

# BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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## I. Key takeaways from President Ilham Aliyev's 4-hours long press conference

On February 26, President Ilham Aliyev held a press conference for local and foreign media representatives. The main goal of the press conference, which lasted for more than four hours, was to clarify the position of Azerbaijan on the key issues, particularly on the postwar situation in the region after the Second Karabakh War.

Answering the question about the ongoing political developments in Armenia, President Ilham Aliyev said that Baku does not interfere in internal affairs of other countries. "There is a complete crisis situation in Armenia now. I would not like to comment on their domestic developments. We never interfere in other countries' domestic affairs, especially in sensitive moments like this," President Ilham Aliyev said, adding that "I would not want to go deep into the matter of the situation in Armenia. Certain political groups in Armenia may misuse what I say. It is better that they resolve their problems on their own. But surely, if we take into account that it is a neighbouring country and a war was just over, we cannot stay indifferent to the situation in Armenia. We are closely following the situation".

At the same time, President Ilham Aliyev underscored the fact that Armenia's previous and incumbent governments were responsible for the current political crisis. "Kocharyan-Sargsyan junta dragged Armenia to an abyss and crisis for 20 years. The country has practically lost all the outlines of independence. It resembles a colony. The main reason for this is the occupation policy because the longer they tried to keep our lands under occupation, the more profoundly

dependent they became," the president added. Whether the political crisis in Armenia would affect the implementation of the November peace deal, President Ilham Aliyev noted that "I am not concerned that any change in Armenia can have an impact on the implementation of the declaration. First, because it is already an officially signed document. Second, because there is the Russian president's signature under it... Will Armenia ever dare to treat like this the Russian president's signature? The thing is that there is the Russian president's signature there and he acts as the guarantor of this document". "I believe no matter who comes to power in Armenia, any attempts to hinder the implementation of the 10 November declaration will be very harmful for that country. I have already mentioned President Putin's remark that this could be a suicide for them. The situation will be much worse than today," the president added.

Touching upon the issue of creating sustainable peace and security in the region, President Ilham Aliyev noted that the only way to do this is through collaboration, adding that Azerbaijan's goal is to build back communications in a trilateral way – together with Armenia and Russia, create the Zangazur corridor – a railway which will link Azerbaijan's main part with its exclave Nakhchivan via the southern part of Armenia – and remove all transport hurdles. The realization of this plan will help Armenia as well. President Ilham Aliyev has also said that Baku will not mind if Ankara decides to open its border with Armenia which has been closed since the early 1990s. If Ankara decides to open the border, Azerbaijan will not mind because the Karabakh conflict between Baku and Yerevan is over and the situation is different now – Baku liberated lands, which had been under Armenian occupation for nearly three decades, as a

result of the Second Karabakh War of September-November 2020, President Ilham Aliyev explained. Turkey's move to close its border with Armenia in 1993 as a sign of solidarity with Azerbaijan during the First Karabakh War was a symbol of fraternity. "Considering the new situation, we approve of normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations. We do not have any special opinion at present about normalization of these relations, and Turkey will itself determine when these borders can open and when relations can normalize," the president went on to say. "In any case, no... negative opinion will come from Azerbaijan about it," President Ilham Aliyev added. President Ilham Aliyev explained that relations between all countries should be normal for the sake of stability in the region and lasting reconciliation. "Look what we are talking about at present – we are talking about the opening of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. That is, if the Armenian-Azerbaijani border is opening, naturally, the Turkish-Armenian border does not need to stay closed any longer," the president said. "If we are talking about these corridors and we if want to realize the Zangazur corridor, the Turkish-Armenian border will open, too," President Ilham Aliyev noted. In the end, it is up to Turkey whether to open the border or not. "Naturally, it is up to Turkey. In any case... Azerbaijan does not have any special position on this matter. Also, anything that happens to Turkey's benefit benefits us, too," the president concluded.

At the same time, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that anti-Turkish propaganda is very strong in Armenia. "Turkophobia has become an official ideology there, and they have always regarded Turkey and Azerbaijan as enemies," the president said, urging Yerevan to stop laying territorial claims on Turkey. "For how long can this policy of enmity

last? They... should come to their senses. Laying territorial claims on a great country like Turkey is suicide," the president said.

Azerbaijan will have to do truly enormous work to clear the liberated territories, without which, it will not be possible to begin the full-scale restoration of the Azerbaijani lands. In 2021, Azerbaijan is planning to spend 100 million manats (about \$60 million) on demining the territories liberated from Armenian occupation. "The investment program for 2021 envisages over 100 million manats for the activities of the Agency for Mine Clearance to clear the territories liberated from occupation from mines and other explosives. We have also bought the most advanced equipment," the president said.

President Ilham Aliyev noted that the government has already begun to implement the "smart village" project in three villages of Zangilan district – Aghali 1, Aghali 2 and Aghali 3 – for 1000 people at the initial stage, which is expected to be completed by the end of this year. At the same time, President Ilham pointed out that the return to the cities like Aghdam will take time, but the government has mobilized all its resources and works hard to rebuild those territories as soon as possible. Simultaneously, a new international airport is getting built in Fuzuli, which is expected to be operational this year. At the same time, there are plans to build international airports in Lachin and Zangilan as well since Zangilan is expected to become an important logistical center and transport hub. Along with the airport, two highways to the city of Shusha are also getting constructed. One of them, named the "Road of Victory" by President Ilham Aliyev, is the route along which Azerbaijan's Special Forces marched to Shusha – through forests and valleys. And the other highway will provide direct access from the Fuzuli airport.

Another issue touched upon by President Ilham Aliyev during the press conference was the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine nationalism. Azerbaijan has spent almost 2 billion manats (\$1.16bn) last year to fight Covid-19 pandemic. A larger part of the money was paid to medical workers and as social allowances. The quarantine regime was quite effective and with a little over 200,000, Azerbaijan have had a relatively low level of those who have been infected with coronavirus. To date, there are just over 2,000 active patients. Since Azerbaijan managed to establish more than 10 new modular hospitals and also since there has been a positive dynamic between the number of those infected and those recovering in favor of the latter in the last two months, the situation with the coronavirus has been under control from the very beginning of the pandemic. Azerbaijan has also become the first country in the South Caucasus to start vaccination. Azerbaijan started vaccination with the Chinese CoronaVac vaccine on 18 January, just a month after vaccination began in Europe. With 4 million doses contracted, 15,000-20,000 people are vaccinated every day in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan has also joined the COVAX system from the very beginning and should receive other vaccines such as AstraZeneca, Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech through it. Since Russian companies are the distributors of the AstraZeneca vaccine in post-Soviet republics, Azerbaijan has also signed relevant documents with the Russian side for the supply of this vaccine to Azerbaijan in the very first day of distribution. This also applies to the Sputnik vaccine.

On Azerbaijan's initiative, supported by more than 150 countries, a special session of the UN General Assembly dedicated to COVID-19 was held in December last year. One of the issues raised by Azerbaijan was the fair distribution of

vaccines among countries of the world, so that there would be no protectionism or nationalism in this issue. President Ilham Aliyev noted that "despite all the statements about solidarity, about the joint struggle against this scourge, we are seeing the exact opposite. Some countries, for example, have purchased three to four times more vaccines than they need ... It means that someone will not have enough. And they don't even need them," adding that "they speak out for equality, for human rights, for democracy, but in practice they infringe on the rights of millions of people, those living in poor countries and unable to afford it. Even if they could afford it, they would simply have no access to it". President Ilham Aliyev also noted that he raised this issue at the special session of the UN General Assembly, and it was actively discussed within the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement as well. President Ilham Aliyev noted that "in this matter, we are showing integrity both in our national capacity and as a country that currently chairs the second largest international structure in the world after the UN".

## **II. Azerbaijan set to further boost its military ties with Turkey**

The Second Karabakh War has raised the issue of modernizing the army in the future. President Ilham Aliyev has repeatedly declared the government's determination to keep the army's combat readiness high and supply it with the state-of-the-art weapons to secure the country's territorial integrity against all possible threats. "Our army will continue to strengthen. New contracts have been signed, the most modern weapons are being purchased, and they are already being delivered. Contracts on state-of-the-art weapons available in the world have already

been signed and they will be delivered to Azerbaijan," the president said on February 25, adding that "the reforms will be even more flexible, aimed at creating a more competitive army".

Over the years, Azerbaijan has signed numerous agreements with Turkey, with some of them envisaging reciprocal military assistance. "Certainly, if any threat to Azerbaijan emerges, we are fully confident that fraternal Turkey will be the one providing us with support," President Ilham Aliyev said during the press conference for local and foreign media representatives on February 26. The two countries had conducted more than 10 joint military exercises both in Azerbaijan and Turkey in 2019, and one joint exercise in Turkey in 2020. At the same time, a delegation comprising more than 100 people arrived in Azerbaijan from Turkey and mine-clearing work had been carried out in lands that Baku liberated in the Second Karabakh War.

President Ilham Aliyev described the Turkish army as one of the strongest armies in the world and second strongest in NATO. "We in Azerbaijan are determined to create a small model of the Turkish army, and practical work in this field has already started," the president said, adding that "our army should become stronger and more modern, and the model of the Turkish army is the most acceptable model to us, and we will continue working jointly in this direction".

President Ilham Aliyev said that senior Turkish officials clearly expressed support for Azerbaijan during the recent war. "It was very big political and moral support to us and, at the same time, a signal to the world that they should stay away and not interfere. This continues today as well - as two fraternal countries, Turkey and Azerbaijan are the closest countries to each other on a global

scale, and our military cooperation strengthens by the day, work is being done to buy new weapons from Turkey... and those weapons will arrive soon," the president noted.

President Ilham Aliyev also praised the establishment of the Russian-Turkish Joint Monitoring Centre whose responsibility is to monitor the ceasefire, which was signed at the end of the recent Karabakh war. The president said that the establishment of the center, which started operating on January 30, meant "the arrival of the Turkish armed forces in the Karabakh region, in Azerbaijani land. "It can be considered a historic event, and we are very pleased about it," the president said. President Ilham Aliyev also pointed out that it was a joint decision by Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey to establish the center, and Armenia "simply had to agree to it".

Pointing out that those who raise the issue of the status are not helping to create the peace in the region, President Ilham Aliyev noted that the Azerbaijani government has a clear idea of the further coexistence of the Azerbaijani and Armenian peoples. At the same time, the president also underscored that it is a two-way street and the Armenian people should also be ready for peaceful co-existence.

### **III. Rebuilding liberated territories**

In February, President Ilham Aliyev has signed an order approving "Azerbaijan 2030: National priorities for socio-economic development". In accordance with the order, the national priorities include five main directions: Ensuring sustainable growth and competitiveness of the economy; creating dynamic, inclusive society based on social justice; competitive human capital and modern innovation; the great return to the liberated territories; clean

environment and green country. In the first direction, the tasks are set to achieve economic growth that is to ensure an annual increase in living standards via the establishment of highly profitable jobs. Particular attention will be paid to the development of the non-oil sector, increasing the share of the private sector in its financing. It is important to accelerate the development of capital and insurance markets, which are the main source of long-term investment resources in the economy. The tasks are also designed to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) in Azerbaijan's economy, including strategic investors in infrastructure. It is also set to improve the economic efficiency of public investments and the activities of state-owned companies (SOE), as well as to improve the level of transparency in this sector. The objective is to minimize the shadow economy.

Azerbaijan also welcomes the involvement of foreign companies in implementing new projects in liberated territories. President Ilham Aliyev and the head of the Italian company Maire Tecnimont Group, Fabrizio Di Amato, discussed in a video conference format the projects the company completed in Sumgait and its involvement in new projects Azerbaijan is considering to implement in Karabakh to rebuild both civilian infrastructure and the required industries in view of the economic potential of the regions. President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the significance of the projects the Maire Tecnimont Group had implemented for the development of the non-oil sector that went up by 12.5% in 2020 despite the pandemic and economic recession. Underscoring the fact that the Italian company is involved in projects worth over 1.6bn euro in Azerbaijan, President Ilham Aliyev credited the Italian media for the objective coverage of the Karabakh war. President Ilham Aliyev noted that Italian companies would be very active in

projects related to the restoration of the liberated territories, adding that several Italian companies have already been invited for restoration and construction work, expressing his confidence that their number will go up. "I have said many times that we will only invite companies from friendly countries," President Ilham Aliyev reiterated.

President Ilham Aliyev went on adding that the decision had been taken to establish an Italian-Azerbaijani university in Baku. "We have already earmarked a venue. The work on the creation of the university has begun and it can already be opened this year," President Ilham Aliyev noted. Pierroberto Folgiero, Maire Tecnimont Chief Executive Officer highlighted cooperation between Maire Tecnimont and SOCAR in the chemistry industry, adding that it would pave the way for the activities of the future university, pledging the company's readiness to share technologies for the development of green chemistry in Azerbaijan.

After Azerbaijan liberated territories in Karabakh, new opportunities have emerged for the production of electricity from solar, wind, and water resources and Azerbaijan is actively attracting foreign companies to become Baku's partners. Attracting investments in renewable energy is in line with official Baku's strategy and the potential renewable energy sources in the liberated territories in and outside Karabakh are useful to this end, President Ilham Aliyev told the VII meeting of the Consultative Council of the Southern Gas Corridor held in a video conferencing mode. "I have already officially declared the liberated territories a zone that will be provided with green energy. We are already working on a master plan and, using the enormous water, solar, and wind potential, we will implement these projects," President Ilham Aliyev told the meeting with representatives from 18 countries, 19

companies, and five leading international financial institutions in attendance. President Ilham Aliyev also added that although Azerbaijan with its large oil and gas potential is an exporter of crude oil and oil products, natural gas and electricity, the country should now show great responsibility and actively invest in green energy. "We have already signed necessary documents for the construction of two such facilities. One is a solar farm and the other is a wind farm with a combined capacity of 440 MW. These projects will be 100% implemented through foreign investments," President Ilham Aliyev noted. Promoting the smart cities project for the liberated territories, President Ilham Aliyev highlighted that the preparations were in the pipeline for this great challenge.

Underlining important achievements, President Ilham Aliyev also noted that Azerbaijan would continue to develop its energy resources. "There are very promising prospects associated with several fields currently at the exploration and production stage. In particular, I can mention the Babak deposit with gas reserves of 400bn cubic meter. The Absheron gas condensate field has reserves of 350bn cubic meter and I hope that production will begin next year. Another deposit is Umid (Hope), where natural gas reserves are at least 200bn cubic meter," the president said, adding that these were fields with proven reserves and they would contribute to gas production in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea. Focusing on Azerbaijan's plans, President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the Ionian-Adriatic pipeline. "The completion of the TAP creates an opportunity for the construction of the Ionian-Adriatic pipeline. We have already signed a MoU with west Balkan countries. After the implementation of the Ionian-Adriatic pipeline, we will be able to diversify our supply

routes and create new opportunities for the west Balkan states as well," President Ilham Aliyev noted. Azerbaijani gas is a new, reliable, and long-term source for Europe, because our proven reserves of natural gas are 2.6 trillion cubic meters, and according to new data, this volume may be higher. If we also take into account the project called "deep-water gas" at the Azeri–Chirag–Gunashli field, the picture of our potential will become even clearer," President Ilham Aliyev added.

On February 14, President Ilham Aliyev has launched the construction of a railway that will connect the main part of Azerbaijan to its exclave Nakhchivan as well as Turkey. Attending the ground-breaking ceremony in Fuzuli District, President Ilham Aliyev said that all regional countries will benefit from the upcoming opening of transport links in the region. Speaking in Lachin District on the border with Armenia, President Ilham Aliyev warned revanchist forces in Armenia against calls for revenge. "Revanchist forces are trying to raise their heads in Armenia today. They are trying to threaten Azerbaijan with further provocations and war. They must understand that we pay attention to everything, control everything, and we will never allow the Armenian Fascism to raise its head again. We have destroyed the Armenian Fascism," President Ilham Aliyev noted. President Ilham Aliyev also said that the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan had driven the enemy out and that there was no Armenian Army now, as it was defeated and there was neither equipment nor manpower left. They have acknowledged that they had 10,000 deserters during the war, the president said, adding that there was not a single deserter in the Azerbaijani Army, which is an evidence of the high morale of the Azerbaijani people and army. Recalling that Armenia was forced to vacate Lachin, Kalbajar, and Aghdam districts after the 10 November

tripartite peace deal, President Ilham Aliyev said it became possible thanks to the military prowess of the Azerbaijani Army. President Ilham Aliyev also added that Armenia never wanted to return Lachin and Kalbajar districts to Azerbaijan and this approach of Armenia was propped up by the OSCE Minsk Group mediators. "This was the main reason for the lack of progress in the negotiations. Unfortunately, the position of Armenia and some of its foreign patrons implied returning five districts to Azerbaijan, so that Azerbaijan would be content with this and Nagorno-Karabakh would be given independence someday, while Kalbajar and Lachin districts would remain under the eternal control of Armenia. I rejected that offer," President Ilham Aliyev added.

Previously, commenting on the complaints by the Armenian leadership that the Armenian military had unusable weapons, President Ilham Aliyev said: "You know, blaming someone is the easiest thing you can do. However, they should also say that these weapons were handed over to them free of charge not for a year or two years, but for all 30 years. They were armed against us. Now we are using every opportunity to closely monitor the processes taking place in the region. We have opportunities and we have enough sources of information. We know how many weapons were transferred to Armenia free of charge during the war and how many were transferred before the war. Immediately after the July clashes, from 17 July until the last day of the war, several planes of free weapons were delivered to Armenia on a daily basis," the president added.

The president said that Armenia received free of charge Iskander, Tochka-U, SKAD, and S-300 missiles, tanks, artillery, and air defence systems, adding that "we destroyed all of them. There is no Armenian Army, it is

finished," he said. President Ilham Aliyev noted that for about 30 years, Armenia was an instrument in the hands of a number of influential circles and was used against Azerbaijan. "Organized and influential circles united against us and wanted to keep our lands under occupation forever. Armenia was only a tool, a mediator. We overthrew this insidious policy and restored justice," the president added.

#### **IV. Armenia's continued provocations against Azerbaijan**

While Azerbaijan is making great efforts to normalize relations, ensure peace and stability in the region on the basis of mutual recognition and respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and international borders of state, Armenia is refusing to give up on its provocative actions. On February 6, on the state border fire was opened from the Armenian side on a roadside stand "Welcome to Azerbaijan" on the Kafan-Goris road that partially passes via Azerbaijani territory. On February 22, Armenian Defence Minister Vagharshak Harutyunyan said that his country had started reforming its armed forces and that the Russian Defence Ministry was "directly involved in this process". President Ilham Aliyev voiced his criticism about the reports that Russia is helping to rebuild the Armenian army after its defeat in the Second Karabakh war. "I heard several days ago that their allies are going to revive the Armenian army, to modernize it. Why? Against who? The war is over. If someone is harboring plans to take revenge, they will see this fist, it is still there, let them not try our patience," President Ilham Aliyev warned.

Moreover, despite the fact that the deployment of Armenian troops to Azerbaijani territory in any form is an overt violation of

international law and international documents to which Armenia is a party, Armenia is continuing to send troops illegally to Nagorno-Karabakh following the recent war. After the end of the hostilities in late November, more than 60 people were detached from Armenia to Karabakh for subversive military activities against Azerbaijan. They managed to slip through the Lachin corridor, which is the area of the responsibility of the Russian peacekeepers, to the territories controlled by the Azerbaijani army. The group carried out terrorist attacks on the Azerbaijani military personnel and civilians, killing four servicemen and one civilian, who was a mobile operator employee ambushed while traveling to the city of Shusha. Several people were also wounded. In response, Azerbaijan carried out a counter-terrorist operation. As a result, several terrorists were neutralized and more than 60 were captured.

Commenting on this issue during the February 26<sup>th</sup> press conference, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “when some people try to describe them as prisoners of war today, I think they are deliberately distorting the essence of the issue. There cannot be a prisoner of war 20 days after the war. We returned all the prisoners of war we had. In fact, we returned them earlier than they returned ours. These people do not fall into that category. These are terrorists and saboteurs. So any speculation on Armenia or some countries' part is irrelevant”.

The statement released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on February 27 pointed out that Armenian soldiers are still being secretly transported by deception and coercion to Nagorno-Karabakh via the Lachin corridor to take part in subversive military activities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that “the illegal deployment of Armenian troops to the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where

Russian peacekeeping forces are currently stationed, is also a gross violation of the joint statement of the leaders of Azerbaijan, Russia and Armenia dated November 10, 2020”. The statement also pointed out that “the joint statement of November 10 envisages the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan in parallel with the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces”, warning that “this is a violation of the peacekeeping contingent's control mechanisms and undermines the contingent's efforts to stabilize the situation in the region”.

Armenia is also refusing to hand over maps of mined areas to Azerbaijan. Armenian troops left behind endless minefields in the de-occupied areas returned to Azerbaijan in accordance with the act of surrender of 10 November 2020. All settlements, approaches to districts and villages have been mined, which significantly endangers the lives of thousands of Azerbaijani servicemen participating in the rescue missions. Touching upon this issue during the February 26<sup>th</sup> press conference, President Ilham Aliyev describe the refusal to submit maps of minefields by Armenia as a crime. There have been casualties among servicemen and civilians in mine blasts since the end of the war. This is happening only because we have not been given the maps of minefields, the president said, adding that “with our current capacities, we cannot ensure demining within a short period of time”. Over a thousand dead bodies of Armenian servicemen were found in cooperation among representatives of the Armenian side, the Russian peacekeeping mission and Azerbaijani representatives in liberated areas and handed over to Armenia. “We act in accordance with moral norms and universal human values. However, the refusal to give us the maps of minefields means to

doom civilians and servicemen to death and injuries. What kind of cooperation can we talk about? Cooperation cannot be one-sided," President Ilham Aliyev noted.

Azerbaijan has filed a lawsuit against Armenia at the European Court of Human Rights over the aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan. The lawsuit touches on the violation of the rights of citizens of Azerbaijan to life, respect for their personal and family life, freedom of religion, torture, and ill-treatment, property rights, and free movement as a result of the occupation of the Nagorno-Karabakh region and seven adjacent districts of Azerbaijan by Armenia that lasted for about 30 years, as well as the disappearance of 3890 citizens of Azerbaijan and the failure of Armenia to take any measures to investigate. Along with this, the lawsuit reflects the facts of violation of the rights of citizens of Azerbaijan who were deprived of the right to return to their homes due to the fact that Armenia planted a large number of landmines in the occupied territories, destroyed our cities and villages, and sent illegal armed formations to territories liberated from occupation after the 10 November 2020 peace deal.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan also expressed bewilderment at the statement of the spokesperson for the external affairs of the EU, Peter Stano, who wrote in a tweet in late January that the EU welcomes the release of five Armenia servicemen by Azerbaijan and "calls for the immediate release of the 57 remaining in custody". The Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed out the double standards and drew attention to the fact that when Azerbaijani civilians Dilgam Asgarov and Shahbaz Guliyev were in captivity in Armenia for almost 7 years, the EU showed no interest in their fate. Underscoring the fact that 62 people intentionally brought to the area of Azerbaijan

liberated from the occupation are not prisoners of war, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reminded that "such a one-sided approach based on double standards can harm relations between the EU and Azerbaijan". Furthermore, the EU has not yet reacted to the fact that during the recent war, Armenia used Smerch missiles against civilians in Azerbaijan, killing more than 100 civilians. There is also callous indifference to the fate of over 4000 Azerbaijani citizens missing in the first Karabakh war.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan has also responded to the unfounded concerns about the preservation of Christian heritage of Karabakh. All monuments in Karabakh belong to the historical, cultural, and religious heritage of the Azerbaijani people and all monuments on Azerbaijan's territory are protected at the state level. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also responded to the joint statement by the members of the European Parliament "on the need to continue negotiations on the settlement of the Karabakh conflict". The spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Leyla Abdullayeva pointed out that "the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, which the European Parliament itself has urged to resolve on the basis of the principles of international law, as well as the UN Security Council resolution, has ended, Azerbaijan has ensured its territorial integrity and single-handedly fulfilled the relevant UN Security Council resolutions of 1993".

#### **V. Never again: The Khojaly Genocide and the future of peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan**

On February 26, Azerbaijan commemorated the 29th anniversary of the systematic mass killing of Azerbaijani civilians by Armenian troops in Khojaly town of Nagorno-Karabakh.

More than 600 people, including 106 women and 63 children, were tortured and brutally murdered on February 26, 1992. The fate of 150 of them, including 68 women and 26 children, remains unknown to date. As a result of the massacre, 487 were injured, 8 families were completely destroyed, 130 children lost one and 25 children lost both parents. The massacre in Khojaly was meticulously documented by journalists and later reported by international human rights organizations including the Human Rights Watch, which described the mass killing as “the largest massacre to date in the conflict” between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The occupation of the Azerbaijani territories of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts and ethnic cleansing of the region in the early 1990s by the Armenian troops was a process of unfathomable atrocities and gratuitous violence. The Armenian leaders, having realized that more than 700000 people based in this region would not be easily persuaded to flee and leave their homes to Armenia, decided to force them into it. This caught the Azerbaijanis off-guard, as they did not expect cruelty, let alone violence, from their Armenian neighbors, with whom they had lived side-by-side in friendships and often kinships over the centuries. Serzh Sargsyan, Armenia’s President in 2008-2018, once admitted that this belief of the Azerbaijani people was the very reason, why the slaughter of Azerbaijanis in Khojaly happened. Sargsyan, who was the commander of breakaway Nagorno Karabakh’s military forces in 1992, told Thomas de-Wall, current senior associate of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in an interview dated December 2000, when Sargsyan was Armenia’s defense minister, that “Before Khojaly, the Azerbaijanis thought that they were joking with us, they thought that the Armenians were

people who could not raise their hand against the civilian population. We needed to put a stop to all that. And that’s what happened.” The occupation of Khojaly, a strategically critical part of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan and the town that hosted the only airport of the region, was a key step in Armenia’s objective to seize the control over the surrounding districts. This region remained under Armenian control for around three decades until the 44-day war which both ended the occupation and opened new horizons for the re-establishment of peace between the two countries.

With the end of the 44-day war, which resulted in Azerbaijan’s victory and liberation of the occupied territories, the Khojaly tragedy, recognized by increasingly growing number of states and world parliaments as a genocide act, has gained a new significance. Vasif Huseynov, a senior fellow at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), noted that the Khojaly genocide should be now perceived as the “Holocaust moment” of the conflict telling why both nations must seize the peace and reconciliation opportunity offered by the trilateral statement of November 10, 2020, that concluded the Second Karabakh War, in order not to let similar tragedies happen ever again.

## **VI. Azerbaijan set to re-integrate Karabakh Armenians**

Azerbaijan is confident that the post-Karabakh war realities in the region have changed the situation on the ground and new constructive approaches are needed to achieve long-lasting peace. In this vein, Azerbaijan is determined to reintegrate Armenians living in Karabakh into its own political, social, and economic environment and grant them the same rights

and freedoms as all citizens of Azerbaijan. The trilateral statement signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia on November 10, calling for opening of all transportation and communication links in the region, has generated a unique opportunity for the restoration of peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In this context, the official recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as "resolved" by the Azerbaijani side is critically important for eventual peace. It is worth noting that the Azerbaijani government agreed to ceasefire at a time when the Armenian troops had lost its entire fighting capabilities and would face grave losses had the war continued. This provided an opportunity for the governments and peoples of the two countries to find a common ground for the implementation of post-conflict peace-building initiatives. The opening of regional transportation and communication channels, along with the proposal to establish a six-state regional cooperation platform (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia + Turkey, Russia and Iran) hold a major importance for the regional stability and security. Armenia has gained nothing from nearly 30 years of occupation of Azerbaijan's territories in Karabakh. For instance, Minjivan was a regional transport hub during the Soviet times. However, this railway was completely destroyed and the rails were sold as scrap metal during the occupation.

In an online meeting with the co-chair of the Nizami Ganjavi International Centre, Ismail Serageldin on February 23, President Ilham Aliyev noted that Azerbaijan restored its territorial integrity in the Second Karabakh War of September-November 2020 and that it is now "willing to turn the page of hostility, turn the page of hatred, of confrontation and to build the future for the region". "I think a lot will depend now on proper evaluation of these

realities by regional countries, by big powers in order to use this opportunity to establish long-lasting peace and stability in the region," the president said. "We have already started, we have started reconstruction, and we have started implementing projects, which will be beneficial for all the regional countries, and eventually, for stability and predictability in the region," President Ilham Aliyev added.

The president also called for interested states and international organizations to play their roles in securing stable peace. "I think, all of us need to assess the new realities and plan our actions as governments and international organizations to focus on positive opportunities of cooperation and peaceful co-existence," President Ilham Aliyev said, reiterating that official Baku is committed to its obligations and during the war, the country behaved in a very dignified and correct way, observing international norms and rules. "I believe that after the war, we have shown a very constructive approach. I think these realities will last for a long time. The peace, which our region was waiting for so many years has come, and the peace must be long-lasting," President Ilham Aliyev said, adding that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was already over and now the need was to concentrate on the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the territories that Armenia had wiped out during the 30-years of occupation.

"Everything is devastated. We could not even imagine the scope of devastation and destruction. There is not a single building in Aghdam, in Fuzuli, in other liberated territories, villages, and cities. Everything has been destroyed, including historical monuments. So, a lot is to be done in order to re-build. However, we are committed to do this," the president said. "We have a strong will to do it, we have opportunities to do it, and

of course, we want the international community to know the reality now more than before. Because now that foreign diplomats and international media representatives are visiting the liberated territories, I think they can really see what Armenia's occupation has done to our historical and cultural monuments," President Ilham Aliyev noted.

For Azerbaijan, peace building, recovery and reconstruction, humanitarian assistance to those in need, and the return of IDPs and refugees are priorities. To this end, Azerbaijan is ready to work with relevant international partners, including the ICRC and UNHCR and other UN agencies as well as with individual states seeking to contribute to peace and stability in the region in full compliance with UN principles, Jeyhun Bayramov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, told the 22 February meeting of the High Level Segment of the UN Human Rights Council. Over the years of occupation, Armenia has committed a series of serious crimes against the civilian population of Azerbaijan, as well as its cultural heritage and infrastructure, Jeyhun Bayramov said, pointing out that Armenia razed to the ground whole cities, districts, and villages in and around Karabakh. The minister added that the liberation of Azerbaijani territories creates conditions for the protection of the rights of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons to a safe and dignified return to their homes and the government has already begun to take practical measures to restore the territories, ensure the safe and dignified return of the displaced population, and peaceful coexistence within the frameworks of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan.

## **VII. Azerbaijan's role in the EU's transition to renewable energy**

Due to the EU's Green Deal objectives, the share of natural gas in the European Union's energy mix in the near future will be higher. In 2019, the EU proposed the European Green Deal (EGD), a set of fifty actions for the following five years across all sectors to prepare the EU economy for climate neutrality by 2050. This means that the EU plans to achieve sustainable development by reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Alongside this decarbonization policy, Europe's gas dependence is expected to increase. Therefore, the EU is interested in the diversification of energy sources and routes, especially regarding natural gas. Europe has already started the process of switching from coal to gas in the power sector, and the process will continue in the future: The EU aims to use renewables, natural gas, and nuclear energy in power generation. In fact, natural gas will maintain its importance as a "bridging" fuel to facilitate the energy transition and further reduce the percentage of coal in the energy balance. This also holds true in the context of the EU's interest in reducing its dependence on a single supplier, thus guaranteeing the diversification of sources and export routes.

In this context, reliable natural gas imports from Azerbaijan through the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) and Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) have become especially important. In its initial stage, the SGC was set to deliver about 16 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas: 6 billion to Turkey and 10 billion to Europe. However, the project is also built with potential expansion capacity, which could be increased to 31 bcm in SCPX and the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), and up to 20 bcm in TAP, thus doubling the latter's capacity. This also means that Azerbaijan, which possesses

further gas reserves in its fields in its portion of the Caspian Sea (Babek, 400 bcm; Absheron, 350 bcm; and Umid, 200 bcm in reserves), as well as in Karabakh, Dan Ulduzu, and Ashrafi, might in future supply additional volumes into the infrastructure and increase gas exports to many corners of Europe. As Dr. Esmira Jafarova, a board member of the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR

Center), and Shahmar Hajiyev, a leading advisor at the AIR Center, pointed out, “it is a reality that the SGC enjoys the full support of the EU, and even the potential changes in EU energy policies resulting from the adoption of the “Green Deal” that is set to make Europe carbon-neutral by 2050 are unlikely to alter the position of the SGC in Europe’s list of priorities”.