

BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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I. Armenia's dangerous provocation game in the region

On October 13, the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan announced that a civilian column of vehicles moving from Sugovushan to Kalbajar came under fire. "On October 13, at about 14:00, a column of vehicles with non-military cargo moving from Sugovushan settlement of Tartar region to Kalbajar region to build civil infrastructure in Kalbajar region was subjected to fire by illegal Armenian armed detachments near Gozlukorpu settlement," the statement from the Ministry of Defense read. Despite the Armenian side categorically denying the fact of firing at civilian vehicles, the Russian peacekeeping contingent temporarily deployed in Karabakh confirmed on its official website that, while being escorted by Russian peacekeepers, a column of Azerbaijani vehicles carrying construction materials came under fire near the Sarsang water reservoir. On October 14, the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan stated that an Armenian reconnaissance quadcopter was intercepted in Fuzuli District, noting that "a quadcopter belonging to illegal Armenian armed detachments in the territory of Azerbaijan, where Russian peacekeepers are temporarily deployed, tried to carry out reconnaissance flights over the positions of the Azerbaijan Army in the direction of the Fuzuli region. However, the UAV was seized as a result of the vigilance of the Azerbaijan Army Units." The Armenian side again tried to deny the fact of an obvious provocation, but the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan swiftly published pictures of the downed UAV on its official website.

In the evening of October 14, the Armenian side dangerously escalated the situation in the region by deliberately murdering Afgan Hamzayev, a soldier of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan. The Ministry of Defense of

Azerbaijan said that the serviceman was killed as a result of sniper fire opened by illegal Armenian armed detachments, warning that "decisive steps will be taken to neutralize the illegal Armenian armed detachments that committed the terrorist act". Pointing out that "the terrorist act committed by Armenian-backed Armenian illegal military detachments during the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Minsk with the mediation of the Russian Federation is a deliberate provocation," the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan also underscored that "this is another proof of Armenia's policy of deliberately aggravating the situation in the region, obstructing the implementation of the provisions of the Joint Statement signed on November 10, 2020, and overshadowing the activities of Russian peacekeepers." The Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan also noted that "a request has been sent to the Russian-Turkish Joint Monitoring Center to investigate this terrorist act." The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan also noted that "this provocation committed by illegal Armenian armed detachments supported by Armenia is a gross violation of Armenia's obligations under the trilateral statement of November 10, 2020, and serves to aggravate the situation in the region. This provocation committed by the Armenian armed detachments while the Russian-mediated meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia was taking place, demonstrates the revanchist position of the Armenian side, as well as its attempts to obstruct the activities of Russian peacekeepers."

On October 15, Armenian terrorist groups again, trying to commit another provocation, attacked the positions of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan. The Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan noted in its statement that "on October 15, in the morning hours, illegal

Armenian armed detachments by the use of a civilian ambulance attempted to commit a terrorist provocation against the Azerbaijan Army Units in the Aghdere direction. As a result of the vigilance of the Azerbaijan Army servicemen and the measures taken, the attempt of provocation was suppressed, and the gunmen moving by car were forced to retreat. We declare that the use of a civilian ambulance for military purposes is absolutely unacceptable, which is a method characteristic of terrorists and is a gross violation of international humanitarian law. We once again warn that any terrorist and provocative activity will be suppressed by the Azerbaijani side immediately and decisively.”

The aim of these provocations is clear: it is to undermine the fragile peace, stability, and security in the region. There are many shady elements on the Armenian side, including senior military and political figures, who are deeply dissatisfied with the current status quo. Those elements, both in the Armenian military and the state apparatus at large, were the main pillar of the 30 year-long corrupt and criminal regime that was established in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. They were the ones who reaped all the benefits and enormous profits from the occupation. As a result of the Forty-Four Day War, the corrupt criminal system created in the occupied territories was destroyed by Azerbaijan. With the Russian peacekeepers temporarily deployed to the region, those criminal elements on the Armenian side hoped that they would be able to restore their former status and privileges. However, those expectations were not realized. Consequently, those criminal elements in Armenia are trying to destabilize the situation in the region. Against the background of these provocations, the Armenian far-right National Democratic Pole movement, an Armenian political alliance

that includes the far-right Sasna Tsrer Party, has declared the launch of “a civil disobedience campaign” against the government that they accuse of treason.

The timing of these provocations is no coincidence. In early October, Baku and Yerevan started to use each other’s airspace for civilian flights. Despite the fact that there had been no official ban on these flights before, both sides preferred not to fly over each other’s territories up until now. On October 6, Azerbaijani Airlines started using the Armenian airspace for its flights between Baku and Nakhchivan. On October 7, an Armenian detainee was transferred from Baku to Yerevan. On October 13, the religious leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia met for the first time since the end of the war. On October 19, Azerbaijan transferred five more criminals to Armenia.

During the online meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) heads of state on October 15, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that his country is ready to cooperate for peace in the region. “We are determined and we will do everything possible to establish peace and stability in the region. We have a clear vision on how to achieve this goal - through dialogue and by overcoming the atmosphere of hatred and enmity and opening economic and transport communications. This is the only path that will lead us to this goal,” Pashinyan underscored, adding that “Armenia will have a railway and land communication with Russia, a railway connection with Iran through the territory of Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan will receive a railway and road connection with Nakhchivan through the territory of Armenia”. As Vasif Huseynov, a senior advisor at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (Air Center), pointed out “although it is not certain whether Baku and Yerevan will really

be able to reach a peace agreement in the near term, the latest developments between them, along with Pashinyan's aforementioned remarks about the Zangazur corridor, raise hopes in this direction."

At the same session of the Council of Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States held in the format of a video conference, President Ilham Aliyev noted once again Azerbaijan's readiness to normalize relations and start negotiations on a peace agreement with Yerevan. "We are ready to start negotiations with Armenia on the delimitation of the border on the condition of mutual recognition of territorial integrity. We are also ready to launch negotiations on a peace agreement with Armenia. Azerbaijan, as a victorious country, is ready to normalize relations. We do hope that the Armenian leadership will not pass up on this historic opportunity," President Ilham Aliyev noted. During his speech, President Ilham Aliyev also touched upon the criminal nature of the regime that was created in the territories of Azerbaijan occupied by Armenia for the last 30 years. Pointing out how the occupied territories were used for drug trafficking and training of international terrorists, President Ilham Aliyev noted that "over the past year, after Azerbaijan had regained control over the 130-kilometer section of the state border with Iran which was under the control of Armenia for about 30 years and thereby blocked a drug trafficking route from Iran through Jabrayil district of Azerbaijan to Armenia and further to Europe, the volume of heroin we have seized on other sections of the Azerbaijan-Iran border has doubled compared to the same period of previous years. This suggests that for about 30 years, Armenia, in collusion with Iran, used the occupied territories of Azerbaijan to carry out drug trafficking to Europe."

At the same time, on October 25, President Ilham Aliyev reiterated at a meeting with a group of representatives of liberated Gubadli district Baku's readiness for any form of regional challenges to defend Azerbaijan's national interests. "The war is over, and true, we are still forced to fight, and we are ready. In any form, as they say, on the battlefield – be it in the political or in the military arena," President Ilham Aliyev warned, adding that "we have already shown that we are not a nation to bow to anyone. But at the same time, we are facing huge reconstruction work ahead of us. This must be carried out in accordance with the victory gained in the war. As a whole, after this historic victory, the renewal, modernization of our country, the ongoing reforms, the fight against unpleasant situations, of course, must completely reach a new level. This Victory has both shown the whole world that we are a great nation, at the same time, it forces us in the best sense of the word to move forward only on the right path."

During his visit to Gubadli district, President Ilham Aliyev also attended a ground-breaking ceremony for the Khinalig-Gubadli road leading to the center of Gubadli town from the Khudafarin-Gubadli-Lachin road as well as the opening of the 10 kW Gubadli substation. The president also inaugurated a military unit complex of the State Border Service. At the opening of a new military unit, President Ilham Aliyev informed that the Gubadli military unit was equipped with Harop, Guzugun, and Girgi strike drones as well as the state-of-the-arts weapons. The unit is to protect the segment of the border with Armenia on the territory of Gubadli and Lachin districts. Apart from the strike UCAVs, the military unit's combat equipment includes helicopters, anti-tank grenades, and guided missiles, 120 and 82 mm mortars, anti-aircraft guns, and other modern weapons systems. In addition, the military unit

uses combat equipment, high-speed vehicles, armored and medical vehicles.

II. Inauguration of Fuzuli International Airport

On October 26, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan attended the opening ceremony of the new international airport in Fuzuli and other infrastructure projects in Karabakh. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan became the first head of state to land at Fuzuli International Airport, Azerbaijan's first airport in the liberated territories. President Ilham Aliyev and President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan also laid a foundation stone for "Dost Agropark" to be built by Turkish companies in Zangilan district.

With the Fuzuli international airport commissioned, Azerbaijan is now focused on building two more airports in liberated Zangilan and Lachin districts. On October 20, President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva have viewed the progress of construction work at Zangilan International Airport. The construction work at the 3,000-meter runway airport started in May 2021, and is scheduled for completion in 2022. The government has set itself ambitious goals for the development of the economy of the Karabakh and Eastern Zangazur regions. These three airports are among the first big infrastructure projects that will facilitate the reintegration of the region in the economic life of the country. The airports in liberated Karabakh and Eastern Zangazur will become a major factor in strengthening the connectivity and security of the region, linking the highways Horadiz-Jabrayil-Zangilan-Aghband, Fuzuli-Susa and other infrastructure projects going forward. These airports also will become a

backbone of the industrial zones that will be created near them, boosting the development of e-commerce in Azerbaijan. The plan is to turn these areas into a modern logistics and transportation center.

As part of the visit, President Ilham Aliyev and President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan also viewed work done under the "smart village" project implemented in Aghali village in Zangilan. President Ilham Aliyev and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan have also made joint press statements in Aghali village of Zangilan. In his speech, President Ilham Aliyev noted that "our joint attendance at the opening of Fuzuli International Airport today once again demonstrates our unity and strength. It testifies to the fact that Turkey and Azerbaijan as two fraternal countries are always next to each other. The construction of Fuzuli International Airport lasted only eight months. An international airport was built in eight months, and Azerbaijani and Turkish companies took part in its construction. So this is our shared success. At the same time, we laid the foundation for the first private investment project in Zangilan district today. This is also a joint Turkish-Azerbaijani investment venture. It once again shows that together we are moving forward shoulder to shoulder in all matters, including the reconstruction and development work carried out across the lands liberated from the occupation." President Ilham Aliyev praised Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for supporting Baku, adding that "from the first hours to the final minutes of the Second Karabakh War, Turkey stood by Azerbaijan." President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan "supported Azerbaijan in the very first hours by announcing to the whole world that Azerbaijan was not alone and that Turkey was next to

Azerbaijan. This provided us with great political and moral support, and gave us additional strength.”

For his part, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey would continue supporting Azerbaijan. He said favorable conditions had developed for reaching sustainable peace and normalization in the region. “The roads and railways that will pass through this geographic space will open up economic and trade opportunities not only for Azerbaijan and Turkey, but also for all countries of the region. The day will come when we will be able to travel from Zangazur to Istanbul, Igdir and Kars. The possibilities for turning the region into a transit and logistical center will expand. All neighbors of Azerbaijan, including Iran, Georgia and Armenia, will be able to take advantage of this development. In a nutshell, these are not isolating, but inclusive projects. Necessary in this process is the determination and mutual recognition of borders. It is this concept that should become the basis of good neighborly relations,” President Erdogan said. President Erdogan also noted that if Armenia shows sincere “goodwill towards Azerbaijan, then there will be no obstacles to the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia. Sacrificing a prosperous future that will be built in the region by common efforts to settling petty scores and domestic politics will mean a waste of time. A peaceful, bright future in this beautiful region of the world is certainly possible. I would like to stress again that Turkey will also constructively respond to any positive step aimed at establishing a lasting peace.”

III. Laying the groundwork for the Zangazur Corridor

On October 20, during his meeting with representatives of Zangilan general public,

President Ilham Aliyev said that “recent developments related to the opening of the Zangazur corridor show that we are achieving what we want. Although the Armenian side resisted it initially, they have now agreed to it. Of course, to put it mildly, we have played a role here. Therefore, the issue of opening the highway is being resolved, the issue of the railway is being resolved.” In Zangilan, President Ilham Aliyev first inspected the work done under the smart village project being implemented in the Aghali village, the construction of Zangilan international airport, and the complex of the State Border Service's military unit and attended the groundbreaking ceremony of Zangilan Digital Substation and the opening of the 110/35/10 kV “Zangilan” substation owned by AzerEnergy OJSC.

During the meeting with public representatives in Zangilan District, President Ilham Aliyev made high-profile statements and shed light on some vital issues on the region's agenda. “Recent developments related to the opening of the Zangazur corridor show that we are achieving what we want,” President Ilham Aliyev stressed confidently. President Ilham Aliyev noted that the railway line was currently under construction in Zangilan, as well as the Horadiz-Aghband highway. “A new era is beginning for Zangilan now. The master plan of the city is being prepared. A foreign company has won the bidding, and I think that the master plan will be submitted in the coming months,” the president told a meeting with Zangilan residents. President Ilham Aliyev added that taking into account the natural beauty of the place, a modern and very beautiful city would be built in the area. By the way, the first smart village project on the liberated lands is being implemented in Zangilan District, the president recalled, adding that “some buildings are ready and we

will try to start relocating local residents to Zangilan early next year, perhaps even later this year.” “Thus, a modern logistics and transportation center, cargo planes, passenger planes, railway hub, highways – the entire infrastructure will be built in Zangilan in parallel with the protection of nature, the protection of rivers,” President Ilham Aliyev noted.

Going back to what played a crucial role in regaining the territories lost during the first Karabakh war, the president underscored a series of factors. “We have strengthened our army, strengthened our economy, solidified our international standing and achieved what we wanted, achieved historical justice. We are here with you today. This is my fourth visit to Zangilan,” President Ilham Aliyev said. On a lawsuit Azerbaijan has brought against Armenia and foreign companies involved in illegal exploitation of Zangilan-based gold deposit Vejnali, President Ilham Aliyev said the court proceedings had already started. “The Vejnali gold deposit was illegally exploited by the Armenians together with foreign companies. We have started the process of suing those foreign companies and you will hear about that in the near future. Their attempts to evade this are futile because everything is obvious. They were engaged in illegal work in another country, smuggled gold from here and sold it on world markets. We will bring those who were associated with them to justice,” the president warned.

On October 26, President Ilham Aliyev and President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan participated in the groundbreaking ceremony of the Zangazur corridor-Horadiz-Jabrayil-Zangilan-Aghband highway. Prior to the ceremony, President Ilham Aliyev and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also viewed the construction progress on the Ahmadbayli-Fuzuli-Shusha highway. As

Orkhan Baghirov, a leading advisor at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), noted, “the Zangazur Corridor is a very important project that will change the transportation architecture of the region. After the opening of this corridor, Azerbaijan will be able to restore direct land connection with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (AR) and, through Nakhchivan, with Turkey. This will positively affect the bilateral economic relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey and will accelerate the economic development of the Nakhchivan AR. Compared to the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, which connects Azerbaijan with Turkey through Georgia, the new corridor will be about 340 km shorter. Its proximity to the Karabakh and its connection with other roads in this region will also positively affect the restoration and development of the Karabakh. Along with the development of economic relations with Azerbaijan through this corridor, Turkey will also get a chance to have a direct connection with the Turkic countries of Central Asia. This, in turn, will have a positive impact on the Turkic countries' economic development and integration. By abandoning its aggressive policy and joining the new corridor, Armenia could also end its economic blockade and join regional cooperation.”

At the same time, there is significant opposition to the unblocking of this corridor within Armenia. The Armenian society is not ready to let go of its nationalistic discourse and territorial claims against Azerbaijan and Turkey. There are some anxieties and concerns over the Zangazur corridor in Iran and Georgia, but those anxieties are highly exaggerated and those short-term fears will be offset by tangible longer-term economic benefits. The Zangazur Corridor opens up the possibility for the restoration of the railway connection between Yerevan and Tehran through

Nakhchivan. The launch of this railway line will solve the transportation issues between Yerevan and Tehran and boost their bilateral economic relations. For Moscow, the corridor will offer an alternative road for connecting with the countries of the South Caucasus, Turkey and the Middle East. While Baku, Ankara, and Moscow are the immediate beneficiaries of the launching of the Zangazur Corridor, other regional actors will also inevitably start reaping the fruits of the enhanced connectivity via the corridor in the near future. The new corridor will boost the ability of the wider region to compete with other global transportation and logistics hubs and have impact on the development of the region. The new corridor will also establish new routes within international transportation projects such as the North-South International Transport Corridor and the Middle Corridor, strengthening the significance of the region within the international transportation system.

IV. Building back Karabakh after the liberation

During the three decades long occupation, the Armenian occupational regime razed to the ground entire cities and villages, destroyed and dismantled all the infrastructure, residential and administrative buildings, schools, libraries, hospitals, museums, cultural and religious sites. They were demolished and the materials were sold abroad through the third countries. Despite the obvious difficulties, Azerbaijan is set on to restore and rebuild Karabakh, reviving the life in the liberated lands and transform the region into the most prosperous parts of Azerbaijan. The reconstruction of the liberated lands is a complex, costly and time-consuming process which is being meticulously and systematically

implemented in spite of a number of serious obstacles. On the one hand, the landmines planted by the Armenian occupational regime throughout the region and Yerevan's refusal to hand over accurate landmine maps delay the reconstruction and drastically raise the cost of the whole process. On the other hand, the rebuilding of the cities and villages from scratch requires huge financial commitment – from some initial estimates, more than 10 billion dollars – which will take several years for Baku to deliver. President Ilham Aliyev, in a recent visit to the Karabakh region, noted that Azerbaijan will restore the liberated lands relying solely on its own funds, “without asking anyone, without taking any loans”. Azerbaijan already allocated AZN 2,835 bln. as state-based investments for the restoration of the liberated territories in 2021. These funds are primarily earmarked for the restoration of infrastructure (electricity, gas, water, communications, roads, education, health, etc.), as well as cultural and historical monuments. Azerbaijan is planning to allocate the same amount of funds from the state budget for this purpose in 2022.

On October 20-22, the first exhibition of “Rebuild Karabakh”, dedicated to the restoration and development of the liberated Karabakh, was held in Baku where the products of 279 companies from 17 countries were exhibited. Five national pavilions from Germany, Georgia, Israel, Hungary and Turkey participated in the exhibition. Particular attention was paid to the “green energy” and “smart village” projects, and water facilities. With the existence of 167 precious metal deposits in the Karabakh region, the 7,200 MW of solar and 2,000 MW of wind energy potential per year, and remarkable tourism potential, the liberated territories are attracting some international interest, and promise to become an economic centre of

Azerbaijan in the near future. Over the last year, Azerbaijan has made remarkable progress towards rebuilding. Apart from the Fuzuli International Airport, the opening of which was held with the attendance of Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on 26 October, Azerbaijan has already laid the foundation for two other such airports in the Zangilan and Lachin districts. It is expected that these airports will boost the economy and tourism in the region. Azerbaijan is also constructing highways and railroads to the liberated territories. Along with the local companies, Turkish firms have been involved in road construction. "The Turkish companies are involved in the construction of 372 kilometers of roads, while local companies are constructing the rest of 282 kilometers in the Karabakh region," the Azerbaijani State Agency for Automobile Roads reported in early August, adding that 4,700 workers have been involved in the construction and restoration of the roads in Karabakh.

According to the latest figures, the roads under construction cover up to 800 kilometers connecting various parts of the Karabakh region with the rest of Azerbaijan. One landmark highway project is the Toganaly-Kalbajar-Istisu highway (80.7 km) connecting the Goygol and Kalbajar districts, which passes over the Murovdag ridge at the height of 1,700m to 3,250m. The project includes an 11.6km tunnel for which a ground-breaking ceremony was held in August with the attendance of President Aliyev.

Azerbaijan is also building railways in and towards the liberated territories. The works are underway in the reconstruction of the Barda-Agdam (47.1km) and Horadiz-Agband railway lines (110.4km) and construction of a new Fuzuli-Shusha railway line (83.4km). The

conceptual design of a new railway line connecting the Delimamadli and Kalbajar districts was developed in October 2021. The Horadiz-Agband railway is of special geostrategic importance as it will connect the towns of Horadiz (Fuzuli district) and Agband (Zangilan district). Agband is located in the southwesternmost part of mainland Azerbaijan, at the politically sensitive junction of the borders of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Iran. The Horadiz-Agband railway constitutes a part of a larger project to connect Azerbaijan proper with its exclave, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, via the Syunik region of Armenia – the route which is called "Zangazur corridor" in Azerbaijan.

As Vasif Huseynov, a senior advisor at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (Air Center), pointed out, "these projects will facilitate the quick rehabilitation of the territories where all the infrastructure and communication lines had been destroyed after they region came under Armenian control in the early 1990s. The first group of Azerbaijanis are soon expected to return to the Agali village of the Zangilan district. The village is currently under construction and being rebuilt in accordance with the principles of the "smart village" concept which includes latest technology such as renewable energy and digital services. The elements of the "smart village" and "smart city" concepts are planned to be implemented in the reconstruction of other territories as well. However, for most other regions, longer time will be required to get ready for the resettlement of the former residents. Azerbaijan is hopeful that the rebuilding process will be completed soon and all the IDPs who were expelled from their homeland in the early 1990s will be able to return home."