing, that some of the detainees after we returned, and we returned ten of them, just ten days ago, some of them have been arrested in Armenia. This is a very serious signal to us, these people, and their relatives. We returned them to Armenia, and they put them into prison. Probably, they will torture them, and they have very tough practice. Because what our hostages tell about the terrible time they spent in the Armenian prison shows that these people will be suffering very hard tortures," adding that "it's a matter of justice. Those who did not commit any crime, who did not kill Azerbaijanis have been released, as I said, more than one hundred. As far as I know, those who committed minor crimes received minimal

sentences. Those who participated in the killing of Azerbaijanis must be brought to justice as any other country. But again, these people were detained at least twenty days after the Second Karabakh War ended. On November 26, they were sent to liberated territories, and they were detained at the beginning of December last year and the next group, as I said, this November. So, this is absolutely a transparent picture.” President Ilham Aliyev also did not exclude that the process of releasing detainees could continue, pointing out, however, that the process would be based on Azerbaijan’s legal framework, justice, and humanism.

It is worth mentioning that about 4,000 Azerbaijanis went missing during the first war of 1991-94. Unlike Azerbaijan, Armenia has not yet provided information about these people and has also refused to provide any information about the Azerbaijani citizens who were held in captivity during the first Karabakh war.

VII. Armenia abuses fundraising activities to fund anti-Azerbaijan campaigns

On December 14, Prosecutor General of the Republic of Azerbaijan Kamran Aliyev addressed the virtual event “Abuse of fundraising activities for corruption and other criminal purposes” within the framework of the 9th session of the Conference of States Parties to the UN Convention against Corruption held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. Prosecutor General Kamran Aliyev pointed out that fundraising activities carried out by non-profit organizations and charitable foundations play a crucial role in providing humanitarian support to people in crisis situations. At the same time, Prosecutor General Kamran Aliyev also underscored that

as a result of limited control over such activities, they have been misused for criminal purposes, such as corruption, money laundering, and terrorist financing. In this vein, Kamran Aliyev noted that Azerbaijan is at the receiving end of such criminal activities, highlighting the illegal fundraising campaigns organized by Armenian diaspora organizations during the 44-Day War in 2020.

At the event, experts from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law, the British NGO “Greenacre” and the Financial Monitoring Service (FMS) of the Republic of Azerbaijan made presentations and held interactive discussions on this issue. In their presentations, speakers emphasized the need to develop special rules to halt the misuse in fundraising campaigns organized by charitable foundations, the use of virtual currencies and the uncontrolled segment of the internet to finance criminal activities by some charitable organizations, the use of some banks and other financial institutions as intermediaries in such activities.

The representative the Financial Monitoring Service (FMS) of the Republic of Azerbaijan pointed out that during the 44-Day War, Armenian diaspora organizations collected donations amounting to \$170 million, of which \$110 million were illegally transferred to the state budget of Armenia. This was acknowledged by senior Armenian officials, including the Prime Minister. The collected funds were used to arm illegal armed groups previously stationed in the territories of Azerbaijan liberated from occupation.

In its statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed that Baku “will continue, within the framework of all international platforms, to work purposefully to expose and prevent fundraising campaigns organized by Armenian

diaspora organizations in various countries and aimed against the sovereignty of Azerbaijan.”

VIII. Armenia continues armed provocations along the border with Azerbaijan

Throughout December, the Armenian armed forces have continued provocations on the Azerbaijan-Armenia border, especially in the direction of Kalbajar. On December 8, 2021, Asif Adil oglu Aliyev, a serviceman of the Azerbaijani Army, was killed as a result of another provocation in the direction of the Kalbajar region of the state border. On December 9-10, Armenian military units intensively fired on the positions of the Azerbaijani Army in Kalbajar region from the combat positions located in the direction of Basarkechar region. Another civilian was wounded in Aghdam as a result of the Armenian gunfire on December 29.

Commenting on the continued provocations by the Armenian side, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan noted that “at a time when Azerbaijan is taking steps towards the normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia in a post-conflict period, especially on the eve of the Moscow meeting of the «3 + 3» format consultation mechanism, Armenia's continued provocative activities demonstrate the country's aggressive stance and undermine regional peacebuilding efforts. Responsibility for the tension on the border between the two countries and the bloody crime committed in the direction of the Kalbajar region lies directly with the military-political leadership of Armenia. The accusation of Azerbaijan by the Armenian Foreign Ministry of violating the sovereign territories of this country is completely unfounded. In order to prevent such false accusations,

Azerbaijan supports the start of negotiations on the delimitation of the border between the two countries as soon as possible. If Armenia really wants peace and stability in the region, then it must take real steps to normalize relations and put an end to imitations.”

In his interview with the Spanish El Pais newspaper on December 14, President Ilham Aliyev said that Baku was ready to prevent any attempts by Yerevan to take revanchist actions. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that more than 30 Armenian servicemen had been detained in a provocation on the border back in November. “We want peace, and it's enough of war. We want stability, predictability, and zero risk for any attempt from Armenia to take revanchist actions. Therefore, we will be very closely watching all their maneuvers, regroupings, and attempts to create once again the military potential that can be a danger for us. If we see it happen, we will destroy it immediately, and they know it,” President Ilham Aliyev added.

IX. Pacific Alliance opens its office in Azerbaijan

On December 13, the Pacific Alliance – a regional integration initiative comprised by Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru – opened its joint promotion office in Baku. Established in 2011, the Pacific Alliance presented a new promising inclusive model of regional integration based mostly on the trade liberalization agenda and private sector as the key drivers of economic development. The four members of the Pacific Alliance together represent 37 per cent of the Latin American population and 40 per cent of Latin America's GDP, accounting for 50 per cent of Latin America's total trade and 45 per cent of the region's foreign direct investments. It is an economic force to reckon with. Azerbaijan

became an observer state in the Pacific Alliance in 2019. At the time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan noted in its statement that “Baku attaches special importance to foreign policy relationships with the countries of Latin America and in this regard, it is cooperating actively with organizations and economic associations in this region.” In this vein, the opening of the Pacific Alliance’s commercial office in Azerbaijan shows the importance that Azerbaijan attaches to the development of relations with Latin American countries.

The ambassadors of Colombia, Mexico, Chile, along with Deputy Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Elnur Mammadov attended the opening ceremony of the promotional office for the Pacific Alliance. Ambassador of Columbia to Azerbaijan Luis Antonio Dimate Cardenas noted the opening of the joint office was a very significant event for the members of the Pacific Alliance. Ambassador Luis Antonio Dimate Cardenas also stressed that the Pacific Alliance focuses on regional integration, along with economic cooperation,

including in the tourism sector. “We highly appreciate Azerbaijan’s efforts in the alliance. The opening of the office will cement relations between Azerbaijan and the countries of the alliance, as well as open up new directions for cooperation. We are interested in cementing ties with Azerbaijan,” Ambassador Luis Antonio Dimate Cardenas added. Deputy Foreign Minister Elnur Mammadov pointed out that Azerbaijan is also interested in broadening cooperation with the members of the Pacific Alliance, underscoring that the alliance is one of the rapidly growing economic organizations in the world. Elnur Mammadov said that the new Baku International Sea Trade Port in Alat, along with the anticipated launch of the Zangazur corridor will boost the development of trade and cooperation in the region. “We also welcome the interest of the alliance countries to participate in the restoration of the liberated territories and further cooperation in this direction,” Deputy Foreign Minister Elnur Mammadov noted.