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BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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I. **Russian missile strike on Azerbaijani passenger plane strains Azerbaijan-Russia relations**

The final days of 2024 brought tragedy to Azerbaijan when Flight J2-8243, operated by Azerbaijan Airlines, crashed near Aktau, Kazakhstan, claiming 38 lives and leaving 29 survivors. The incident, which occurred on December 25, has significantly strained relations between Azerbaijan and Russia after it was revealed that a Russian surface-to-air missile was responsible for the crash.

The Embraer 190 aircraft, carrying 67 passengers including Azerbaijani, Russian, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz nationals, was en route from Baku to Grozny, Chechnya, when the incident occurred. Initial attempts to attribute the crash to a bird strike were quickly discredited when investigators discovered shrapnel marks on the aircraft's wreckage.

The timing of the crash coincided with Ukrainian drone strikes in the North Caucasus region, including Chechnya. A U.S. official suggested that Russian air defense units might have mistaken the commercial airliner for a Ukrainian attack drone. While Khamzat Kadyrov, head of the Chechen Security Council, confirmed a drone attack on Grozny that morning, Russia had not closed its airspace to civilian aircraft—a decision that drew sharp criticism from Azerbaijani officials.

President Ilham Aliyev raised serious concerns about the handling of the emergency. During a December 29 address to local media, he questioned why the damaged aircraft was forced to attempt a risky journey across the Caspian Sea to Aktau rather than being directed to closer airports like Mineralnye Vody or Makhachkala. Russian President Vladimir Putin's explanation that Ukrainian drone attacks prevented landings at closer airports was met with skepticism in Baku.

The response from Chechen officials further inflamed tensions. On December 26, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov awarded his nephew Khamzat Kadyrov a medal "For Services to the Chechen Republic"—the same Khamzat Kadyrov

who had boasted about successfully intercepting all "drones" over Chechnya on the day of the crash. Azerbaijani media strongly condemned this action, pointing out that one of these supposed drones was actually a passenger aircraft carrying 67 people.

President Ilham Aliyev took a firm stance against Russia's initial response, condemning attempts to attribute the incident to bird strikes or gas cylinder explosions as "foolish and dishonest." He outlined four specific demands: a formal apology from Russia, acknowledgment of guilt, punishment of those responsible, and compensation for the Azerbaijani state, injured passengers, and crew members.

While Putin offered an apology "for the fact that the incident happened in Russian airspace," his statement notably avoided accepting blame for the crash. President Ilham Aliyev acknowledged this as fulfilling the first demand but emphasized that Azerbaijan expected more than vague expressions of regret. The Azerbaijani government also rejected an offer of financial assistance from Ramzan Kadyrov, insisting instead on official reparations.

Azerbaijan has pushed for an impartial investigation, forming a team that includes international experts, representatives from Embraer, and officials from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia. Baku rejected Russia's proposal for an investigation by the Interstate Aviation Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, citing concerns about potential bias due to its predominantly Russian composition.

The tragic incident has exposed significant vulnerabilities in Azerbaijan-Russia relations and fueled public resentment against Russia within Azerbaijani society. President Ilham Aliyev noted that immediate transparency and accountability could have mitigated the diplomatic fallout. However, Russia's initial response—characterized by denial and delays—has further eroded trust between the two nations. The handling of the crisis

by Moscow has deepened skepticism in Baku about Russia's reliability as a strategic partner, potentially marking a significant shift in regional dynamics.

II. Azerbaijan refuses to play by great power rules

In a notable shift from traditional power dynamics, Azerbaijan has become an increasingly assertive and independent actor on the global stage. This shift was highlighted in President Ilham Aliyev's response to Russia's handling of an aircraft incident between the two nations in December 2023. President Ilham Aliyev's forthright criticism of Russian statements as "nonsensical" and "absurd" demonstrated Azerbaijan's growing confidence in defending its interests, even against major powers.

As Azerbaijan enters 2025, designated as the Year of Constitution and Sovereignty, the nation marks a historic milestone: for the first time in over two centuries, it stands free of foreign military presence on its soil. This achievement distinguishes Azerbaijan as the only Eastern Partnership country to reach such a significant marker of true independence.

The nation's transformation extends beyond military sovereignty. Leveraging its strategic position at the intersection of vital transportation routes and its substantial energy resources, Azerbaijan has steadily developed its economy beyond oil dependency. This economic diversification has strengthened the country's position as an emerging middle power capable of protecting its interests independently.

However, Western perceptions have not kept pace with Azerbaijan's evolution. Both the United States and European Union often demonstrate outdated views of Azerbaijan as a minor regional player susceptible to external pressure. This disconnect was particularly evident in November 2023, when U.S. Deputy Secretary of State James O'Brien's congressional testimony criticized Azerbaijan's actions in Karabakh, which Baku viewed as a legitimate defense of its sovereignty.

The Biden administration's subsequent decisions, including reinstating Section 907 and opposing regional cooperation initiatives, have contributed to strained relations. In July 2024, President Ilham Aliyev directly addressed these tensions, criticizing Western powers for making what he termed "unrealistic demands" of Azerbaijan.

Contrary to Western speculation about Azerbaijan's alignment with Russia, particularly following the February 2022 declaration on allied interactions with President Vladimir Putin, Azerbaijan has maintained a deliberately balanced foreign policy. This was demonstrated through the signing of a strategic partnership with China in July 2024 and the expansion of similar agreements with ten EU member states, most recently with Slovakia in May 2024. Furthermore, Azerbaijan has positioned itself as a crucial alternative energy supplier for Eastern European nations seeking to reduce their dependence on Russian resources.

President Ilham Aliyev's administration has consistently emphasized that Azerbaijan seeks partnerships based on equality and mutual respect, rather than subordinate relationships with major powers. This stance has sometimes conflicted with Western expectations, as both the U.S. and EU have attempted to influence Azerbaijan's international relationships and domestic policies.

The European Parliament's numerous resolutions criticizing Azerbaijan's governance, including calls to halt energy imports, reflect a condescending approach that has damaged Western-Azerbaijani relations to their lowest point since the Soviet era. While some recognize Azerbaijan's strategic importance, particularly in ensuring European energy security, others persist in viewing the country through an outdated lens.

Azerbaijan's foreign policy demonstrates a sophisticated balance, maintaining allied relations with NATO member Türkiye while developing strategic partnerships with China and strengthening ties with EU member states. This multifaceted approach reinforces Azerbaijan's

commitment to maintaining independence and resisting external pressure.

For Western powers, Azerbaijan's transformation presents an opportunity for reassessment. Rather than treating Azerbaijan as a minor regional player, acknowledging its sovereignty and strategic significance could foster more productive relationships. Building partnerships based on mutual respect would not only advance shared objectives in regional stability and energy security but also create a foundation for more effective long-term cooperation.

III. Historical recording challenges Armenia's commitment to peace

A recently surfaced video from 1993 has raised serious questions about historical intentions and current peace prospects in the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace negotiations. The footage, recorded at the first congress of the "Yerkrpah" Volunteer Union, captures Armenia's first president Levon Ter-Petrosyan making remarkable statements about ethnic cleansing that contrast sharply with his public image as a peace advocate.

The video features Ter-Petrosyan addressing members of Yerkrpah, a volunteer organization established during the First Karabakh War that evolved into an informal branch of the Armenian Armed Forces. In his speech, Ter-Petrosyan celebrated what he termed the resolution of a "600-year-old problem" through the complete removal of other ethnicities from certain territories. He specifically mentioned that maintaining control over regions like Zangezur would have been impossible without such measures.

The significance of Yerkrpah extends to the present day. The organization, whose name translates to "Defender of the Land," remains active with approximately 8,000 volunteers serving at Armenia's borders. As recently as February 2024, its members were involved in attacks on Azerbaijani positions at the interstate border,

demonstrating the group's continued military role in the region.

The leaked footage also captured Vazgen Sargsyan, then head of Yerkrpah and Armenia's Defense Minister, warning against the public release of Ter-Petrosyan's remarks due to potential damage to Armenia's interests. The emergence of this video after 32 years has profound implications for understanding both past negotiations and current peace prospects.

These revelations cast doubt on the sincerity of past peace negotiations. Ter-Petrosyan's private remarks about ethnic cleansing having benefits "for the next 600 years" stand in stark contrast to his public persona as a politician seeking peaceful resolution. This dichotomy raises questions about the genuine intentions behind Armenia's diplomatic overtures during that period.

The current peace process faces similar challenges of credibility. While Azerbaijan has extended an offer for Armenians who left Karabakh in 2023 to return under Azerbaijani citizenship and laws, Armenia has not reciprocated with similar opportunities for Azerbaijanis forcibly expelled from modern-day Armenia. Despite repeated calls for dialogue from representatives of displaced Azerbaijanis, the Armenian government, including current Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, has remained silent on this issue.

Adding to these concerns, revanchist voices within Armenia and its diaspora continue to promote expansionist ideologies. On December 30, 2024, Ara Puluzian, heading the Dashnaktsutyun Central Committee of "Artsakh," articulated ambitions extending beyond Karabakh to include parts of Georgia (referred to as "Javakhk") and eastern Türkiye (termed "Western Armenia"). Such rhetoric, actively supported by organizations like the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), poses significant obstacles to regional stability.

The recent revelations from 1993 illuminate the deep-rooted challenges in achieving lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. They expose not

only the historical motivations behind the conflict but also the persistent influence of these narratives on current politics. Moving forward, addressing these historical grievances openly and fostering genuine dialogue between both nations appears crucial for any meaningful progress in the peace process.

The path to reconciliation requires confronting uncomfortable historical truths while working toward mutual understanding. Without acknowledging past actions and their contemporary implications, the prospects for sustainable peace in the South Caucasus remain uncertain. The leaked video serves as a reminder that true reconciliation demands more than diplomatic gestures—it requires honest engagement with historical realities and a genuine commitment to moving beyond past grievances.

IV. Azerbaijan rejects France's accusations of interference in Overseas Territories

Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has strongly rejected accusations made by French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Noël Barrot regarding alleged Azerbaijani interference in France's overseas territories. The accusations were made during French Senate discussions on January 29, 2025, drawing a sharp response from Baku.

Ay Khan Hajizada, Spokesperson for Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, characterized Barrot's allegations as an attempt to deflect attention from France's handling of indigenous populations in its overseas territories, particularly in New Caledonia. The spokesperson pointed to France's own record of regional interference and attempts to undermine Azerbaijan's peace-building efforts.

The diplomatic exchange has brought attention to the Baku Initiative Group, an NGO that focuses on exposing colonial policies in overseas territories. Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry defended the group's activities, stating that attempts to discredit such

organizations only serve to hinder the decolonization process.

In a pointed criticism of French policies, Hajizada referenced recent events in New Caledonia, where at least 14 people reportedly died and many others were injured in the previous year due to the use of force. The spokesperson suggested that France's accusations against Azerbaijan serve as a distraction from these domestic issues.

The Ministry's statement also addressed France's alleged misuse of its position in international organizations, accusing Paris of attempting to pressure NGOs that speak out against neo-colonial policies. Azerbaijan characterized these efforts as "pointless" and destined to fail.

This latest exchange adds to a series of diplomatic disagreements between Azerbaijan and France, reflecting deeper tensions in the bilateral relations. Previously, Azerbaijan has strongly rejected allegations made by French President Emmanuel Macron during his January 6, 2025, address at the Ambassadors' Conference, where he accused Azerbaijan of interfering in French overseas territories.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Ay Khan Hajizada characterized Macron's statements as "baseless" and "provocative," saying they distort reality and are unacceptable. The response came after Macron claimed Azerbaijan had made "unacceptable interventions" in French overseas territories, particularly in New Caledonia.

In a pointed rebuttal, Hajizada highlighted what he described as France's selective approach to international law. He noted that France had never condemned Armenia's actions against Azerbaijan, including ethnic cleansing policy, mass killings, and crimes against humanity.

Azerbaijan's military actions were conducted solely within its sovereign territory and aimed at ending Armenian occupation, in accordance with international law. France's current stance is undermining regional stability. French statements continue to question Azerbaijan's sovereignty and

encourage Armenian revanchism through extensive militarization. France's failure in its overseas territories reflect its insidious neo-colonial policy. Instead of accusing Azerbaijan's over imaginary "interference" and blaming Baku for its own incompetence, France should focus on addressing the concerns of indigenous populations in its overseas territories and reconsider its approach to international relations in the region.

V. Azerbaijan commemorates Black January: A turning point in national history

Azerbaijan marks January 20 as National Mourning Day, commemorating the tragic events of 1990 when Soviet forces launched a brutal crackdown on civilians in Baku and other cities. This year marks the 35th anniversary of what has become known as "Black January," a pivotal moment that both scarred and strengthened Azerbaijan's path to independence.

On the night of January 19-20, 1990, Soviet military units and special forces unleashed unprecedented violence against peaceful civilians in Baku, Sumgayit, Lankaran, and Neftchala. The military aggression, conducted in violation of international law, claimed 150 civilian lives, left 744 seriously wounded, and 4 people missing. Among the victims were children, women, and elderly citizens, making it one of the most heinous crimes against humanity of the 20th century.

The tragic events unfolded against a backdrop of rising national consciousness in Azerbaijan during the 1980s. The Soviet authorities' discriminatory policies, coupled with Armenia's territorial claims and the forced deportation of Azerbaijanis from present-day Armenia, had fueled a growing independence movement. The Soviet leadership's response to these legitimate aspirations for freedom was brutal force.

Despite Soviet attempts to suppress information about the massacre, National Leader Heydar Aliyev played a crucial role in bringing these atrocities to

international attention in the immediate aftermath. Following Azerbaijan's independence and Heydar Aliyev's return to leadership, the events received proper political and legal assessment. In March 1994, Azerbaijan's Milli Majlis (Parliament) adopted a decisive resolution "On the tragic events committed in Baku on 20 January 1990."

The massacre, though intended to crush the spirit of resistance, instead became a catalyst for change. Black January marked not only a turning point in Azerbaijan's independence struggle but also signaled the beginning of the Soviet Union's inevitable collapse. The Azerbaijani people's unity and determination in the face of this tragedy laid the groundwork for future victories.

This spirit of resilience manifested itself most recently in the 44-day Patriotic War and subsequent counter-terror measures in September 2023. Today, as Azerbaijan commemorates this solemn anniversary, the nation remembers both the profound sadness of the loss and the pride in the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. The events of Black January, while tragic, demonstrated the unbreakable will of the Azerbaijani people and their commitment to national freedom—a commitment that continues to shape the nation's path forward.

VI. Azerbaijan details evidence of systematic deportations of Azerbaijanis from Armenia

Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has strongly refuted claims made by Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan regarding the Western Azerbaijan Community and the historical deportation of Azerbaijanis from present-day Armenia. The response came following Mirzoyan's press conference statements on January 8, 2025, which Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Aykhan Hajizada characterized as a "falsification of history."

In a detailed rebuttal, Hajizada outlined the systematic displacement of Azerbaijanis from their historical lands over the past two centuries, coinciding with the mass relocation of Armenians to the South Caucasus. The statement detailed several waves of forced deportations, including the expulsion of approximately 150,000 Azerbaijanis between 1948 and 1953, followed by another mass deportation of over 250,000 people from 1987 to 1991.

The Ministry particularly challenged Mirzoyan's assertion that compensations were paid and departures were voluntary during the last deportation. Hajizada pointed to the deaths of 216 Azerbaijanis during the 1987-1991 ethnic cleansing as evidence of the violent nature of these expulsions. The statement also highlighted the destruction of thousands of historical and cultural monuments and the alteration of more than 2,000 toponyms in what Azerbaijan considers a systematic erasure of Azerbaijani heritage.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected Armenian characterizations of the term "Western Azerbaijan Community" as a violation of international law or a territorial claim. Minister Mirzoyan's denial of Azerbaijanis' right to return to their lands reveals an ongoing policy of Armenianization and systematic prevention of Azerbaijani return.

The statement referenced recent revelations about former Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan's views, who had described the removal of Azerbaijanis as "the solution to a 600-year-old problem," which shows a consistent racist-chauvinist national ideology in Armenian leadership.

Hajizada also addressed Armenia's invocation of international law, pointing to recent history where Armenian forces remained in Azerbaijani territories after the 2020 war and impeded reintegration processes. The spokesperson emphasized that Armenia's commitment to peaceful coexistence could only be demonstrated through practical steps, specifically by creating

conditions for the Western Azerbaijan Community members to return to their historical lands.

The Ministry called on Armenia to engage in dialogue with the Western Azerbaijan Community regarding their peaceful, dignified, and safe return, suggesting this would be a concrete indicator that Armenia has abandoned concepts of ethnic incompatibility and its status as a monoethnic state based on ethnic cleansing.