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HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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**I. President Ilham Aliyev delivers a seminal speech on Azerbaijan's energy strategy at the International Cernobbio Forum**

On September 1, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev traveled to Italy for a two-day working visit. In Rome, President Ilham Aliyev also met with President of the Italian Republic Sergio Mattarella and President of the Council of Ministers Mario Draghi. During the conversation, the sides hailed the development of the political dialogue between the two countries and noted the development of bilateral relations based on strategic partnership. President of the Council of Ministers Mario Draghi stated that this visit would contribute to the development of bilateral relations between the two countries and emphasized that excellent relations had been established between Italy and Azerbaijan at the level of strategic partnership and that mutual trade was continuously increasing. Successful cooperation was being implemented in the field of energy. The sides also pointed to the critical role Azerbaijan played in ensuring the energy security of the European Union and Italy in particular. The two leaders touched upon cooperation issues between the two countries in economy, science, education, culture, art and other fields. It was also stressed that Italian companies were actively involved in the restoration and reconstruction work carried out in the territories liberated from occupation. During the meeting, the sides discussed the relations between the European Union and Azerbaijan, including the visit by the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, to Azerbaijan and stressed the importance of signing the Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Partnership in the field of energy

between Azerbaijan and the European Union as part of the visit.

During the visit, President Ilham Aliyev also attended the inauguration of a new building of the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Italy and participated at the ceremony of exchanging documents in Rome between ADA University and five leading Italian higher education institutions – Luiss Guido Carli University, Sapienza University of Rome, Polytechnic University of Turin, Alma Mater University of Bologna, and the Polytechnic University of Milan for the establishment of the academic cooperation framework for the Italy-Azerbaijan University and creation of faculties and programs.

On September 2, President Ilham Aliyev attended the 48th International Cernobbio Forum under the motto "Intelligence on the World, Europe and Italy" and "Today's and tomorrow's scenario for competitive strategies" organized by the European House - Ambrosetti think tank in Cernobbio, Italy. The European House - Ambrosetti has been nominated in the category "Best Private Think Tanks" as the 1st Think Tank in Italy, 4th in the European Union, and among the most respected independent institutions in the world among 11,175 nominees, in the latest edition of the "Global Go To Think Tanks Report" of the University of Pennsylvania. In 2022, The European House - Ambrosetti has been recognized by Top Employers Institute as one of the 131 "Top Employer" companies in Italy. In keeping with these accolades, the Forum will present many analyses and researches that we have carried out. The highly-select audience is comprised of 200 top managers from Italy and abroad, with precedence given to members of the prestigious Ambrosetti Club. The Forum is an annual event of international scope and prestige. Heads of state and government, top

representatives of European institutions, ministers, Nobel prize winners, businessmen, managers and experts from around the world have been meeting every year since 1975 to discuss current issues of major impact for the world economy and society as a whole.

President Ilham Aliyev attended the Forum as a chief guest at the international forum at the invitation of the Italian President Sergio Mattarella, President of the Council of Ministers of Italy Mario Draghi, and the European House - Ambrosetti think tank. The head of state made a speech on “The role of Azerbaijan for Energy Security” at the plenary session of the forum. Describing the contemporary history of Azerbaijan’s energy sector, President Ilham Aliyev drew attention to the fact that Azerbaijan was the pioneer in inviting major global energy companies to work in the Caspian Sea in 1994, just three years after Azerbaijan gained its independence. Azerbaijan quickly started to export its oil to European markets, mainly Italy. As a landlocked country, Azerbaijan needed to have export pipelines, so it pushed for the transformation of the Eurasian energy map, launching two strategic oil pipelines, one to the Mediterranean port of Turkiye and another to the Black Sea port of Georgia, thus diversifying the energy supplies to the Black Sea market and the global market.

The second stage of Azerbaijan’s energy strategy was development of vast gas fields. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that, according to the information about the proven reserves of Azerbaijan, they are equal to 2,6 trillion cubic meters and, for more than 10 years, Azerbaijan has remained a reliable energy supplier to Europe. President Ilham Aliyev also noted that the Southern Gas Corridor is an integrated pipeline system consisting of three pipelines – the South Caucasus pipeline, Trans-Anatolian (TANAP)

and Trans-Adriatic (TAP), which ends in Italy. “This is a 3,500 kilometer very complicated technical infrastructure. It partly goes to cross high mountains and partly goes on the seabed. And the last day of 2020, on the 31st of December, the final part of that major project, TAP, was inaugurated. Since that time, for one year and a half, Azerbaijan became a supplier of natural gas to three European countries, apart from Turkiye and Georgia. 13,5 billion cubic meters of gas have been supplied to Europe for one and a half year, 11,7 billion out of that to Italy. And this year, we plan to increase the volume and we project to supply the Italian market with close to 10 billion cubic meters. Our total export will be more than 22 billion cubic meters and with the great potential to grow,” the president noted.

President Ilham Aliyev also highlighted the Memorandum of Understanding on strategic partnership in the energy field between the European Commission and Azerbaijan signed in August. “Last month in Baku, Madam Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission and myself signed a Memorandum of Understanding on strategic partnership in the energy field between the European Commission and Azerbaijan. This is a very important step towards further development of our energy resources and based on that, I called it a roadmap for the future, we will plan, and I am sure we will achieve it, to double our energy – natural gas export to Europe,” President Ilham Aliyev stressed.

President Ilham Aliyev also noted that since the capacity of the Southern Gas Corridor varies depending on the segment, there are major considerations that need to be taken into account. It requires political decisions, technical steps and investments. “TANAP has capacity of 16 billion cubic meters. We plan to expand it up to 32 billion cubic meters and TAP

has a capacity of 10 billion cubic meters and it is almost full, so we need to expand it at least to 20. That will need, of course, additional financial contribution. As a country, as an investor, we are ready to do it, but that also must be done by other members of our team," the president noted.

President Ilham Aliyev also highlighted the importance of interconnectors. "Now in Europe we see that after the Russian-Ukrainian war, the issue of natural gas became one of the most important on Europeans' agenda and there are different projects of interconnectors. One of them, Greece-Bulgaria, is close to be inaugurated. There are other projects of that kind. There is one project, which is called the Ionic-Adriatic pipeline, which will bring Azerbaijani gas to three Balkan countries," the president stated, adding that "in general, I can tell you that after the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, we got official requests from more than 10 countries with respect to the increase of our supply or starting our supply, including those countries which already get our gas like Türkiye, Georgia, Italy and Bulgaria and many more. So, in order to be able to satisfy the growing demand, we, of course, need to have a very close cooperation and coordination. For that purpose, we have already officially launched the dialogue between the EU and Azerbaijan on energy, which will cover not only natural gas, but other segments of the energy market, particularly electric energy, hydrogen and green hydrogen."

President particularly emphasized the importance of renewables in Azerbaijan's energy strategy: "We started this process several years ago, though, as you can understand with those figures which I brought to your attention, we are pretty comfortable with natural gas and with oil and our power stations were both on natural gas and on fuel

and also on hydro resources. But, it was our, how to say, moral commitment to invest in renewables, especially taking into account a huge potential. And there have been already many evaluations of the potential of renewable energy in Azerbaijan. So, only in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea, the proven potential is 157 gigawatt of energy. In the territories, which we liberated during the Patriotic War of 2020 in Karabakh and Zangazur, the potential of solar, wind and hydro energy is more than 10 gigawatts and we are already in the process of development of this huge potential. I can tell you that three leading energy companies, one from Saudi Arabia, one from the UAE and one from the United Kingdom already are investing and planning to invest in three renewable power stations of a total capacity of more than 700 megawatts. So that will save us additional gas for export and that will increase our export potential. Today we are talking about how to bring our electric energy to Europe through the existing line, which goes through Georgia, Türkiye, Bulgaria and further to Europe or through the new line, Zangazur corridor, which has a great potential also for alternative energy supply route."

President Ilham Aliyev added that "we are ready to do all what we can in order to satisfy the growing needs of our partners. It is clear that energy security is national security and after the war in Ukraine started, it is clear than ever before."

Answering the question whether living in the region with historic ties to Russia is difficult, President Ilham Aliyev noted that "it may seem difficult, but that is our history, that is our geography and we live in this geography forever and neither we nor our neighbors can change the geography. I think the success of our country in political development, in strengthening of independence – we

celebrated last year the 30th anniversary of our independence – demonstrate that it is possible to build normal relations with neighbors and at the same time with big neighbors, much bigger than you are, and at the same time, to preserve your identity, national identity, independence and your independent political course.” President Ilham Aliyev also added that “with respect to relations with our neighbors, I can say that we always try to find areas of cooperation and those areas which were problematic or where we had a different approach, we always articulated that. We never adjusted ourselves to a policy of our big neighbors. We always had our own policy, which is based on international law, justice, decisions and resolutions of international organizations and common sense. And that is why we succeeded. Azerbaijan now is stable from political point of view, from economic point of view. We invested a lot in being independent from point of view of economic activity. Otherwise, we would have felt under dependence. So, we have been part of empires, we have been part of the Soviet Union. Now thirty years, our people live free and we want to live free forever. For that we must be strong. We must have good friends and partners.”

On the formation of the new global order, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “it is difficult to predict what will be the new global order, but it is clear that the world will never be as it was before February this year. The world has changed and how this change will evaluate, it will depend on a variety of factors. It will depend on how long the war in Ukraine continues. It will depend on what will be the end of that war, what will be the balance of forces in the world and, of course, in the region,” adding that “for us, the most important as a country which is relatively newly independent, is to protect us from

external problems and external challenges. Because internally our country is well integrated, society is mobilized and there is a unity in what we are planning to do and how to develop the country. Therefore, for us the most important is what will be the implication of a new global order to our region, what will be the position of big regional countries, how we will succeed in our plans to achieve peace with Armenia and what will be the future of our children and new generations. Therefore, we are observing the situation.” President Ilham Aliyev also noted that “we are making our steps with respect to our strategy, but at the same time, we cannot ignore the changing world and the changing rules of the game when norms of international law are absolutely and totally destroyed and in our case they were destroyed when Armenia occupied us and we were actively appealing to the international community to draw attention for that injustice when our lands were under occupation and the Security Council resolutions of the United Nations for 27 years were not implemented.”

“We see violation of international law in many other areas and we see that countries, which think that they can ignore them, they do ignore them openly. So, this is an absolutely new situation. What will be the new order of the world, what will be the new function of international institutions, whether the United Nations will continue like it is or it will be reformed and some other organization will emerge, all that is possible. And it depends on those who have responsibility for the world. Who have power to promote the ideas and integrated opinion of decision makers,” the president concluded.

**II. Roadmap for the Future: Key foreign policy takeaways from President Ilham Aliyev's interview to the Italian "Il Sole 24 Ore" newspaper**

During his visit to Italy, President Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by the correspondent of the Italian "Il Sole 24 Ore" newspaper Roberto Bongiorno in Cernobbio. Commenting on the overall situation in the region, President Ilham Aliyev noted that the signing of the peace agreement within a few months is realistic if Yerevan shows the same political will as Azerbaijan, which proposed five basic principles on which the peace agreement should be based and Armenia accepted them. These principles are: the recognition of the territorial integrity of both countries; withdrawal of any territorial claims to each other; non-use of force or the threat of using force; delimitation of borders; and, opening of communications. Touching upon the issues of regional communications, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that "building the new infrastructure connecting Azerbaijan, Armenia and our other neighbors was part of the trilateral declaration, which was signed just after the war ended. And Azerbaijan has already started large-scale infrastructure projects in the liberated territories. We have already inaugurated the first international airport and the second international airport's runway is already operational. Soon, we will inaugurate it. We build electric lines. We build power stations, highways, tunnels, bridges and railroads. So, all is in the process. Of course, we build it not only for connectivity with the neighbors, for internal use, but also Zangazur corridor, which will connect Azerbaijan with its Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan through Armenia, which is also part of our efforts."

Answering the question on the possibility to increase energy supplies beyond what was

already agreed with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, President Ilham Aliyev noted that all energy projects, including natural gas transportation, were based on the existing contracts. "We signed the contracts with the European companies, which purchased our gas, many years ago, and then we invested in pipelines and started to supply gas to Europe only a year and a half ago. On the very first day of 2021, we started to supply gas to Italy. Therefore, our previous plans are fully implemented, and now you are referring to our meeting with Madam Ursula von der Leyen. We discussed how to increase in the short term the production. To double the export to Europe is a big deal. It is not a small thing. We need investments. We need to expand the capacity because our pipeline, which brings our gas to Europe, has a capacity of 10 billion cubic meters - TAP. So, we need to expand it up to 20. It needs money; it needs an agreement between the shareholders, and all that is a process," the president stated.

Commenting on Azerbaijan's gas reserves, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out the minimum proven reserves are 2,6 trillion cubic meters of gas. "So, potentially we can increase the supply to Europe by even more than 20 billion cubic meters. But, also, we should understand that Europe is not our only destination. We supply Turkey with the exact figure as Italy – about 10 billion cubic meters and the demand in the Turkish market also is growing. We supply Georgia, though the market is not big, but still. Our total export this year will be about 22-23 billion cubic meters, but to increase, first: a lot of investments must be made in the fields and expansion, not only of TAP. We need to expand TANAP from 16 to 32 billion cubic meters. Yes, it will not be needed to build a new pipeline. We only need to upgrade the compressor stations, but still, it is an investment. And also one important thing

that we never in the past or even now put in front of us a target to compete with Russian gas on the European market,” the president added.

At the same time, President Ilham Aliyev drew attention to the fact that there are still issues that need to be solved in this area. “We have signed contracts with three European countries, Italy, Greece and Bulgaria. There are demands from other European countries, and we are evaluating those demands. There are projects, as you mentioned in your question, to have other extensions like the Ionic-Adriatic pipeline, which can go to the Balkans, the Greece-Bulgaria interconnector, which will soon be inaugurated and other interconnectors. But all this is a kind of puzzle on the table. We need to have active negotiations with potential consumers, agree with shareholders about the investments in production, in distribution and also negotiate the price. So, a lot of issues are in front of us,” President Ilham Aliyev stated.

On the future of the Trans-Caspian pipeline project, President Ilham Aliyev noted that it is on the owners of the resources, not transit states, to initiate this project. “Transitors can only facilitate, provide the territory or can be co-investor or can only be a kind of recipient of transit fees. In other words, the Trans-Caspian pipeline is not a project of Azerbaijan. As far as our projects are concerned, all of them in oil and gas have been completed. Now, we implement the projects of export of electric energy to Europe. But the Trans-Caspian project is based on Turkmen resources. Therefore, if the Turkmen government decides to build Trans-Caspian, it will be their decision. If they make such a decision, of course, we will support it, but we will not initiate it,” the president stressed, pointing out that “when we initiated the construction of the Southern Gas Corridor, we took the lead. We created a

team, we started negotiations with countries, with consumers, with companies and also we were the main investor. When we built an oil pipeline from Baku to Ceyhan, it was the same. What I am trying to say is it is not the transitors who initiate these projects. It is the owners of the resources.”

Answering the question on relations with regional powers, President Ilham Aliyev noted that Azerbaijan’s relations in the region are well-balanced and they have their own dynamics, based on consistency and mutual respect. “With every neighbor, we have a special agenda of bilateral cooperation, which is different from other neighbors and with every neighbor, we always have been very fair and sincere. We never violate our promise. If we say something, our neighbors are sure that we mean it. So, our signature has the same power as our word. Therefore, in this complicated situation, we do not have any messages neither from Russia nor Iran about our position.” At the same time, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that Azerbaijan’s position in the current situation is quite straightforward: “We have always supported the territorial integrity of every country, and this is a fundamental position. Yes, this was based on our own problem of violating our territorial integrity. Now that we restored it, we still have this position because the territorial integrity of a country cannot be violated by force. This is a violation of international law. Some may like this position, and some may dislike it, but they have to take it into account.”

President Ilham Aliyev also pointed out that the alliance declaration which Azerbaijan signed with Turkiye in 2021 is a major element of regional stability. “Since the end of the Second Karabakh War, where Turkiye showed us political and moral support, our relations have strengthened even more. So, this is an

important factor, and on many issues in our region Turkiye and Azerbaijan act as one team, and this also must be taken into account by everyone,” the president stressed.

On the diversification of the economy, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “no matter how we try to diversify our exports, our non-oil and non-gas exports will not match oil and gas exports because oil and gas exports are growing. For instance, with Italy, we supplied natural gas to Italy last year for 9.6 billion dollars. This year, in 7 months, 11 billion dollars and the gas price is up. So, for us, diversification is not statistics reflected in GDP. It is a means to provide jobs and good quality of life to our people. If you look at our GDP, for instance, in these six months, what you will see. GDP grew 6.2%, but in the non-energy sector almost 10%, in the non-energy related industry more than 11% and also in the non-energy, exports grew 25%. The growth is here, but it is not enough. Therefore, we need more reforms and more investments in the non-energy sector, and for that, of course, we need to have a better business climate. Also, there is an improvement, but still, we need to do a lot to remove all these bureaucratic obstacles and some psychological legacy of the Soviet past.”

On the role of Italian companies in rebuilding liberated areas, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out “Italian companies are very actively working in the liberated areas. I can tell you with respect to the scope of work, Italian companies are second after Turkish companies. And Turkish companies are natural because it is our ally and close friend. And second, it is our neighbor, and they have very prominent construction companies. But the second companies from countries are Italian. I can give you an example. For instance, our Memorial and Victory museums, not only in Baku but in some other liberated cities, are

designed and will be built by Italian companies. Italian companies provided equipment for electric energy production in four liberated territories – Aghdam, Fuzuli, Gubadli and Kalbajar,” adding that “this is hydro energy. This is the company called Ansaldo. Then, one Italian company designed, based on our request, and will implement the project of the new mosque in Shusha. So this demonstrates the level of our relations because Shusha, for every Azerbaijani, is a sacred place, and the new mosque in Shusha was awarded to an Italian company. That means that there is such a high level of trust that we made that step. And we have big plans for renewables, for wind and solar plants, for hydro, to invite more Italian companies. Yesterday, during my meeting with the Prime Minister, we discussed the amount of contracts implemented by Italian companies in Azerbaijan and the contracts financed by Azerbaijan. It is more than 10 billion dollars. So, Italy is well presented in Azerbaijan, but in liberated territories, I am sure they will keep this important second position after Turkiye during all time of the restoration.”

On the prospect of Azerbaijan becoming a commercial hub for the whole region, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “we built the biggest trade seaport in the Caspian, which now operates at full capacity. So, we need to expand it after 25 million tons of cargo handling and one million TEU. We built a shipbuilding yard in Baku, so now we produce all types of ships to transport oil and cargo from the eastern shores of the Caspian. We built railroads and highways, and the export through Azerbaijan from Central Asia and China grows. I think the growth is more than 20%. That all was done before the Russian-Ukrainian war,” adding that “the Russia-Ukraine war only sent the signal to companies on the eastern shores of the Caspian that this

route should be more closely examined. And we provide reasonable tariffs, and we provide all the necessary logistical support.”

“So, having no access to open seas and being a landlocked country, Azerbaijan today is becoming a regional transportation hub, not only from East to West and backward but also from North to South. The South-North transportation corridor crosses Azerbaijan. There is no other way for this corridor to go. And this corridor has also become very important, for instance, for Russian companies, which now have difficulties exporting their goods to European destinations because of the sanctions. So, the route from Azerbaijan to Iran and the Persian Gulf has become for Russian companies one of the most attractive. And also from the Persian Gulf through Azerbaijan to Russia. So, we are sitting on two corridors – the South-North and East-West and, of course, it increases the geopolitical importance of Azerbaijan and allows the creation of new jobs. We expect that the South-North transportation corridor will be as important as the East-West. For us, both have the same value because both cross our territory,” President Ilham Aliyev concluded.

### **III. Armenia initiates the largest to date provocation at the border with Azerbaijan**

On September 12-14, Armenia initiated large-scale provocations and attacks on the border with Azerbaijan. This latest round of deliberate provocations is in line with the modus operandi demonstrated by the current Armenian government in the last few years. Thus, it is no coincidence that these provocations came immediately after the last summit between President Ilham Aliyev and the Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

on August 31, which resulted in an agreement “to step up substantive work to advance on the peace treaty governing interstate relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.” Immediately after the latest summit, Armenian prime minister Nikol Pashinyan made a number of provocative statements that substantially worsened tensions along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Pashinyan announced that the Brussels summit had failed to produce any major agreement between the sides, again raised the issue of the status, and essentially refused to accept Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity. Pashinyan also shifted his position about the construction of a railway between mainland Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan exclave through the southern Armenian territories, known as the Zangezur corridor in Azerbaijan. It is worth noting that last year he had declared that railway construction was acceptable and rejected the idea of paving a highway along this route. Following the May 22 summit, President Ilham Aliyev stated that the sides had agreed on the establishment of the transportation route along Zangezur. Now, the Armenian government walked back on this agreement. Therefore, this largest provocation since the end of the 44-Day War was in line with the previous hostile behavior of the Armenian government and was designed to undermine the peace process.

On September 13, the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan announced that in the late hours of 12 September, units of the Armenian armed forces committed a large-scale act of sabotage in the directions of Dashkasan, Kalbajar and Lachin of the Azerbaijan-Armenia state border. According to the ministry, at night, the sabotage groups of the Armenian armed forces using the mountainous terrain of the area and the existing ravine gaps mined the territories and supply roads between the

positions of the Azerbaijan Army Units in different directions. "Confrontation occurred as a result of urgent measures taken by the Azerbaijan Army Units in order to immediately suppress these actions. The Armenian armed forces stationed in the directions of Basarkechar, Istisu, Garakilsa and Gorus settlements using various caliber weapons and mortars subjected to intensive fire some positions, shelters and strongholds of the Azerbaijan Army in the territory of Dashkasan, Kalbajar and Lachin regions. As a result, there were losses among the military personnel, the military infrastructure was damaged," the Ministry of Defense stated, adding that "the Azerbaijan Army Units deployed in these directions are taking decisive retaliatory measures in order to suppress provocations committed by the Armenian armed forces and military threats to the territory and sovereignty of Azerbaijan, to ensure the safety of the military personnel, including civilian workers involved in infrastructure work in the territory of Kalbajar and Lachin regions. Necessary measures are being taken to suppress the firing points of the Armenian armed forces and to prevent the expansion of the scale of the confrontation."

The Ministry of Defense also pointed out that "in general, over the past month, provocations of the Armenian armed forces in the direction of Lachin, Gadabay, Dashkasan and Kalbajar regions of the state border, cases of shelling of the positions of the Azerbaijan Army in the territory of these regions using various caliber weapons are of intensive and systematic nature. At the same time, it was observed that Armenia concentrated offensive weapons, heavy artillery, and military personnel along the borders of Azerbaijan. All these facts once again demonstrate that Armenia is getting prepared for a large-scale military provocation. By taking such actions, Armenia

also aims to slow down the implementation of large-scale civil infrastructure projects carried out by Azerbaijan in the border areas liberated from occupation and maintain a tense atmosphere near Azerbaijan's borders. We declare once again that the military-political leadership of Armenia bears the entire responsibility for the provocations, confrontation, and losses."

The Ministry of Defense also noted that "the information disseminated by the Armenian side that the Azerbaijan Army allegedly targets the civilian population, facilities, and infrastructure does not reflect reality. This is another disinformation spread by the Armenian side. In response to Armenia's provocations, local countermeasures are aimed against legitimate military targets that are firing points. The retaliatory measures are small-scale and targeted, as well as aimed at ensuring the security of Azerbaijan's borders and suppressing Armenia's provocations. Targeting civilian facilities and innocent people is a standard military methodology used by the Armenian armed forces. During the 30-year period of occupation and the 44-day Patriotic War, it was the Armenian side that deliberately and purposefully shelled cities and the civilian population of Azerbaijan using ballistic missiles and cluster bombs," adding that "the news about the invasion of Azerbaijan into the territory of Armenia, disseminated in the Armenian media and the segment of social networks, is nothing but nonsense. The Republic of Armenia is only aggressor and occupier in the region. The presence of personnel and equipment of the Armenian armed forces in the Karabakh economic zone of Azerbaijan continues. In response to the large-scale provocation of Armenia, the Azerbaijan Army is conducting local countermeasures and neutralizing firing points."

“Armenia's ongoing military adventurism and revanchism policy, intensive shelling of the positions of the Azerbaijan Army in the Kalbajar, Lachin, Dashkasan and Gadabay directions over the past month and its large-scale provocations today are the main reasons for the aggravation of the situation,” the Ministry of Defense warned.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan also noted that “during the last month, the provocations of the Armenian armed forces in the direction of Lachin, Gadabay, Dashkasan and Kalbajar regions of the state border, and cases of the firing of the positions of the Azerbaijani Army in those regions with various types of weapons, were intensive and systematic. At the same time, Armenia’s increase in militarization along Azerbaijan’s borders, deployment of heavy equipment and large-caliber weapons in the region indicated that Armenia was preparing for a large-scale military provocation.”

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also emphasized that “delaying the normalization process by Armenia with various pretexts, showing a destructive position in the negotiations conducted with international efforts, not withdrawing the Armenian armed forces from the territory of Azerbaijan contrary to the obligations within the framework of trilateral statements and agreements, continuing planting landmines, including recently produced in Armenia in the territory of Lachin, putting forward new conditions and disrupting the process of opening of communications and transport routes, as well as not responding to the peace agenda demonstrated that Armenia is not interested in the peace process and aims to undermine them.”

“The following aggression of the Armenian side against Azerbaijan is a gross violation of

the fundamental norms and principles of international law, as well as the provisions of the trilateral statements signed between the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Russian Federation, and the agreements reached between Azerbaijan and Armenia. These steps of Armenia are completely contrary to the ongoing normalization and peace process. At the time, when the Azerbaijan is carrying out large-scale restoration and construction works in these territories liberated from occupation, Armenia by allowing aggression once again demonstrates that it is hindering this process by all means. Responsibility for the provocation, clashes and losses lies with the military-political leadership of Armenia. Any actions against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan will be resolutely prevented,” the Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned.

On September 13, President Ilham Aliyev held an operational meeting with the participation of the leadership of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan regarding the provocations committed by Armenia on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. During the meeting, it was stated that the provocations perpetrated by the Armenian armed forces on the border of the two states were prevented, and all relevant duties and tasks were fulfilled. It was noted that the responsibility for the current tension rests squarely with the political leadership of Armenia. The Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan controls the operational situation along the border.

On the same day, President Ilham Aliyev received Senior Advisor of the U.S. Department of State for Caucasus Negotiations Philip Reeker. The sides discussed the large-scale provocations committed by the Armenian armed forces in the Kalbajar, Lachin and Zangilan directions of the two countries' border on September 13.

The president pointed out that Azerbaijan had taken measures in response to Armenia's provocations, adding that responsibility for the provocation rests squarely with the military and the political leadership of Armenia.

On September 13, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken made a phone call to President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. During the telephone conversation, the U.S. Secretary of State expressed his concern over the tension on the Armenia-Azerbaijan state border. President Ilham Aliyev stated that the tension arose due to large-scale provocations by Armenia, and therefore the responsibility completely falls on the political-military leadership of Armenia. Antony Blinken noted that the United States would continue its efforts to ensure lasting peace and security in the region and to normalize relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The head of state pointed out that Azerbaijan supported the peace agenda and underlined the importance of continuing efforts in this regard.

On September 13, President of the Republic of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a phone call to President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. During the telephone conversation, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan expressed his deep condolences to President Ilham Aliyev, relatives of the killed military servicemen and the entire Azerbaijani nation in the aftermath of a large-scale provocation committed by the Armenian armed forces on the state border. President Erdoğan noted that brotherly Türkiye was always with Azerbaijan and emphasized the solidarity between the two countries. President Ilham Aliyev noted that brotherly Türkiye, as always, stood by Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan always stood by brotherly Türkiye in all matters. President Ilham Aliyev stated that Armenia's large-scale military provocation had been courageously and professionally prevented by the Armed

Forces of Azerbaijan, noting that the death of martyrs did not remain unavenged. The President added that responsibility for such large-scale military provocations rested squarely with Armenia. During the conversation, the sides emphasized again that the relations of brotherhood and strategic alliance between Azerbaijan and Türkiye were successfully developing in all fields.

On September 14, the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan announced that the Armenian forces violated ceasefire and continued to fire on Azerbaijan Army positions using D-30, D-20 howitzers, and 82 mm mortars. The Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan also noted that "the Armenian military leadership that is concerned about the failure of the provocation committed by the armed forces of this country has ordered to deploy units, weapons, and military equipment, located along the Azerbaijani-Armenian state border, near buildings and civilian infrastructure facilities in human settlements, and deep into the territory of Armenia. By subjecting to fire the Azerbaijan Army positions from those points in the settlements, Armenia is trying to turn these firing points into legitimate military targets and deliberately expand the area of military operations. We declare once again that the Azerbaijan Army Units strike the enemy's firing points with high accuracy and do not target civilian facilities."

On September 14, President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron made a phone call to President Ilham Aliyev. During the telephone conversation, Macron expressed his concern about the latest incident on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that responsibility for the large-scale provocation rested squarely with the political and military leadership of Armenia and that Azerbaijan was taking retaliatory measures. During the conversation, the parties

also emphasized the importance of ensuring sustainable peace and security in the region and continuing the peace agenda. Touching upon the issue of border tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan being put on the agenda of the UN Security Council at the initiative of France, President Ilham Aliyev reiterated the significance of conducting discussions at this level on an objective basis.

On September 14, President Ilham Aliyev also received European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia Toivo Klaar. Toivo Klaar expressed his concern about the tension that arose on the state border on the night of September 12-13, and stated the fact that the European Union's leadership spoke over the phone with the Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of Azerbaijan. The head of state noted that this large-scale provocation was committed by Armenia and stated that all responsibility for this lies directly with the political-military leadership of Armenia. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that Azerbaijan supports the peace agenda as a continuation of the discussions held in Brussels. President Ilham Aliyev stated that despite the necessary steps taken by Azerbaijan to stabilize the situation and eliminate tension, Armenia continues to violate the reached ceasefire.

On September 15, at the initiative of the U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Dr. Colin Kahl, a telephone conversation was held with the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Colonel General Zakir Hasanov. During the telephone conversation, the sides discussed issues of bilateral military cooperation, as well as the confrontation on the Azerbaijani-Armenian state border, and the current situation.

On September 17, the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan announced that "on September 12-14, 2022, while suppression a large-scale provocation of the Armenian armed forces, 282 servicemen of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan were wounded and received bodily injuries of varying severity. Out of 282 wounded servicemen, 43 persons rejoined the army after being provided with first medical aid, 115 persons are in satisfactory state, 103 persons are in state of moderately severe, and 21 persons are in severe condition. At the same time, as a result of the Armenian armed forces' provocation, 2 Azerbaijani civilians were wounded." Overall, as a result of the provocation initiated by the Armenian armed forces at the border 80 servicemen of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan lost their lives.

On September 17, President of the European Council Charles Michel made a phone call to President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. During the conversation, the side exchanged views on ensuring sustainable peace in the region, eliminating tensions, ensuring the ceasefire agreement reached, and the process of normalization of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations. On September 18, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken made a phone call to President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. The importance of continuing efforts to strengthen the achieved ceasefire regime, ensuring sustainable peace and security in the region, normalizing Armenia-Azerbaijan relations, including peace treaty negotiations, and opening transport corridors was underlined during the phone conversation.

On September 19, 2022, within the framework of the high-level week of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly, a meeting was held between the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov, and

the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan at the initiative and with the participation of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

“During the meeting, Minister Jeyhun Bayramov drew attention to Azerbaijan's position on ensuring peace in the region in the post-conflict period and necessary steps in this direction. Minister Jeyhun Bayramov emphasized that on September 12-14, Armenia caused clashes by carrying out provocations and attacks against Azerbaijan, and the fact that Armenia violated the initial ceasefire achieved within a few hours, and thereby caused additional losses of life. He said that Azerbaijan, as a party that carries out large-scale reconstruction works in the region and resettles former internally displaced persons in the region, is not interested in destabilization,” the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the meeting stated.

Minister noted that despite the deep consequences caused by the occupation of the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan by Armenia for 30 years, Azerbaijan put forward the proposal to sign a peace treaty immediately after the 44-day Patriotic War and took consistent initiatives in this direction. He said that despite Azerbaijan's efforts in the process of normalization of relations with Armenia, the opening of communications, delimitation, and demarcation of borders, as well as in the humanitarian field, Armenia obstructs the processes and grossly violates its obligations within the framework of trilateral statements. “Minister Jeyhun Bayramov once again emphasized his readiness for urgent negotiations in accordance with the trilateral statements and the results of the Brussels meeting of the leaders to ensure lasting peace,” the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan noted.

Commenting on the speech of the Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi during her visit to Armenia on September 18, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan noted “The statement made by the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi during her visit to Armenia on September 18, 2022, which distorts the situation in the region, is deeply regrettable. Groundless and unfair accusations made by N. Pelosi against Azerbaijan are unacceptable,” adding that “the incident that took place on the deemed border, which is not delimited yet on the night of September 12-13, 2022 was a large-scale military provocation by Armenia against Azerbaijan, and this provocation was prevented by the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan, and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country was ensured. Currently, the ceasefire regime is observed and the escalation of the situation has been prevented. All responsibility for the escalation of the situation in the region and the large-scale provocation lies with the military-political leadership of Armenia.”

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed out that “generally, N. Pelosi is known as a pro-Armenian politician, and presence of pro-Armenian members of Congress in her delegation to Armenia is a pure evidence of this. Considering that the period of mid-term elections to the US Congress is approaching, it seems that N. Pelosi is using this visit for her domestic political agenda and to gain the support of the Armenian lobby circles in the US. It is unacceptable to transfer political intrigues and lobbying interests from the US domestic political agenda to the South Caucasus region via Armenia.”

“We regretfully emphasize that N. Pelosi, who speaks about justice, has not demonstrate any position regarding the policy of aggression by Armenia against Azerbaijan, occupation of

Azerbaijan's territory for almost 30 years, the ethnic cleansing of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis and other such serious crimes for which Armenia is responsible," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted.

"What N. Pelosi said during her visit to Armenia should be regarded as a statement made on the basis of Armenian propaganda. This is a serious blow to efforts to normalize relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Such unilateral steps and groundless statements serve not to strengthen the fragile peace in the region, but, rather to escalate tension," the ministry pointed out.

On September 27, President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron made a phone call to President Ilham Aliyev. The President of France informed the President of Azerbaijan about his meeting with Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan on 26 September. President Ilham Aliyev thanked President Emmanuel Macron for the information. During the conversation, they discussed the clashes that had recently taken place on the Azerbaijan-Armenia border. The presidents also discussed the future peace talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia. On September 29, President Ilham Aliyev received Continental Europe and Turkiye Advisor in the Office of the French President Isabelle Dumont. The discussions and constructive dialogue between President of France Emmanuel Macron and President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev during the recent telephone conversations were underlined at the meeting. The sides exchanged views on the issues relating to normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, negotiation process on peace treaty, delimitation of borders and opening of communications. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the landmine problem Azerbaijan is facing and the fact that nearly 4,000 Azerbaijani citizens are considered

missing since the First Armenia-Azerbaijan War. The importance of addressing these issues was pointed out.

Commenting on the causes of the recent clashes at the border Dr. Farid Shafiyev, Chairman of the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), and Vasif Huseynov pointed out that "it must be made clear that the latest clashes stemmed from the lack of a peace treaty and the absence of any meaningful progress in other negotiating tracks. Pashinyan should not employ the tactics of his predecessors who imitated the negotiations for up to thirty years and blocked the peaceful settlement of the conflict. This tactic eventually led to the war in 2020. The lack of a peace agreement might expand the theater of future hostilities between the two countries and lead to new tragedies. While thirty years of military action occurred on the territory of Azerbaijan, the latest clashes have shown that Azerbaijan will not tolerate shelling and rocket strikes from the territory of Armenia and its response will affect Armenian military installations there," adding that "unfortunately, the major powers that previously dealt with the resolution of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, namely Russia, France, and the United States, have opposing interests in the region. Additionally, U.S. politics are occasionally affected by various domestic interests, such as Armenian lobby groups. The Brussels platform, which initially looked promising, is now endangered."

#### **IV. Azerbaijan and Bulgaria enhance their energy partnership**

On September 30, President Ilham Aliyev traveled to the Republic of Bulgaria for an official visit. During the visit, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and

President of the Republic of Bulgaria Rumen Radev held a one-on-one meeting in Sofia. President Ilham Aliyev and President Rumen Radev also held an expanded meeting in Sofia. Welcoming the President of Azerbaijan, President of Bulgaria Rumen Radev noted that “our political dialogue at the highest level has been very active during the year, and our relations have already reached the level of strategic partnership. For us, Azerbaijan is a reliable and time-tested partner. I am sure that we have a mutual interest in developing our pragmatic and effective relations in all areas,” adding that “we will witness another exciting and very significant event. We will inaugurate the Greece-Bulgaria Gas Interconnector. This is a project of strategic importance for us and the European continent. Because by doing this, we are redrawing the energy map of Europe. We will buy natural gas from Azerbaijan. This, of course, will diversify our supply.”

“We attach great importance to our energy cooperation, but, of course, we will discuss not only the energy field but also other strategic fields in our meeting. Innovation, high technologies, trade, investment and, of course, the fields of culture and science are also on the agenda. These will serve to deepen our cooperation,” President Radev stated.

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev also noted that “Bulgaria and Azerbaijan are strategic partners. The Declaration on strategic partnership was signed seven years ago, and over these years, this strategic partnership has manifested itself in a number of areas. I remember your official visit to Azerbaijan. The discussions and decisions we made during the visit are being implemented. As you have just mentioned, a significant event is taking place in Bulgaria tomorrow – we will celebrate the launch of the Greece-Bulgaria Interconnector project. I congratulate you from the very beginning on this occasion,” adding that “our

cooperation in all fields is based on a sincere relationship. Bulgaria-Azerbaijan relations are multifaceted. The historical ties between our peoples are, of course, an important factor underlying these relations. Today, of course, this strategic partnership based on mutual interests opens up new opportunities. Very serious cooperation existing in the field of energy has a great future. We are at the first stage of this work. I am sure that tangible steps will be taken in the future regarding the issues we discussed in a one-on-one meeting today. Azerbaijan is an important country for Europe and a reliable gas supplier. The European market, including the markets of Bulgaria and your neighboring countries, is of great interest to us.” President Ilham Aliyev also noted that “implementation of the Middle Corridor in the field of transport and the activity of the East-West transport corridor will certainly connect our bring even closer together. I am sure we will have many contacts in the future, and new issues will be included in the already extensive agenda.”

Following the expanded meeting, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and President of the Republic of Bulgaria Rumen Radev made press statements. President Radev noted “Azerbaijan is a desirable and reliable partner for us. I am delighted that our positions coincide in this matter, and we intend to carry this pragmatic and effective cooperation forward in many areas,” adding that the Greece-Bulgaria Gas Interconnector “is a significant project for our country and Eastern Europe as a whole. This interconnector will allow us the opportunity to buy natural gas from Azerbaijan for the first time. This, of course, will redraw the energy map of Europe. This is such an infrastructure project that we will be able to develop economic cooperation not only between our countries but also in the entire region. Through this project, we are

reaffirming our strategic partnership. I would like to thank Mr. Aliyev for the fact that we are developing our relations based on the Declaration on Strategic Partnership that we signed at the time, and thanks to our commitment and determination.”

President Radev also pointed out that “in addition to Bulgaria, three other European countries – Romania, Hungary and Slovakia – have applied to us to buy and transport additional gas volumes. In the summer of this year, in July, Mr. Aliyev and Mrs. von der Leyen signed a document. According to that document, a new approach should be applied. Thanks to this, instead of waiting for years – you probably know that large investments are needed to expand the existing infrastructure here – we can immediately send Azerbaijani gas to other countries through the infrastructure of these four countries. Thus, gas can be delivered to Central, Western and Southern Europe more quickly and reliably. This proposal will be officially presented tomorrow. We will discuss it with the President of the European Commission and representatives of these four countries. We are ready for it. We can organize a high-level meeting within a month and can move the project forward. We can start this project.”

“Currently, we are looking for new opportunities in the conditions of high gas demand and crisis. President Aliyev and I discussed various issues and a wide range of opinions because we need gas in cement production, glass production and other production areas. Azerbaijan also produces various products. Thus, we will be able to buy gas directly from Azerbaijan. This is a significant issue, and this gas can already be transported to the markets of third countries through us. We are saving transportation costs and time here. Bulgaria will take a more active part in this process, and our gas company will

play a more active role. We will, of course, discuss this issue with Mr. Aliyev again – what our possibilities are and what options we have. We are interested in this issue and will also consider converting natural gas to electricity. This is an important issue not only for Bulgaria but also for the European Union. Of course, the Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Partnership is very important,” President Radev noted.

President Radev also pointed out that “of course, we did not limit ourselves to the energy issue in our discussions. We will look for new opportunities for cooperation in other innovative areas. For example, information technology and artificial intelligence. Of course, at present, we have certain challenges regarding “green energy” and carbon neutrality. We will work on that. In addition, we are planning on the production of fertilizers. We have great potential in the production of automotive and spare parts. We can work together in these areas, hand in hand. Agriculture, food production, and pharmaceuticals are also very interesting fields. Other important area is science, education and culture. With this, we can strengthen contacts and exchanges between peoples and add new perspectives to our cooperation in the fields of economy and investment.”

President Ilham Aliyev noted that “the Joint Declaration on the Strategic Partnership between Bulgaria and Azerbaijan, signed in 2015. This Declaration has raised our relations to a high level, and, at the same time, all the issues identified in that declaration have been implemented. Today, Bulgaria and Azerbaijan maintain closer contact with each other as two friendly and strategic partner countries,” adding that “I am sure that as strategic partners, we will take further steps in the field of energy security, which is the main issue

discussed today. Partnership in this field has already been implemented, as Azerbaijan's gas is now in Bulgaria. During the conversation with the President today, we also discussed ways of increasing the volume of Azerbaijani gas to be exported to Bulgaria. Relevant instructions have been given. Energy security issues have always been important, but in today's circumstances, this importance has increased even more. We are well aware of this. Therefore, we are doing our best to increase gas production and supply our partners with natural gas. Azerbaijan has been exporting its crude oil to the world and European markets as a reliable partner for many years. Azerbaijan, which now exports natural gas, will assert how itself as a reliable partner in this field as well.”

President Ilham Aliyev highlighted that “the Greece-Bulgaria Gas Interconnector project is indeed of historic importance. I am sure that this interconnector will enable the transportation of Azerbaijani gas to Europe on a larger scale. At the same time, it will be of great benefit to energy security on the European continent. As the President noted, a Memorandum on strategic partnership in the field of energy was recently signed between the European Union and Azerbaijan. According to this Memorandum, in the next few years, we will increase our gas exports to Europe at least twice, and there are opportunities to do that. Azerbaijan's confirmed gas reserves are at 2.6 trillion cubic meters. New and diversified gas transportation infrastructure allows us the opportunity to supply natural gas to many countries. Of course, the successes achieved in this field are also a good foundation for future plans.”

“We should not limit our energy agenda to the exports of natural gas. We have also discussed other issues related to energy. Export of electricity and mutually beneficial cooperation

in this field, the transportation of crude oil to Bulgaria, possible participation of SOCAR in the renewal of energy infrastructure in Bulgaria and other issues have been discussed as well. In short, the time has come to open SOCAR's office in Bulgaria, and I am sure that we will do that soon. As for other issues as a whole, transport security is undoubtedly a critical issue considering the new geopolitical situation today. Azerbaijan has created a very modern transport infrastructure in its territory – railways, highways, and a new International Trade Sea Port – all these infrastructure facilities aim to increase the volume of transit cargo through Azerbaijan. This year, the volume of these cargoes has increased by approximately 50 percent. In the future, this number will be even more significant. Therefore, Bulgarian and Azerbaijani transport workers will come together and exchange ideas about long-term and future large-scale cooperation. I will meet with the heads of several leading companies in Bulgaria today. There are already quite a few topics for the meeting. I am sure that this meeting will play a very important role in the deepening of cooperation in the fields of economy and investment as a whole. At the same time, I will invite Bulgarian companies to do more large-scale work in Azerbaijan, including the territories liberated from occupation. At the moment, major construction and improvement work is underway there, and we would like to see companies from friendly countries there,” President Ilham Aliyev concluded.

As part of his official visit to Sofia, President Ilham Aliyev also met with representatives of leading business communities of Bulgaria. Addressing the meeting, President Ilham Aliyev noted that “I am very satisfied with the discussions I had with the President and the Caretaker Prime Minister today. We have held

talks on many areas of mutual interest. We discussed ways to expand mutual cooperation. We touched upon economic relations, commercial cooperation, including energy and transport. These areas are very important for our ties, as well as for regional development. Of course, we will discuss the issues that are of interest to you. Because your participation in this meeting indicates that you know our country well, you know our development and the reforms we are carrying out. I hope that after this meeting, you will be more interested in working with our companies and our country, either as an investor or through contracts. Considering the friendly relations between Bulgaria and Azerbaijan, I believe that it is the right time for our business people to participate in mutual projects.” Then representatives of leading business communities of Bulgaria made presentations to the President of Azerbaijan about projects related to automobile, food, energy, satellite, drones, communication, digital development, ICT, medicine, and chemical industry. Representatives of some companies stated that they had already cooperated with Azerbaijani companies. They also noted that they were interested in working together with Azerbaijani companies in the Alat Free Economic Zone and other industrial estates. Bulgarian business people were also provided with detailed information about investment opportunities and business environment in Azerbaijan.

At the same time, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on a sister city relationship between the Azerbaijani city Shusha and Bulgarian city Veliko Tarnovo was signed in Sofia. The document was inked by Special Representative of the President of Azerbaijan in Shusha district Aydin Karimov and Mayor of Veliko Tarnovo Municipality Daniel Panov.

## V. Digital Silk Way gets a big boost

The “Digital Silk Way” project initiated by NEQSOL Holding and realized by its subsidiary, AzerTelecom, is an innovative digital infrastructure project that seeks to establish a modern transit fiber-optic infrastructure network connecting Europe to Central and South Asian markets. Upon completion, this project will provide the fastest, most cutting edge route for digital connectivity in the wider region, including Caucasus, Central and South Asia. As part of the “Digital Silk Way” project, the Trans-Caspian Fiber Optic Cable Line project is also being realized along the bottom of the Caspian Sea between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. The operators of this Asian segment of the project - AzerTelecom from Azerbaijan and Transtelecom from Kazakhstan – have established “Caspian Fiber Optic Company” joint venture responsible for the construction and operation of the Trans-Caspian Fiber-Optic cable line.

On September 30, AzerTelecom and Transtelecom signed a strategic partnership memorandum on the project of laying a fiber-optic cable line along the seabed of the Caspian Sea during the “Digital Bridge” international technological forum held in Astana. The sides expressed confidence that this MoU will serve as an incentive for further cooperation in the field of digital infrastructure development of both countries, and contribute to the increase of new market opportunities in terms of accessibility and the transmission capacity of networks in the two countries. The MoU envisages a strategic partnership between the two operators within the framework of the Trans-Caspian Fiber-Optic cable project on the Azerbaijan-Kazakhstan route. Representatives of telecommunication operators expressed their interest in the future development of bilateral business in the field of international

telecommunication services, the possibilities of stimulating bilateral cooperation in the further development of the digital transformation and digital infrastructure in both countries.

“Cooperation between our companies within the framework of the digital infrastructure project —the Trans-Caspian Fiber-Optic Cable Project, which is part of the Digital Silk Way — will open up opportunities for us to enter new sales markets, expanding our transit capabilities. Also, with the help of this cooperation, we will be able to improve the reliability of providing telecommunications

services to consumers in our countries,” Sergey Nazarenko, Chief Operations Officer at AzerTelecom, stated.

“Today, the most optimal formula for solving joint problems and interests for us is building direct relationships. Joint activities with AzerTelecom involve the exchange of information, best practices, experience and promotion of joint projects. All this, in turn, will contribute to the development of new market opportunities in terms of availability and increase in network bandwidth in both countries,” Kuanyshebek Yesseyev, Chairman of the Board of Kazakhtelecom, pointed out.