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# BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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## **I. Azerbaijan marks the 31st anniversary of Khojaly genocide**

On February 26, Azerbaijan marked the 31st anniversary of the systematic mass killing of Azerbaijani civilians by Armenian troops in Khojaly town of Karabakh. This tragic event, which occurred on the night of 25-26 February 1992, is considered one of the bloodiest and most devastating in the history of Azerbaijan. During the incident, Armenian troops, assisted by the Soviet Union's Khankandi-based 366th Guards Motor Rifle Regiment, forcefully expelled 5379 inhabitants of the town and massacred 613 people, including 106 women, 63 children, and 70 elders, who were tortured and brutally killed. Additionally, 1275 people were taken hostage and subjected to unspeakable torture, and the fate of 197 of them, including 68 women and 26 children, remains unknown. This massacre resulted in 487 injuries, including 76 children. The actions of the Armenian armed forces had a devastating impact on families, resulting in the loss of lives and tearing families apart. As a result of the Khojaly genocide, 8 families were completely destroyed, leaving no survivors. Additionally, 130 children were left without one parent and 25 children lost both parents, leading to a lifetime of pain and trauma for the survivors. All these innocent people were slaughtered, tortured, and disabled simply because they were Azerbaijanis. It was a meticulously planned campaign with the aim of wiping out the entire Azerbaijani population of Karabakh. As part of Armenia's occupation policy, a premeditated plan was executed that involved the killing of Azerbaijanis with special cruelty in settlements such as Baganis Ayrim, Garadagli, Meshali, Karkijahan, Malibeyli, and Garadaghli prior to the Khojaly genocide.

The Khojaly Genocide was meticulously documented by journalists and later reported by international human rights organizations, including the Human Rights Watch, which described the mass killing as “the largest massacre to date in the conflict” between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The occupation of Karabakh by Armenia, involving unfathomable atrocities, gratuitous violence systemic destruction of cultural heritage, places of worship, followed by campaigns of ethnic cleansing. The Armenian leaders, having realized that more than 700000 people based in this region would not be easily persuaded to flee and leave their homes to Armenia, decided to force them into it. This caught the Azerbaijanis off-guard, as they did not expect cruelty, let aside violence, from their Armenian neighbors, with whom they had lived side-by-side in friendships and often kinships for many centuries. Serzh Sargsyan, Armenia’s President in 2008-2018, once admitted that this belief of the Azerbaijani people was the very reason, why the slaughter of Azerbaijanis in Khojaly happened. Sargsyan, who was the commander of breakaway Nagorno Karabakh’s military forces in 1992, told Thomas de-Wall, current senior associate of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in an interview dated December 2000, when Sargsyan was Armenia’s defense minister, that “before Khojaly, the Azerbaijanis thought that they were joking with us, they thought that the Armenians were people who could not raise their hand against the civilian population. We needed to put a stop to all that. And that’s what happened.” The occupation of Khojaly, a strategically critical part of Karabakh and the town that hosted the only airport of the region, was a key step in Armenia’s objective to seize the control over the region. This region remained under Armenian control for around

three decades until the 44-Day War which both ended the occupation and opened new horizons for the re-establishment of peace between the two countries.

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hosted the only airport in the region, was a key step in Armenia's objective to seize control over the region. This region remained under Armenian control for around three decades until the 44-Day War, which ended the occupation and opened new horizons for the re-establishment of peace between the two countries.

After the conclusion of the 44-day war, Azerbaijan's victory and the liberation of occupied territories, the significance of the Khojaly tragedy has been renewed. The mass murder, recognized as a genocidal act by an increasing number of states and world parliaments, has resulted in the adoption of several resolutions and decisions condemning the massacre of civilians in Khojaly and characterizing it as a crime against humanity and an act of genocide. To date, the national legislative bodies of 18 countries, as well as 24 US states, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Organization of Turkic States, have passed resolutions condemning the atrocities. In a significant judgment on April 22, 2010, the European Court of Human Rights concluded that the crimes committed in Khojaly were "acts of particular gravity which may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity."

As Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed out in its statement on the occasion of the 31th anniversary of the Khojaly genocide, "The Khojaly genocide, the indiscriminate killing of the civilian population, was part of the policy of ethnic hatred, racial discrimination and systematic violence carried out by Armenia against Azerbaijan for many years at the state level. The Khojaly genocide and other crimes committed by Armenia during its aggression against the Republic of Azerbaijan, including war crimes and crimes against humanity,

constitute serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. These include violations of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and others.”

The Khojaly genocide is widely recognized as the defining moment of this conflict, akin to the Holocaust in its scale and horror. It serves as a stark reminder of why both nations must seize the opportunity for peace and reconciliation offered by the trilateral statement of November 10, 2020, in order to prevent similar tragedies from happening in the future. Despite this, Armenia has yet to renounce its aggressive policy towards Azerbaijan and embrace peaceful co-existence in the region. During the 44-Day War, Armenia deliberately targeted the civilian population and infrastructure of Azerbaijani cities such as Ganja, Barda, and Terter, which were located far from the war zone. These attacks showed that Armenia was resorting to the same terror tactics used in the Khojaly genocide in 1992. This time, however, Armenia unlawfully targeted and killed peaceful Azerbaijani civilians using multiple launch rocket systems and cluster munitions.

As Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan underscored, “The Republic of Azerbaijan believes that continuous measures taken at the national level as well as under international law, will serve to end impunity and bring to justice those responsible for serious crimes committed during Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan. There have to be a legal assessment on the Khojaly genocide

and those who committed this terrible tragedy should receive its proper punishment.”

## **II. President Ilham Aliyev attends the Munich Security Conference**

On February 17, President Ilham Aliyev arrived in Germany to attend the 59th Munich Security Conference. On February 18, a joint meeting of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan was held at the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference. Following the joint meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by TV channels in Munich. Commenting on the meeting, President Ilham Aliyev noted that the meeting went well. “I think it was constructive. Many issues were discussed, including the signing of the peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the existence of the necessary conditions for the signing of the agreement. Of course, I reiterated my position. The critical thing is that this peace agreement should be based on international norms and principles. Any provision about Karabakh is unacceptable. Azerbaijan’s position in this respect has been communicated. Three days ago, we received new responses to our proposals from Armenia, and we are elaborating on them now,” President Ilham Aliyev noted. “At first glance, there is progress in Armenia's position, but more is needed. So this is the primary issue discussed. Of course, the situation on the Lachin-Khankendi road was also addressed. I reiterated Azerbaijan's position that there is no question of any blockade. More than 2,500 trucks and Red Cross vehicles have passed along the road

since December 12, and if there had been a blockade, how could these vehicles have crossed through? In other words, this is an unfounded accusation against Azerbaijan, we are rejecting it, and this position was met with understanding in all the meetings I have had. The European Union understands our position as well,” President Ilham Aliyev added.

Regarding the protests by the eco-activist on the Lachin road, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “We rightfully demand that the illegal exploitation of our fields be stopped, and until this is achieved, I am sure that our social activists will not give up their honorable mission. I have tried to communicate this message as well today.”

President Ilham Aliyev also emphasized the importance of establishing checkpoints at the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia. “It would be good if Armenia and Azerbaijan established checkpoints on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border bilaterally. We made this suggestion before and repeated it officially today. Previously, this proposal was conveyed through informal channels, and Armenia did not articulate any stance in response. They may require additional time to consider the matter,” President Ilham Aliyev stated, adding that “our initial impression is that Europe and America view this proposal as logical. This is an essential factor in normalizing relations between the two countries. Because if we are talking about border delimitation, it is only possible to achieve with checkpoints. Suppose we are talking about the opening of communications, of course. In that case, checkpoints should be established at both ends of the Zangezur corridor and the border between the Lachin district and Armenia. Today, at the meeting held with the participation of Secretary of State Blinken, I

officially put forward this as a proposal. We will wait for a response from Armenia.”

At the Munich Security Conference, President Ilham Aliyev also attended a plenary session on “Moving Mountains? Building Security in the South Caucasus”. Moderated by Chairman of the Munich Security Conference Christoph Heusgen, the plenary session was also attended by Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili, Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and OSCE Secretary General, Deputy President of the Foundation Council of the Munich Security Conference Helga Maria Schmid.

Commenting on the impact of the war in Ukraine on Azerbaijan, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “the general geopolitical situation has changed entirely and probably will not go back to the time before Russia-Ukraine War. So, we can see some disadvantages concerning trade cooperation with traditional partners. At the same time, some advantages, especially concerning connectivity projects. Azerbaijan has invested in creating modern transportation, logistics, and infrastructure for many years. And now, diverting cargo transportation from Central Asia across Azerbaijan to Europe creates additional opportunities. But you know we had our war two years ago, which lasted 44 days. And we know what war is. We know what kind of devastation and suffering it brings to the people. Therefore, we, of course, want peace to be established in Eurasia. And I think Azerbaijan and Armenia must demonstrate that the transition from the long-lasting stand of mutual hatred and hostility must end. We are now working on a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Hopefully, we will conclude it sooner or later. And that could be an excellent example of how

countries with serious historical disagreements can get together and turn the page of hostility.”

President Ilham Aliyev also noted that “as far as we understand in our communications with our American partners and partners from European Union, and also, as far as I understood from today’s trilateral meeting with Prime Minister Pashinyan, which Secretary Blinken organized, we have a common understanding that there should be a two-track approach to the situation in the region. First, the Azerbaijan-Armenia peace talks track. Second, Azerbaijan’s communications with the Armenian population in Karabakh,” adding that “this two-track solution separates our talks with Armenia from our internal issues like our communications with Armenians in Karabakh. And also, it was agreed with our international partners that there would be discussions on the rights and securities of the Armenian minority in Karabakh. And we are ready to do it. But with those representatives of the Armenian community who lived, were born, and lived in Karabakh throughout their life. But not with the person who was exported from Russia to have the leading position in Karabakh. Maybe export is not the right word. I prefer the word “smuggled into.” Because nobody knows how he emerged in Karabakh and how he is trying and achieving to go back to Yerevan and from there to Moscow, then back to Yerevan and then to Karabakh. This fact alone demonstrates that there is no blockade.”

Commenting on the unfounded allegations of blockade on the Lachin Road, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that “from 12th December until today, when our activists from civil society came to the checkpoint, there have

been more than 2,500 vehicles, including tracks of Russian peacekeepers and representatives of the Red Cross. Red Cross took almost 100 medical patients from Karabakh to Armenia for treatment. So, how can we call it a blockade when there is an open road? And if Armenians in Karabakh try to use this road, no one will stop them.”

President Ilham Aliyev also drew attention of the public to the fact that although Armenia kept systematically violating international law for 30 years, no sanctions were imposed on Yerevan. “Armenia occupied twenty percent of Azerbaijan’s territory, violated international law, and did not comply with UN Security Council resolutions for 27 years. And no sanctions were imposed on them. And we always asked for sanctions on Armenia to be imposed to avoid the war. We were waiting for Minsk Group to deliver the result. We were waiting for the Security Council of the United Nations to respect their resolutions. But we thought there was no movement, and there is a common understanding that this conflict is frozen. So, we proved that it is not frozen. We had to fight. We had to sacrifice 3,000 lives to restore our dignity, territorial integrity and justice and implement UN Security Council resolutions. Therefore, we cannot take out of the context today’s situation in Karabakh or our communications with the Armenian community there and forget about the thirty years of occupation, forget about that the territory equal to the territory of Lebanon is totally in ruins, and that was done not by aliens. That was done by our neighbors who came, occupied our land, made a million Azerbaijanis homeless, destroyed 65 out of 67 mosques, and desecrated them. And then, when we kick them out, they now plea for justice. They accuse us of occupation - those who occupied us for 30 years. And one thing

also should not be forgotten - the trilateral declaration of November 2020, which the Prime Minister referred to, de-facto, was the capitulation act by Armenia. We fought the war. And the results of the war have been accepted by the international community and Armenian society. And the best indicator was the new mandate the Armenian population gave to Prime Minister. That was the mandate for peace. Therefore, we need to look to the future. And I think today, as we discussed just before the session, is a historical day if we look to the future. Because for the first time, three leaders get together as independent countries. There were cases like that during the Soviet times. And we should not miss this opportunity," President Ilham Aliyev emphasized, adding that "Karabakh Armenians are Azerbaijani citizens, are minority. Azerbaijan is a multi-ethnic country. And all minorities in Azerbaijan enjoy the same rights and privileges, including cultural, linguistic, and other and also security. And we are ready to start practical communications with representatives of the Armenian community in Karabakh. And today, in front of Secretary Blinken, I told my Armenian colleague about that. But we can do it only when the Russian citizen-criminal oligarch, a person involved in money laundering in Europe, Vardanyan, is out of our territory."

President Ilham Aliyev also pointed out that the word "Nagorno-Karabakh" was obsolete. "This is the Russian word. "Nagorno" means mountainous. And in Azerbaijan, there is no such administrative unit like Nagorno-Karabakh. Therefore, I ask our partners to respect Azerbaijan's sovereignty and constitution. There is a Karabakh region of Azerbaijan with an Armenian population," President Ilham Aliyev noted.

It is worth mentioning that the Armenian side rejected the proposal regarding the establishment of the border checkpoints. Commenting on the Armenian sides distortions and manipulations of the peace negotiations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan noted that "the assessment of the proposal by the Azerbaijani side to establish a border checkpoint in order to prevent the abuse of the Lachin road regarding the exploitation of Azerbaijan's natural resources, the illegal rotation of the Armenian armed forces, the transportation of mines and ammunition, the illegal entry of third country nationals to Azerbaijan, once again demonstrates that Armenia is not interested in ensuring transparency on the Lachin road."

"The Armenian side's rejection of the proposal regarding the border checkpoint that would stop the illegal use of the Lachin road, which was intended only for humanitarian purposes, once again shows that the true intention of the Armenian side is to continue using the road for illegal purposes contrary to the trilateral statement of November 10, 2020, by repeating statements that the protests led to a "blockade" and a "tense humanitarian situation." This once again proves that, in fact, the claims that the protest on the Lachin road created a "humanitarian situation" have no basis, and Armenia uses this claim only for its political purposes," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs added.

"As to the international mechanism regarding the rights and security of Armenian residents living in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, as well as Armenia's claims on the issue of dialogue with Armenian residents, we would like to note that, as clearly stated in the Munich negotiations, the rights and security of residents of Armenian origin living in the

region will be ensured in accordance with the Constitution and legislative acts of Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani side also declared that it is ready to conduct a dialogue with representatives who have the right to represent Armenian residents, and not with those who arrive in the Karabakh region from outside and represent themselves as representatives of Armenian residents," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized, adding that "in accordance with the norms and principles of international law, as well as the Prague and Sochi agreements, in which countries mutually recognize each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, Armenia should not interfere in the internal affairs of Azerbaijan and renounce its territorial claims."

### **III. Baku hosts the 9th Ministerial meeting of the Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council and the 1st Green Energy Advisory Council**

On February 3rd, the 9th Ministerial meeting of the Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council and the inaugural Green Energy Advisory Council meeting took place in Baku. The meeting reaffirmed the strategic energy partnership between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the European Union, which aims to achieve long-term energy security, sustainability, supply diversification, and cooperation on the energy transition agenda.

The co-chairs of the meeting welcomed the full-scale operation of the Southern Gas Corridor and its contribution to ensuring a reliable, competitive, and affordable energy supply from Azerbaijan to Europe. The successful commissioning of the Greece-Bulgaria Interconnector was also acknowledged as an important development

that will support the diversification of energy supplies in Europe. The co-chairs expressed their support for the expansion of the Southern Gas Corridor as it could potentially offer a new energy supply source for other markets. They also recognized the importance of reducing methane emissions across supply chains.

The first Green Energy Advisory Council Ministerial meeting provided an excellent opportunity for partner countries, financial institutions, and companies to engage in productive discussions on expanding cooperation on the green agenda. This platform will help create international green energy linkages, enabling Azerbaijan to become a green energy supplier for European markets.

The signing of the "Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic Partnership in the Field of Energy between the European Union represented by the European Commission and the Republic of Azerbaijan" in Baku on July 18, 2022, and the expansion of cooperation in energy transition, renewable energy, energy efficiency, and renewable hydrogen will pave the way for new opportunities to enhance the partnership. Furthermore, the "Agreement on strategic partnership in the field of green energy development and transmission between the governments of the Republic Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Hungary" signed in Bucharest on December 17, 2022, is also of great significance.

Speaking at the meeting, President Ilham Aliyev noted that "there were several important milestones last year that demonstrated our joint commitment to energy security. First of all, I'd like to mention the important document, which was signed here in

Baku between the President of the European Commission, Madame Ursula von der Leyen and myself on strategic partnership in the field of energy which was signed last July and which actually is a clear roadmap for our future plans. So, we plan by 2027 to double our gas export to Europe, and this is doable because we have resources. We have a mutual political will, and we have a very high level of mutual trust. So, one of the important factors in the successful implementation of the Southern Gas Corridor project, apart from technical and sometimes political issues to be resolved, is the high level of mutual trust, and I would even call it mutual solidarity. When we immediately see someone in need, we try to support them. I think this is a good spirit of partnership and should be a guide for us in our future endeavors. Especially now, when along with the Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council, we will have today the first Advisory Council on green energy.”

President Ilham Aliyev added that “another important milestone was the inauguration of the Interconnector between Greece and Bulgaria, which of course, was generated by the Southern Gas Corridor project and is, to a certain degree, its extension, which allowed us to start supplying natural gas to Bulgaria and also consider expansion through that extension, through that interconnector to the neighboring countries. Of course, December was a remarkable month for energy security because of two important events. First, the signing of an agreement between Azerbaijan and Romania on gas supply, and gas supply will start soon. So, Romania joins the team of countries as part of the Southern Gas Corridor. And also, the signing of an agreement on green energy development and transmission between Azerbaijan, Georgia, Hungary and Romania will create additional synergy for our efforts and will actually open a new chapter in

energy security. So, these were important milestones.”

“If we talk about this year, this January, we signed the MoU between Azerbaijan and Hungary on gas supplies. So, this even expands the number of countries and team members. And all that is due to, first, the close political relationship between the countries involved. Active coordination and efficient chairmanship by the European Commission and Azerbaijan of our efforts, and also, is a reflection of the energy dialogue, which has started and was formalized between the European Union and Azerbaijan, which embraces natural gas, electricity, hydrogen, and green hydrogen. I think this is a very unique and very efficient format for our cooperation,” President Ilham Aliyev underscored.

“As soon as the MOU with the European Commission on increasing gas supply to Europe was signed, we started in Azerbaijan to work actively to look for additional opportunities to supply more gas. Now, apart from expected production from new fields, which we expect, for instance, this year, and an increase of production from the existing Shahdeniz field, which definitely is the case, we also work on energy efficiency domestically. We are working on a program for the reduction of losses. We are working on a program combining our domestic needs with respect to electric energy and natural gas to save more gas, which we are using now to generate electricity in Azerbaijan for export,” President Ilham Aliyev added.

“Today, in Azerbaijan, together with our investors, Masdar and ACWA power, we jointly implement two investment projects of solar and wind power generation of a total of 470 megawatts. One project, which is already in the pipeline with bp, will be implemented in

the liberated territories of Jabrayil district - 240 megawatts. There will be a total of 710. And if everything goes according to our plans, within one year, one year and a half, we will have this capacity, and that will save hundreds of millions of cubic meters of natural gas for export. With respect to the plans for renewables, apart from what I already said, only with three major energy companies, we have agreed and signed MoU and agreements to produce up to 25 gigawatts of renewable energy offshore and onshore, solar and wind. Masdar 10, Fortescue 12 and ACWA power today will be a ceremony 2.5 additional to what has already been signed and being implemented. So, this is really huge potential. Therefore, when we are talking about Black Sea cable, we need to plan it in stages and also coordinate it with demand in Europe. And, of course, to see a broad picture of our potential cooperation in the European continent. Because I'm sure that Romania and Hungary will not be the final destination for green energy. The potential of Azerbaijan's green energy also is available. It has already been confirmed. Only offshore wind potential is 157 gigawatts, onshore wind and solar 27, and up to 10 gigawatts of the potential of wind and solar we have in the territories we liberated more than two years ago as a result of the Patriotic War. And also, we have discovered the big potential in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, and now we are negotiating to evaluate the opportunity to build a 500-megawatt solar power station. And I think there'll be even more capacity. So, this is what we have," President Ilham Aliyev pointed out.

#### **IV. Azerbaijan files arbitration case against Armenia**

On 27 February 2023, Azerbaijan initiated an inter-state arbitration against Armenia under The Energy Charter Treaty (ECT). A Notice of Arbitration was served on Armenia, in which Azerbaijan seeks redress and financial compensation for Armenia's violation of Azerbaijan's sovereign rights over its energy resources during Armenia's illegal occupation of Azerbaijan's territory from 1991 to 2020. Armenia breached multiple provisions of the ECT and fundamental principles of international law by denying Azerbaijan access to its energy resources in the Karabakh region through military force, exploiting Azerbaijan's energy resources for Armenia's benefit, and preventing Azerbaijan from further developing its energy resources in accordance with its national energy policy and environmental commitments. A significant aspect of Azerbaijan's inter-state ECT claims against Armenia is the latter's unlawful exploitation of the Karabakh region's abundant hydropower resources. The Karabakh region has 25% of Azerbaijan's internal water resources, making it an optimal location for hydroelectric power leverage.

The Tartar hydro-electricity plant (Tartar HEP) on the Sarsang reservoir of the Tartar River is one of the significant hydropower assets illegally exploited by Armenia. In 1994, as part of its armed aggression against Azerbaijan's sovereign territory, Armenia captured the Sarsang reservoir and Tartar HEP. Armenia also constructed at least 37 unauthorized hydropower facilities on Azerbaijan's sovereign territory during the occupation. Besides the Tartar HEP, the output of these additional unauthorized facilities was expressly designated "an avenue of export" to

Armenia. To support its illegal exploitation of Azerbaijan's hydropower, Armenia established a "whole unified system" of electricity distribution from the formerly occupied territories to Armenia, regulated the "daily volume of electricity production" from Armenia, and granted licenses to energy companies to operate the existing facilities in the region. During the occupation, Armenia also extracted coal from the Chardagly mine in Azerbaijan's Tartar district to use it in the Yerevan thermal power plant in Armenia. Armenia eventually constructed additional energy infrastructure on Azerbaijan's territory to facilitate its illegal exploitation of Azerbaijan's hydropower and coal resources. For instance, Armenia funded the construction of a new coal-transport highway, which was described as a "direct lifeline" between Armenia and the occupied territories and would play an "instrumental role" in Armenia's security.

As a result of the occupation, Armenia also caused damage to the existing energy transit infrastructure, including the natural gas pipeline that connects Yevlakh to the Nakhchivan exclave of Azerbaijan. Therefore, Azerbaijan could not provide natural gas services to Nakhchivan. As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan noted in its statement: "This arbitration case is an effort to secure justice and reparations for nearly 30 years of illegal exploitation and expropriation of Azerbaijan's energy resources by Armenia, on Azerbaijan's internationally recognized sovereign territory."

#### **V. Azerbaijan releases a detailed account of the terrorist attack on its Embassy in Iran**

On January 27 of this year, a heinous terrorist attack was carried out on the Embassy of the

Republic of Azerbaijan in the Islamic Republic of Iran, resulting in the death of the head of the embassy's security service, Orkhan Asgarov, and serious injuries to two staff members, Vasif Taghiyev and Mahir Imanov. The embassy's surveillance cameras recorded the terror attack in detail. A detailed account of the terrorist attack was made public by the Government of Azerbaijan on February 7th.

On January 27, 2023, the terrorist responsible for the attack on the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Islamic Republic of Iran drove past the embassy twice before choosing a suitable moment for the attack - at 08:05 and 08:24.

At 08:32, as embassy staff members entered the administrative building through the main entrance, the terrorist crashed his vehicle at high speed into an embassy service vehicle parked in front of the building. He then took an automatic rifle from his car, gestured to the Iranian police officer posted at the entrance, and entered the building while firing.

The terrorist fired multiple shots at embassy staff inside the administrative building for four minutes until 08:36, during which time Orkhan Asgarov, the head of the embassy's security service, was killed, and Mahir Imanov was seriously wounded in his right arm and left leg. Vasif Taghiyev engaged the terrorist in hand-to-hand combat to neutralize him and was wounded in the shoulder by the terrorist's rifle. However, he was able to remove the magazine from the rifle. The terrorist then pulled out a pistol and fired, hitting V. Taghiyev in the chin. Despite his injury, V. Taghiyev managed to push the terrorist out of the embassy building.

At 08:34, two minutes after the terrorist entered the embassy, an Iranian police vehicle

arrived at the scene. However, after a brief conversation with a police officer posted at the entrance, it left the area. The entire attack was recorded in detail by the embassy's surveillance cameras. Later, during the inspection of the embassy's territory, a "Colt" type pistol that was dropped by the terrorist was found.

The Iranian police officer posted at the entrance failed to intervene during the attack despite the terrorist's forceful entry into the Embassy, the sound of gunshots, and V. Taghiyev's call for help to neutralize the terrorist. The police officer even abandoned his post and left the area.

After being pushed out of the Embassy, the terrorist reloaded his rifle with a spare magazine from his jacket, gestured to someone twice, and fired continuously at the Embassy entrance and the windows of the apartments where diplomats' family members reside. He also attempted to burn the Embassy vehicle twice using a combustible substance he brought with him.

When the terrorist realized that he couldn't open the strong entrance door with rifle fire, he used a heavy mallet taken from the trunk of his car to try to break it down. He then re-entered the Embassy with the intent to kill diplomats and their family members. V. Taghiyev threw a fire extinguisher at the terrorist while he was firing his weapon and trying to get up to the second floor of the Embassy, injuring him in the head (which was not captured by the surveillance cameras), and forcing him to leave the building.

After stepping onto the street, the terrorist gestured towards some individuals standing in the distance and put down his rifle. Despite this, the police did not approach him, and

taking advantage of their lack of intervention, the terrorist retrieved a "Molotov cocktail" from his vehicle and attempted to set ablaze the embassy vehicles parked in front of the building. However, the police intervened promptly as the terrorist accidentally set himself on fire.

Initially, the police did not take immediate action to arrest the terrorist and instead engaged in a conversation with him without treating him as a criminal. During this time, the terrorist roamed the area, threatening and insulting the embassy diplomats. The police still did not react. The terrorist then retrieved a mallet from the Embassy building's door and placed it in his vehicle.

Later, the terrorist demanded that V. Taghiyev come down from the embassy window, and when he did, the terrorist threatened him and attempted to attack him. The police only apprehended the terrorist after this incident, handcuffing him and taking him away in a car. Subsequently, an unknown person wearing a mask took unidentified items from the terrorist's car and left the area.

It should be noted that there have been inaccuracies in the chronology of events circulating on social media and other media platforms. The primary reason for this is the incorrect timing displayed in the video footage due to technical factors. The Embassy's street cameras show a time that is 24 minutes earlier than real-time.

As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted in its statement regarding the attack, "The facts that the terrorist chose Friday, which non-working day in Iran to commit the attack (to minimize the circumstances that could interfere with the terror act), that he brought with him to the scene an automatic rifle and a full spare

magazine, a "Colt" type pistol, a "Molotov cocktail", a heavy mallet and other means, the fact that the Iranian police did not intervene in the terror act gives grounds for presuming that the incident was planned in advance."

The Iranian police's indifferent response to the violence and their passive stance towards the attacker, coupled with the attacker's mysterious communication with others in the area, raises doubts about the Iranian government's claim that the assailant acted solely on personal motives. The police officers who arrived at the embassy in a car shockingly fled the area after a brief conversation with an Iranian police officer who was supposedly "guarding" the embassy. This left the unarmed Azerbaijani security officer to confront the attacker who was armed with multiple weapons, posing a significant threat not only to embassy personnel but also their families residing in the same building. It is worth noting that similar assaults have occurred in the recent past against diplomatic missions in Tehran during times of strained international relations between Iran and the respective countries, such as the British embassy in 2011 and the Saudi Arabian embassy in 2016. These incidents have exacerbated tensions between Azerbaijan and Iran, sparking concerns of further deterioration in their already strained relationship since the 44-Day War.

Moreover, on January 27th, documents were submitted to various international organizations and platforms calling for condemnation of the terrorist attack on the Embassy of Azerbaijan in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the identification and punishment of the perpetrators in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

It is worth noting that approximately 100 countries and several international organizations' secretariats have condemned the attack on Azerbaijan's embassy and emphasized the importance of holding those responsible accountable since the attack took place.

Iran has attempted to prevent widespread exposure of the attack in international organizations where decisions are consensus-based and where it is a member. Therefore, Iran objected to the draft communiqués and statements submitted by Azerbaijan to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) immediately after the attack.

"We condemn this provocative step of Iran and state that it must comply with its international obligations. Azerbaijan will use all relevant international platforms to widely condemn the terror act against its Embassy and punish the perpetrators of the said act," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan noted in its statement.

Furthermore, Iran has sought support from numerous countries for its position in these organizations, but only Syria and India supported Iran's position among the 120 countries in the Non-Aligned Movement. These three countries opposed the adoption of the aforementioned documents, claiming that terror attacks in individual countries were not previously condemned in the Non-Aligned Movement, and bilateral issues between these countries should not be brought to international platforms such as the Non-Aligned Movement. However, the Non-Aligned Movement has condemned numerous terror attacks in its member states and stressed the

importance of protecting diplomatic missions in the past.

The crisis at hand can be traced back to the outcomes of the 44-Day War, which took Iran by surprise. Since the war ended, several developments, such as the strengthening security alliance between Azerbaijan and Turkey, the growing relationship between Azerbaijan and Israel, and plans for the Zangazur corridor project, have raised concerns among Iranian officials. Tehran's response to the situation has been multifaceted, including military exercises along the Azerbaijani border, military aid to Armenia and Armenian separatist forces in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, and intensified anti-Azerbaijani propaganda in Iranian media and narratives of some Iranian officials.

Baku was suspicious when the Iranian army's military exercises involved pontoon bridges to cross the river that forms the natural border between Azerbaijan and Iran in most sections of the interstate border. Iranian experts and security officials have openly threatened that Iran could take over Azerbaijan if its government ignores Iran's concerns and interests in the South Caucasus. They have questioned Azerbaijan's independence and ethnic identity, claiming that Azerbaijan was historically part of Iran and should return to Iranian control.

In December, Azerbaijani media reported that Iran had been providing Armenia with military aid free of charge, with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) reportedly supplying Armenia with 500 Dehlabieh anti-tank missiles and 100 Almas systems in October. This transfer of arms occurred amid military drills by Iran along its border with Azerbaijan for the second time since the 44-Day War ended. Azerbaijani media also

presented evidence that Iran was sending military personnel to support Armenian separatist forces in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, violating the Lachin road that was meant to be used by Armenians only for humanitarian purposes under the trilateral statement of November 2020.

In light of the aforementioned threats and propaganda against Azerbaijan, it is justifiable for Baku to connect the embassy attack with these actions. In response to the potential for further violence, Azerbaijan evacuated its embassy in Tehran immediately after the attack and rejected Iran's claim that the attack was only motivated by personal reasons. As a result, the bilateral relationship between the two countries has reached an all-time low, and the possibility of further deterioration remains high since Tehran has yet to renounce its claims against Azerbaijan. This poses a significant threat to regional peace and security for several reasons. Most notably, the current state of bilateral relations, coupled with anti-Azerbaijani sentiments disseminated by the Iranian media, creates a tenuous situation that could quickly escalate with even the slightest provocation.

Commenting on the terrorist attack during the interview at the Munich Security Conference, President Ilham Aliyev underscored that "we demand an immediate and transparent investigation. The terrorist being interviewed by Iranian media shortly after the act of terror indicates him being dispatched by a particular sector of the Iranian establishment. Additionally, the sudden announcement of his mental disability only two days later raises suspicion as to how this diagnosis was made so expeditiously. That is an attempt to shield him from justice. Therefore, the Iranian government must have a transparent

investigation. We must be informed, and the terrorist must be punished. Still, most importantly, those behind the terrorist, those representatives of the Iranian establishment, who perpetrated this brutal act against Azerbaijan, must be brought to justice. It is only then that we can talk about any normalization.”

## **VI. Azerbaijan reacts to ICJ decision**

On February 22, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered its Orders on the requests for the indication of provisional measures in the cases Azerbaijan v. Armenia and Armenia v. Azerbaijan. Commenting on the ICJ’s decisions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan noted that “we welcome the Court’s recognition that Armenia is still under an obligation to refrain from aggravating the parties’ dispute, per the Court’s prior order of 7 December 2021. The Court’s decision not to revisit its prior conclusion that Armenia’s placement of landmines does not meet the requirements for the issuance of provisional measures is not a decision on the merits, and Azerbaijan will continue to seek to hold Armenia to account. Azerbaijan also welcomes the Court’s rejection of Armenia’s requested measures requiring Azerbaijan to cease its alleged “orchestration and support” of the protests and “immediately

restore...the provision of natural gas and other public utilities” to Garabagh. In its Order, the Court took note of Azerbaijan’s representation that Azerbaijan has and undertakes to continue to take all steps within its power and at its disposal to guarantee safe movement along the Lachin Road and the terms of the Trilateral Statement of November 10, 2020. Azerbaijan will continue to uphold the rights of its people under international law and to hold Armenia to account for its ongoing and historic grave violations of human rights.”

“Armenia applied to the International Court of Justice for consideration of three main issues. One of them was related to the peaceful protest conducted by eco-activists and representatives of civil society on the Lachin road on December 12,” Deputy Foreign Minister Elnur Mammadov pointed out commenting on the decision of the ICJ. According to Deputy Foreign Minister Elnur Mammadov, the claim alleged that this protest was fake and the participants were allegedly instructed by the government of Azerbaijan. Baku provided the court with an evidence that those actions were actually held by eco-activists, including the names of eco-activists and photo, video evidence. The ICJ rejected Armenia’s motion and assumption that the protest was organized by the government of Azerbaijan.