

BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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I. **Armenia ignores an offer to sign a comprehensive peace treaty with Azerbaijan**

For the past few months, Azerbaijan has been consistently emphasizing the need for a comprehensive peace treaty with Armenia. Just recently, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov [pointed out](#) that “this is realistically the first time after the obtaining of independence by both Armenia and Azerbaijan when our countries have a unique chance to normalize their relations,” adding that now normalization between the two countries is possible since Azerbaijan eliminated the fact of the Armenian occupation and restored its territorial integrity as a result of the 44-Days War. President Ilham Aliyev has also repeatedly emphasized the importance of the peace treaty for the whole region. In his letter to US President Joe Biden on the occasion of US Independence Day, President Ilham Aliyev once again urged the US to facilitate the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia, noting that “I think the United States may contribute significantly to forging lasting peace and atmosphere of trust between Azerbaijan and Armenia, based on mutual respect to the territorial integrity, sovereignty and inviolability of borders.” President Ilham Aliyev went on to invite US firms to take part in reconstruction and development work across liberated lands. “We would like to see US companies as partners in this process,” President Ilham Aliyev noted.

“If we do not have a peace agreement with Armenia, it means that there is no peace. There is no peace not only between the two countries but also in the South Caucasus. We need peace and sustainable development, forecasting, zero war risk, we do not need war. We did not need a war before,” President Ilham Aliyev [said](#) on June 25 at a meeting with the Romanian, Austrian, Lithuanian foreign

ministers and an EU delegation, adding that “I have repeatedly said that we want to move from a post-conflict situation to peaceful development and cooperation in the South Caucasus. Unfortunately, we have never heard anything like this from the Armenian government. The Armenian government is ignoring any of our statements about starting negotiations on a peace agreement with Armenia.”

Azerbaijan’s position on this issue has been very clear. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been resolved and Baku is ready to move forward in its relations with Armenia by signing a comprehensive peace treaty recognizing territorial integrity of both countries. However, the problem is that the Armenian government does not seem to be interested in signing a peace treaty with Azerbaijan. On the contrary, recent provocations and indiscriminate shellings of the Azerbaijani positions along the border show that Yerevan is more interested in escalating the violence and destabilizing the situation in the region. By escalating the tension and deepening the confrontation, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is trying to create an opening for other outside actors to get more actively involved in the situation. Pashinyan is also torpedoing the trilateral format, which implies the final resolution of the conflict, that is, the mutual recognition of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and Armenia, the opening of communications and obligations to resolve issues exclusively through political and diplomatic means. To this end, Yerevan is purposefully aggravating the situation, openly violating the trilateral agreement of November 10, 2020. Pashinyan is also trying to make the OSCE Minsk Group relevant again, although the group has completely [outlived itself](#) and in its current iteration is meaningless. As Robert Cutler, a fellow at the Canadian Global Affairs

Institute, [pointed out](#) in his article in Foreign Policy Magazine “for the Minsk Group to have any role at all, it would require not only new co-chairs but also new terms of reference. But events are moving and will continue to move too fast for cumbersome large-scale, multilateral OSCE diplomacy to keep up. Proposals for economic and political cooperation in the region itself, including but not limited to Turkey’s “six-way platform” proposal (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Russia, and Turkey), are much more vital and dynamic than political schemata sketched in foreign ministries thousands of miles from the scene.”

On July 14, President Ilham Aliyev noted that Yerevan failed to react to his proposal to sign a peace treaty following the 44-Days War. “I have said several times that we are ready to sign a peace agreement with Armenia. In other words, we are ready to begin this work. However, there is no reaction from Armenia, there is no official reaction. The information we have received through unofficial channels is that Armenia is not ready for this. I think this would be a big mistake. Just as the Armenian side made great mistakes and committed war crimes both in the run-up and during the war. This may be yet another grave mistake. Because our proposal is based on a new real situation. We believe that the issue has been resolved and there should be a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. There must be recognition of each other's territorial integrity, recognition of borders, and delimitation work must begin,” President Ilham Aliyev [noted](#).

President Ilham Aliyev also reiterated that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was over. “The Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been resolved. This conflict has been resolved. It is us who has resolved it, the Azerbaijani state. We have resolved this

unilaterally,” President Ilham Aliyev said, adding that those who thought that the conflict had not been resolved were on “on the wrong and dangerous path.” “If someone says that the conflict is not resolved, let them come and say how they see a solution and what is not resolved. If we are talking about the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, I said that there is no territorial unit called Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan. In general, this word, this expression should not be used. There is no Nagorno-Karabakh – there is Karabakh. The Karabakh economic zone was established on the basis of a decree I signed on 7 July, and this is all. All regions of Karabakh are united into one. The East Zangazur economic zone has been established,” President Ilham Aliyev pointed out.

II. Azerbaijan sets up Karabakh and East Zangazur economic regions

On July 7, President Ilham Aliyev signed a decree on a new division of the country into economic regions. They will now include Karabakh and East Zangazur liberated during the 44-Days War. According to the decree, there will now be 14 economic districts in Azerbaijan. The Karabakh economic region covers Khankandi city, Aghjabadi, Aghdam, Barda, Fuzuli, Khojali, Khojavand, Susha and Tartar regions. The Eastern Zangazur economic region includes the newly-liberated Jabrayil, Kalbajar, Gubadli, Lachin and Zangilan regions. In his speech on July 14, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that both East and West Zangazur are parts of historical land of the Azerbaijanis, which was taken away from Azerbaijan and handed over to Armenia by the Soviet government. “It is the land of our ancestors, that we must return there, we will return and we are already returning there. No-one can stop us. We will definitely return, because

there is no other way,” President Ilham Aliyev said, adding that “the 10 November Trilateral Declaration states: all refugees must return to their homeland. Our native land is Zangazur, our native land is Goycha district, Iravan. We will definitely return there.”

The new division has been carried out with the aim of making the restoration and reintegration process of liberated territories as efficient as possible. Azerbaijan liberated 300 city centers, settlements, villages and the historic Shusha city as a result of the 44-Days War. The November 10 agreement also imposed the return of Kalbajar, Lachin and Aghdam districts occupied by the Armenian forces in the war in the early 1990s. The Armenian occupation has caused the enormous destruction of Karabakh. Armenia has almost completely destroyed the existing infrastructure in the occupied territories, razing most of the cities and villages to the ground. Aghdam, “Hiroshima of the Caucasus”, faced the utmost destruction. According to the UN estimates, the total economic damage of the occupation was around \$53.5 billion. According to the Military Prosecutor’s Office of Azerbaijan, if all the material and environmental destruction is taken into account, the total damage that Azerbaijan is faced with is about \$819 billion.

With the end of the occupation, Azerbaijan now aims to fully revive the liberated territories. Despite the fact that the scale of the devastation makes the economic recovery process complex and time-consuming, Azerbaijan wants to transform the liberated territories into areas of high-tech development. Thus, immediately after the war, the plan for socio-economic development of the liberated territories was prepared and the reconstruction process has started. Baku has already allocated \$1.3 billion for reconstruction works in the liberated

territories. Overall, \$2.2 billion is planned to be allocated for the restoration process in 2021. The funds will be used to restore the infrastructure and historical monuments in the liberated lands.

The first steps taken in the restoration process have been the construction of roads, highways, airports, and other transport links. Reconstruction of transport networks and establishment of airports in the liberated territories will create a favorable environment for the full usage of the tourism potential of Karabakh while establishing green energy zones and smart cities will boost economic growth in the region. As Dr. Esmira Jafarova [puts](#) it, “Azerbaijan is bent on carrying out the reconstruction work in its liberated territories, and the idea is to rebuild those territories as “smart” cities and villages”. The main goal is to utilize technology integration and smart green solutions as the way to achieve a sustainable development of the region.

III. Armenia continues to escalate the situation along the border with Azerbaijan

Armenia is pursuing an aggressive policy towards Azerbaijan and refusing to accept the reality that Azerbaijan has restored its territorial integrity as a result of the 44-Days War. Rather than taking the steps to de-escalate the situation, the Armenian side is constantly raising the stakes by firing on Azerbaijani positions along the border and engaging in provocative rhetoric. As a result of these intensive shellings one Azerbaijani serviceman was killed on July 23, and two of servicemen were injured on July 28. The statements issued by the Armenian Foreign Ministry after the 44-Days War contain constant barrage of absurd and false

accusations against Azerbaijan, aiming to increase the tensions in the region.

“The statement of the Armenian Foreign Ministry dated July 30, 2021, reflects another absurd and false accusation against Azerbaijan. Armenia, which has been pursuing an aggressive policy against Azerbaijan for almost 30 years, still demonstrates a position contrary to international law, rejects the process of delimitation of the border between the two countries, and obstructs the implementation of trilateral statements,” Leyla Abdullayeva, Head of the Press-Service Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, noted, adding that “We bring to the attention of the Armenian side that peace in the region can be achieved on the basis of respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders. Sustainable peace can only be achieved on the basis of respect for international law. Azerbaijan has been stating this position for 30 years and is guided by it.”

Condemning the recent border provocations and continued shelling by Armenia of Azerbaijani positions in his phone conversation with the Acting US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian affairs Philip Reeker, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov stressed that Azerbaijan did not want further escalation of violence on the border, [pointing out](#) that Azerbaijan is not interested in the escalation of the situation and supports the settlement of all disagreements through political and diplomatic means, adding “the importance of Armenia's awareness of its responsibility and stopping provocations.”

IV. Armenia hands over additional minefield maps to Azerbaijan

On July 3, Armenia handed over maps of about 92,000 anti-tank and anti-personnel mines in Fuzuli and Zangilan districts liberated during the 44-Days War. In exchange, as a humanitarian initiative, Azerbaijan handed over 15 people of Armenian origin, who were imprisoned by the court's verdict and the term of their custody had ended. The swap took place at Russia's initiative. “We express our gratitude to Rustam Muradov, Commander of the Russian peacekeeping contingent temporarily deployed in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, for his mediation services in the implementation of the humanitarian initiative to obtain mine maps,” the statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan [read](#), adding that “obtaining mine maps will save the lives of tens of thousands of our citizens, including those involved in mine clearance, and will accelerate the implementation of reconstruction and rehabilitation projects” in the liberated territories. Mine clearance in the liberated lands has been one of the most urgent matters after the 44-Days War. Just recently, President Ilham Aliyev [noted](#) that “after the war, many Azerbaijani civilians and servicemen were killed and wounded by landmines... Without completing this [demining] work, of course, we will not be able to return our IDPs and refugees to those lands”. In June, in one of the latest deadly incidents, two Azerbaijani journalists and a local official were killed by landmines planted by the Armenian forces during the occupation. Azerbaijan has repeatedly called upon the international community to pressure Armenia to handover the minefield maps. It is worth mentioning that until recently, Armenia has unequivocally denied the existence of minefield maps, with Armenian Ministry of

Foreign Affairs shamelessly lying that it was just a “fake agenda” pushed by Azerbaijan to manipulate the international community.

V. Azerbaijan opens trade mission in Israel

Azerbaijan opened Trade and Tourism Representative Offices in Tel Aviv on July 29. They are Baku's first official representative offices in Israel, becoming a crucial milestone in 29 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The offices were inaugurated by co-chairs of the Joint Commission between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the State of Israel – Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan Mikayil Jabbarov and Minister of Tourism of Israel Yoel Razvozov. The event was attended by the members of Azerbaijani delegation, Israeli officials and business representatives, members of the Israel-Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The representative offices will play a critical fundamental role in the development of bilateral trade and economic relations between the two countries. During the inauguration, Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan Mikayil Jabbarov thanked Israel for its support to Azerbaijan during the 44-Days War and appreciated Israeli companies' interest in the reconstruction of Azerbaijan's regained lands.

Over the past decade, Baku has been engaged in an enormous strive to upgrade its military by drastically ramping up its defense spending and investing in various military technologies. Apart from modern conventional firepower assets and long-range assault capabilities, Baku has been keenly interested in acquiring advanced military technologies that would give Azerbaijan a decisive qualitative edge in the battlefield, which was demonstrated during the 44-Days War. The relationship with

Israel has been particularly important in acquiring this qualitative edge. With 60 percent of its weaponry coming from Israel, from 2015 to 2019, Azerbaijan was the second-largest importer of Israeli military equipment. By 2016, Azerbaijan and Israel signed \$4.85 billion worth of defense contracts, mainly for UAVs and missile systems. In fact, one of the hallmarks of the 44-Days War was the extensive use of Israeli-made advanced military equipment, including UAVs for surveillance, target acquisition, reconnaissance, and ground attacks on artillery systems and military facilities by Azerbaijan.

At the same time, the nature of the relationship between Azerbaijan and Israel cannot be reduced to such simplistic dyads as “oil-for-weapons trade”. However, that is exactly a type of reductive and harmful arguments that some Israeli journalists and experts had tried to use during and after the 44-Days war in order to justify their call for the reconsideration of relations with Baku. These reductive arguments purposefully ignore the long history of the mutual understanding and profound friendship between the Jewish and Azerbaijani people. As Farid Shafiyev, the chairman of the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), [pointed out](#) “the reductionism of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations to oil-for-weapons does not stand the judgment of history. Members of the Jewish diaspora settled in Azerbaijan centuries ago, and their cohabitation had no anti-Semitic traits; on the contrary, there was a synergy of cultures. In the past 100 years, in addition to Tat-speaking Jews (Tat is an offshoot of the Farsi language), thousands of Ashkenazi Jews moved to Azerbaijan. They again witnessed the culture of tolerance and, even more significantly, the migration produced thousands of cases of intermarriage. Thus,

Azerbaijani–Israeli intergovernmental relations partly rest on interethnic linkages. Two former Soviet Azerbaijani leaders had Jewish wives and, today, people of mixed heritage play significant roles in their respective communities in Azerbaijan and Israel by promoting closer ties in politics, business, and culture. Simply put, both ethnic groups had a history of positive relations before Azerbaijan produced oil or Israel weapons.”

In his speech at the opening of the trade mission, Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan Mikayil Jabbarov highlighted great potential for the expansion of bilateral cooperation in the spheres of energy, healthcare, digitalisation, investment, innovations, information and communication technologies, agriculture, management of water resources and tourism and invited Israeli businessmen to take advantage of a favourable business and investment atmosphere in Azerbaijan. Israeli Ambassador to Azerbaijan George Deek welcomed the launch of the trade mission saying this is Azerbaijan's first official presence in Israel. “Today is a historic day. Since the relations between our countries were established almost 30 years ago, Azerbaijan did not have any representation in Israel. And now this has changed. Today, Azerbaijan opened a Trade Representative Office in Tel Aviv, and for the first time, there will be an Azerbaijani flag waving in Israel. This will create an opportunity for our relations to become stronger and more diverse, bringing our countries and peoples closer together. I believe this is another step towards opening of an embassy of Azerbaijan in Israel. Next year we will celebrate 30 years of diplomatic relations and friendship between our countries. Inshallah, we will all celebrate it together in Azerbaijan and in Israel,” the Israeli

ambassador said in a video address posted on his Twitter account.

VI. President of European Council Charles Michel visits Azerbaijan

On July 18, President of the European Council Charles Michel visited Azerbaijan. Following the expanded meeting, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and President of the European Council Charles Michel have held a joint press conference. In his speech, President Ilham Aliyev [praised](#) Azerbaijan's relations with the European Union. President Ilham Aliyev said the EU is Baku's close partner as well as its main trading partner with nearly 40 percent of Azerbaijan's trade being with the EU and totaling almost \$9.5 billion in 2020, adding that more than 1,700 companies from EU member states operate in Azerbaijan and pointing out that Azerbaijan had signed or adopted documents on strategic partnership with a third of EU member states. “This is a very big achievement of our government. This also creates additional opportunities for cooperation,” the president noted. President Ilham Aliyev also noted that energy security is an important part of bilateral agenda. “Here, we can only report about great achievements. I would say historic achievements, especially the completion of the Southern Gas Corridor project,” President Ilham Aliyev stressed. President Ilham Aliyev also pointed out that more than three billion cubic meters of natural gas had been exported from Azerbaijan to EU member states since 1 January 2020 and this figure would grow, adding that investments in the Southern Gas Corridor project totaled more than \$33 billion.

President Ilham Aliyev also noted that “after the second Karabakh war there are new opportunities for opening of all communications in the region as it was

provided by the trilateral agreement of November 10, last year... Azerbaijan put an end to a long-lasting Armenian occupation of our territories. Azerbaijan itself implemented resolutions of the UN Security Council, demanding unconditional and full withdrawal of Armenian troops from our territories, and Azerbaijan has put an end to war. Therefore, now it is time to think about peace and to turn the page. We are ready for that... I think that demonstrating good will and very pragmatic approach in a relatively short period of time, we can resolve most of the still remaining issues on the table and lay down the foundation for a broad regional cooperation in the region. EU plays, and I am sure will play very important role from this point of view and the visit of Mr. President to the three countries of the South Caucasus demonstrates European involvement, European agenda. It is fully in line with our agenda. Our views coincide with this issue also."

President of the European Council Charles Michel said that he and President Ilham Aliyev had had "an extensive and in-depth exchange of views on the nature of relations between the European Union and Azerbaijan". "Because we want to give another impetus to our relations. We actually want to give the partnership between the European Union and Azerbaijan a strategic nature," he explained. Michel also said that the partnership between the European Union and Azerbaijan is not based on financial support. "On the contrary, it is a partnership based on the desire to work together, on innovation, technological exchanges and economic cooperation. It is in this spirit that the two priorities the European Union considers in terms of economic development – climate change and digital revolution – must be at the heart of the projects we are launching together," Charles Michel noted. Charles Michel also said that the

European Union is ready to support efforts regarding the delimitation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. "For this, we are ready to provide European expert assistance and, if necessary and desired, European monitoring," he said. Michel said that regional cooperation in various fields is important as well. "Infrastructure is important. This is especially true for transportation and various routes... The European Union also wants to participate in and encourage regional cooperation efforts. We want to convey this message to all parties and countries that are ready to mobilize resources on this issue," he said.

VII. President Ilham Aliyev visits Russia amidst Armenia's increasing provocations at the border

On July 20, President Ilham Aliyev arrived in Russia on a working visit at the invitation of President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. "The main focus will be given to the practical aspects of the implementation of November 9, 2020, and January 11, 2021, agreements of leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia," the statement from the Kremlin read. In his over one-hour-long interview on July 22, President Ilham Aliyev said that Azerbaijan and Russia see eye to eye on the regional issues. "There are no disagreements in our approaches. We, Russia and Azerbaijan, believe that the war is over, the conflict is over. Revanchist trends should be suppressed in Armenia, and there should be peace in the region from now on. The risk of a new war should be reduced to a minimum and eliminated," President Ilham Aliyev noted. President Ilham Aliyev also added that Azerbaijan and Russia were strategic partners and had long-term strategic cooperation plans. "We have very strong friendly relations, I personally have very close relations with Mr.

Putin, we are the politicians who trust each other. This is very important," President Ilham Aliyev stressed. At the same time, President Ilham Aliyev also emphasized that Azerbaijan was monitoring on a daily basis the Lachin corridor which is under the temporary control of Russian peacekeeping forces. Despite Azerbaijan's objection, foreign vehicles pass through the corridor, "which should be stopped, which is not good, because this is our territory", the president said. "If someone thinks that we do not see this, they are wrong. In some cases, they stick Armenian number plates on these vehicles. But we are there, we are in the corridor. We see everything, both Khankendi and the corridor. Therefore, an end should be put to this," President Ilham Aliyev stressed.

"We have set an agenda for Armenia - a peace treaty... We are ready to start the negotiations. Is war over? It is. Armenia, do you want peace? It seems, you do. Then why should we not sign a peace treaty? Recognize our territorial integrity, let us sign a peace treaty and delimitate the borders. Look, our agenda in this regard coincides with the agenda of the EU, Turkey and Russia," the president said. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that Armenia had agreed for a railway to pass through the Zangazur corridor but objected to a motorway. "This runs counter to the 10 November statement. Because its point 9 says that roads are to open - railways, motorways. How can that be that a railway will be opened to connect Armenia with Iran and Russia, but we will not be able to go to Nakhichevan by car? Is this possible? No," President Ilham Aliyev said. President Ilham Aliyev said that he had discussed the issue with Russian President Vladimir Putin during his visit to Moscow on 20 July. "I believe that in the next stage we will get more positive news from Yerevan," President Ilham Aliyev noted.

VIII. Armenia continues its deliberate destruction of regional ecosystem

In the last 30 years, Armenia has been engaged in deliberate destruction of the regional ecosystem through different scorched earth techniques, destruction of environmentally sensitive infrastructure, and unsustainable resource extraction to finance the conflict. Just recently, the results of the monitoring carried out by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan after the 44-Days War and the analysis of water samples taken from four transboundary rivers have found that the pollution in those rivers was several times higher than the norm. One of the critical environmental issues of the region is the pollution of the transboundary Okchuchay River by Armenia, which is the most polluted river in the region. The Okchuchay, with a length of 84 kilometers, starts in west Zangazur and flows into east Zangazur, which was liberated from occupation during the 44-Day War. The Okchuchay River passes through Armenia's two mining districts. One of them is the Zangazur Copper Molybdenum Combine (ZCMC), which is located upstream of the Okchuchay River in the territory of Kajaran city, in the southeast of Armenia. The second mining district, Kapan Polymetal, is located downstream of the Okchuchay River, 1.5 kilometers east of the town of Kapan in the southeast of Armenia. These mining enterprises in Armenia dump waste directly into the river without any treatment, which makes the water resources from this river virtually unusable on the Azerbaijani territory. The amount of nickel is seven times higher than the norm, iron four times and copper-molybdenum compound two times higher. According to an evaluation by the U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) dating back to 2007, the ecological and chemical

status of the Okchuchay River system is “not satisfactory for aquatic life ... Industrial activities are the main pressure factor.” Data from Armenia's Ministry of Ecology proves this. According to data, the Okchuchay is one of Armenia's most polluted rivers and has been classified as Class 5 in terms of pollution, the highest possible level. Research by Armenian experts found that the root causes of the river's pollution were lack of management and planning, poor operating experience and inadequate waste management.

As Dr. Javid Valiyev, Head of Department at Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), [pointed out](#), “most of ZCMC's shares (60 percent) belonged to Germany's CRONIMET Mining AG until 2019. Meanwhile, the managing partner of CRONIMET, 83-year-old Gunter Pilarsky, has a close connection with Armenia and has served as an honorary consul of Armenia in the German state of Baden-Württemberg since 2006. Pilarsky's name also appears on a list of Armenia's paid lobbyists in Germany.” According to the USA Tribune, until the autumn of 2020, Germany was one the main countries where Armenian lobbying organizations were engaged in attracting corrupt lawmakers.

Water pollution has altered the river's ecosystem; many fish species have been killed and some have disappeared altogether. The metals discharged into the Okchuchay pollute not only the river itself but also other nearby rivers. The Okchuchay flows directly into the Aras River, the second largest river of the South Caucasus, thus it is directly affected by the pollution from the Okchuchay. According to Iranian experts, despite Armenia accepting responsibility and committing to repair and refurbish facilities to completely clean up the rivers, no action has yet been taken. With this gross violation of international protocols and conventions, more pressure should be put on

Armenia for polluting this and also the Aras River. The Aras River is the largest right tributary of the Kura River, and together they form the most important water resources of the South Caucasus, flowing into the Caspian Sea. These two rivers also affect the water quality of the Caspian as they flow into the inland sea. Therefore, the cleanliness of these rivers concerns all Caspian coastal states for fishing and other reasons. According to the Caspian Convention, coastal states have a duty to protect the environment and biological assets in the Caspian Sea.

The Okchuchay is an important domestic and irrigation resource of the eastern Zangazur economic region of Azerbaijan. It is an important water source for the development of this region after its liberation. The Republic of Armenia signed the Protocol on Water and Health, part of the 1992 UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), on June 17, 1999. Since signing the protocol in 1999, Armenia has twice initiated the process of ratifying the protocol. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has some reservations about the ratification process, taking into consideration the “polluter pays” principle. To sum up, mining activities in Armenia heavily damage the region's ecosystem. Owing to the presence of a German company here, Azerbaijan expected a reaction from the German government. However, there was no official reaction from Germany against the pollution of water and the environment in the region.

Unfortunately, this kind of barbaric behavior by international companies has been a commonplace during a 30-year-long occupation of Karabakh by Armenia. Many international companies that were illegally active in occupied territories of Azerbaijan, especially in gold mines of Zangilan and

Kalbajar districts, engaged in the exploitation of more than thirty mining areas, often operating without any environmental oversight. On July 22, in an over one-hour-long interview, President Ilham Aliyev warned foreign mining companies that they will either have to pay compensation voluntarily or Baku will take them to court because they operated without its permission in its occupied territories. "Foreign companies illegally exploited our gold and other mines for many years. This is a crime... There are two options for these companies: either they pay us compensation and accept our terms, or their other alternative is to resolve this issue in a court," President Ilham Aliyev warned.

IX. Armenians in Karabakh are not entitled to special status

On July 22, in an over one-hour-long interview, President Ilham Aliyev reiterated once again that Armenians in Azerbaijan will not be granted any special status. "How logical is it to create a status for 25,000 people? I am asking you. The Azerbaijani people are rightly dissatisfied with statements voiced in France and America, which do not reflect the reality, to the effect that the conflict should be resolved. I asked before - please tell me how it should be resolved. I am saying, I, the Azerbaijani president, am saying that I have resolved this problem, that is it! There is no Nagorno-Karabakh, there is no status!" President Ilham Aliyev noted. President Ilham Aliyev described as a very wise step the fact that European Council President Charles Michel did not utter the words "Nagorno-Karabakh" or "status" during his visit to Azerbaijan on July 18. "We appreciate this, and Armenia too should draw conclusions from this. There is neither status nor Nagorno-Karabakh," the president said, adding that the

Nagorno-Karabakh region was an artificial entity created by the Soviet authorities. "There is no administrative entity in Azerbaijan called Nagorno-Karabakh, and the fact that Charles Michel did not use those words is surely regarded as his respect for our position," President Ilham Aliyev said.

In their article [published](#) in National Interest, Dr. Farid Shafiyev and Dr. Javid Veliyev, point out that the main objective of those who demand a special status for Armenians in Azerbaijan is not to solve the issue, but to exacerbate the problem. By granting a political status and acting as its guarantor, they forge new areas of intervention in the future. The authors provide ten reasons why it does not make sense to grant Armenians living in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan a special political status.

First, when Armenian nationalists started the "miatsum" (unification) movement in Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) in 1988, the ultimate goal was to expand Armenian territory by annexing NKAO to Armenia, rather than to pursue self-determination. It was a part of the irredentist "Great Armenia" project (the restoration of a partly mythical Armenian kingdom between three seas) that was later presented as a self-determination movement for the international audience.

Second, the region's autonomy was granted by the Soviet authorities not just to the Armenians living in the region but also to Azerbaijanis. It is worth noting that, historically, Karabakh was a single land comprising a mountainous part and a lowland region. The former Nagorno-Karabakh was an artificial Soviet creation to make Armenians a majority in the newly created communist administrative unit. On February 20, 1988, Armenian deputies to the former National

Council of Nagorno-Karabakh voted to unify that region with Armenia contrary to Azerbaijani and Soviet laws. This move was illegal from the viewpoint of Soviet legislation.

Third, Baku patiently acted upon the demands of the Armenians living in Karabakh between the years 1988-1991, promoting socioeconomic programs despite the fact that, on average, Karabakh Armenians had better living standards than Azerbaijanis elsewhere. Moscow created a special administration in Nagorno-Karabakh, but Armenian nationalists continued to promote an irredentist agenda of unification with Armenia. On December 1, 1989, the Armenian Soviet Parliament adopted an illegal decision to unite the NKAO with Armenia: this decision was annulled by the Soviet Supreme Assembly.

Fourth, when the Armenians started an attack on the civilian population, the autonomous status of former Nagorno-Karabakh was abolished on November 26, 1991, by the Azerbaijani parliament. Therefore, according to the constitution and laws of Azerbaijan, there is no such region as the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region. Azerbaijan's territorial integrity was recognized by the international community and reconfirmed by 4 resolutions of the UN Security Council adopted in 1993 in response to the occupation of Azerbaijani territories.

Fifth, contrary to Armenian claims, according to the Soviet Constitution, only fifteen Soviet republics had the right to self-determination. Nagorno-Karabakh, on the other hand, had no constitutional right to secede from Azerbaijan. The Armenian side argued that Nagorno-Karabakh's so-called proclamation of independence was exercised in accordance with the April 3, 1990, law of the USSR "On the Procedures for Resolving Questions Related to the Secession of Union Republics from the

USSR." According to this law, during the initiation of the succession process by a Soviet republic, any autonomous entity also has the right to make its independent choice to remain in or leave the Soviet Union. However, Azerbaijan, similar to Armenia and other Soviet republics, left the Soviet Union on the basis of the Belovezha Accords after the collapse of the USSR on December 8, 1991. Therefore, one cannot cite the abovementioned law, dated April 3, 1990, as neither Azerbaijan nor Armenia used this law to secede from the USSR. Sixth, international law does not grant a right of self-determination to any given group of people. There is a complex of conditions that determine whether this right is applicable and, contrary to the assumption of Armenian nationalists, Armenians in Karabakh do not fit the definition of a "people" for the purposes of self-determination. It is also worth mentioning here that the expulsion of 700,000 Azerbaijanis and the total destruction of infrastructure and cultural heritage also undermine any moral ground for an Armenian supposed self-determination claim. Moreover, on June 16, 2015, the European Court of Human Rights released its judgment in Chiragov and Others v. Armenia, finding that Armenia had effectively controlled the Azerbaijani-occupied territories.

Seventh, when the decision of the Armenians living in Karabakh to illegally secede was not approved by Baku, they tried to carry out this act through an armed operation. This armed attack caused the deaths of 30,000 people in the first war, with 4,000 people missing. In the second war, about 5,000 people from Armenia and 2,906 people from Azerbaijan lost their lives. The Helsinki Final Act and other relevant provisions of international law stipulate a peaceful separation with the consent of the

central government, which is not the case with the Armenian irredentist armed movement.

Eighth, after the ceasefire agreement was signed in 1994, a diplomatic negotiation process started between the parties with the mediation of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group. Azerbaijan offered the status of autonomy in return for the withdrawal of Armenian troops in and around the region of the former Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia, however, did not accept this and, in March/April 2020, essentially abandoned the Madrid Principles elaborated under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs—a factor that helped lead to the 2020 war.

Ninth, according to the latest figures, 20,000–25,000 Armenians live in Karabakh. This corresponds to 0.2 percent of Azerbaijan's ten million population. Thus, the population of other ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan is much higher than the number of Armenians. They can all freely exercise their cultural and religious rights as citizens of Azerbaijan.

Tenth, Armenian minorities also live in the surrounding countries and so far, none of them have been given a special political status.

However, they exercise their religious and cultural rights. Azerbaijanis residing in neighboring countries also live in the same way. President Ilham Aliyev, in one of his interviews, gave the example of Azerbaijanis and Armenians living together in Georgia and Russia, meaning that this could be a real possibility in Azerbaijan as well.