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REPORT

Tensions in France-Azerbaijani relations following the Second Karabakh War

MATIN MAMMADLI

📍 Mirza İbrahimov 8, Baku, AZ1005, Azerbaijan

📞 (+994 12) 596-82-39, (+994 12) 596-82-41

🌐 E-mail: www.aircenter.az, info@aircenter.az

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Since the conclusion of the Second Karabakh War in 2020, marked by Azerbaijan's decisive victory and the liberation of its occupied territories, tensions in France-Azerbaijan relations have become increasingly strained. The rise in political and diplomatic friction between the two nations is evidently tied to actions undertaken by official Paris against Azerbaijan across various fronts, exhibiting characteristics akin to a hybrid conflict. After the Second Karabakh War, France's strategic interests in the region, alongside a neo-imperialist agenda and the influence of well-established Armenian diaspora networks within the country, have driven official Paris to embrace an overtly Armenian-centric position. This stance, resembling a hybrid warfare strategy, encompasses various elements across multilateral domains within various international organizations and bilateral relations between France and Azerbaijan.

The United Nations

- **On October 2020**, in the course of the Second Karabakh War, an anti-Azerbaijani initiative was put forward at the UN Security Council, backed by France. However, this initiative was prevented by the position of the seven Non-Aligned Movement member states—namely, the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Republic of South Africa, Tunisia, and Vietnam—who were Council members at the time.
- **In June 2021**, France unofficially presented a draft anti-Azerbaijani resolution to the UN Security Council; however, work on this proposal was stalled, and it failed to advance.
- **On September 13, 2022**, the UN Security Council held open discussions on Azerbaijan-Armenia at Armenia's request and with direct assistance from France. France initiated the adoption of a press statement on behalf of the Security Council, but it was not successful.
- **On December 20, 2022**, the UN Security Council held open discussions in response to Armenia's official request for the "closure" of the Lachin Road. During the meeting, France introduced an initiative to endorse the Statement of the Security Council Chairman. Despite France's efforts, which included presenting a draft document updated four times, consensus on the draft was not achieved.

- **On July-August 2023**, a proposal arose to call a meeting of the Security Council to discuss the issue with the Lachin road and adopt a document. The Security Council then had an open meeting on **August 16**. Despite efforts made during the meeting to advance the initiative to accept the document on behalf of the Council, no consensus was reached.
- **On September 21, 2023**, the Security Council conducted a meeting at the official request of Armenia, with the direct involvement from France, to discuss anti-terrorist measures implemented by Azerbaijan. Despite intense attempts, no document criticizing Azerbaijan was able to be adopted during the meeting.
- **On October 11, 2023**, France presented a draft resolution to the UN Security Council on Armenia-Azerbaijan. Even Armenia itself did not take part in this initiative. The members of the Security Council did not support the initiative. Even though France was forced to make certain changes to the anti-Azerbaijan initiative that it had initially proposed, it failed to achieve the support of the required number of member countries for adoption of the document.
- **On October 2023**, France was one of the main countries that promoted the joint statement against Azerbaijan issued by the UN Human Rights Council, and its delegate read the declaration.
- **On November 2023**, during the hearings on Azerbaijan's national report for the Universal Periodic Review, the French side addressed recommendations containing groundless accusations against our country.

The European Union

- Following the conclusion of the EU Mission on the Armenia-Azerbaijani border initially established on October 20, 2022, for a two-month duration, a subsequent mandate was granted for a period of two years starting from February 20, 2023. Notably, this extension was made under the leadership of France and was implemented without the consent of the Azerbaijani side. During the EU Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers meeting on December 11, 2023, France proposed and successfully pushed for an increase in the personnel of the organization's Mission in Armenia. The decision involved increasing the number of personnel from 138 to 209.
- After the meeting of the EU Council of Foreign Ministers held on **November 13, 2023**, a decision was made to examine the possibilities of the EU Council providing non-lethal assistance to Armenia under the European Peace Facility (EPF).
- The meeting of the Azerbaijan-EU Cooperation Committee, scheduled for November 13, 2023, was canceled two days before the event on the request of the French side (with the backing of Greece and Cyprus).

The European parliament

- French deputies played an important part in the adoption of anti-Azerbaijani resolutions by the European Parliament following the Second Karabakh War¹.

OSCE

On the Armenian government's request and with France's strong support, the OSCE deployed a "needs assessment team" Armenia **on October 21 to 27, 2022**. Consistent and systematic actions were made inside the organization to reduce the effects of this action, which violated the relevant OSCE documents, the organization's decision-making procedures, and previous practices. As a result, the mission was not adopted by a collective decision in the OSCE, it lacked the OSCE's mandate and thus had no connection to the organization, it was solely an individual initiative of the Polish side that chairs the OSCE, funds from the organization's unified budget were not used for the trip, and the OSCE Secretariat ensured that it was financed by individual participating states.

NATO

France, with its purposeful activities, has a negative impact on Azerbaijan-NATO relations. Thus, the document on NATO partnership (ITPP) cannot be accepted due to France's ban. It should be noted that Individual Partnership Programs (ITPPs) are one of the main tools used by NATO to coordinate cooperation with non-Alliance partners and were adopted by the North Atlantic Council in 2021. For the most recent occasion, the silence procedure was extended till May 10. French requirements for document approval are following:

- All candidates nominated by Armenia in NATO should be approved by Türkiye;
- Discussions on "hybrid activities in the South Caucasus" should be held in the NATO Committee with the participation of allies only (Armenia's narrative)
- Discussions should be held in the 32+1 format with the participation of Azerbaijan in the NATO Committee. France insists that these discussions be devoted to disinformation activities of Azerbaijan against France.

International Organization of Francophonie

- During the International Organization of La Francophonie Summit in Tunis **on November 19-20, 2022**, France and Armenia actively participated in the inclusion of anti-Azerbaijan sections in the Djerba Declaration and draft

¹ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/texts-adopted.html#sidesForm>

resolutions on crisis situations in Francophone territories, even putting pressure on other member states to do so. As a consequence of the Azerbaijani side's cooperation with other member states, the majority of French and Armenian initiatives against our country were rejected or weakened.

- **On November 6-7, 2023**, the European Regional Group of the Francophonie Parliamentary Assembly met in Athens and issued a Declaration against Azerbaijan at the initiative of France and Armenia.

UNESCO

- France turns UNESCO into an instrument of its filthy tactics, using the institution as a "department" of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, politicizing this humanitarian organization, and preventing the UNESCO delegation from visiting the liberated Azerbaijani territories.

France's activities against our country on a bilateral level

From November 2020 to the present, the French Senate and National Assembly have adopted a total of six anti-Azerbaijani resolutions, and a resolution titled "European Resolution Project on the financing of the assistance measure in favor of Armenia by the European Peace Facility" is currently on the Senate agenda. The majority of these adopted resolutions called for the recognition of the so-called criminal regime in Karabakh and the implementation of sanctions on Azerbaijan. Although the anti-Azerbaijani resolutions passed by the French parliament have no practical implications, they have seriously damaged relations between the two countries.

Resolutions adopted by the French Senate are following:

1. On November 25, 2020, the so-called resolution "The necessity of recognizing the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh" was adopted almost unanimously.
2. On November 15, 2022, a resolution was adopted "imposing sanctions on Azerbaijan, demanding its immediate withdrawal from the territory of Armenia, respecting the cease-fire agreement dated November 9, 2020, and supporting all initiatives aimed at establishing lasting peace between the two countries."
3. On January 17, 2024, the resolution "Condemnation of Azerbaijan's military attack on Nagorno-Karabakh, any other attempt of aggression against the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia and prevention of violation of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia, calls for sanctions against Azerbaijan and

ensuring the right of the Armenian population to return to Nagorno-Karabakh" was adopted².

Resolutions adopted by the French National Assembly are following:

1. On December 3, 2020, the resolution titled "Protection of the Christian communities of Europe and the East and the Armenian people" was adopted.
2. On November 30, 2022, "The imposition of sanctions against Azerbaijan, the full and immediate withdrawal of the Azerbaijani armed forces present on the territory of Armenia in order to establish sustainable peace between the two countries and more globally on a regional scale, and on November 9, 2020 a resolution on demanding compliance with the signed ceasefire" was adopted.
3. On March 4, 2024, the resolution "condemning the ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan and demanding respect for the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia" was adopted³.

Other decisions against Azerbaijan adopted by France are following:

- On October 3, 2023, Paris City Hall issued a letter of intent to grant honorary citizenship to "Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh"⁴.
- On September 30, 2023, by the French initiative, the France-Azerbaijani Friendship Group suspended its activity in the National Assembly⁵.

In recent years, relations between the two countries have been greatly impacted by the spread of an anti-Azerbaijani narrative in French media circles. Anti-Azerbaijan propaganda is widely circulated on major French media such as Le Figaro, Le Monde, Le Point, Francetvinfo.fr, La Croix, Intelligence Online, and others. Two primary focal points emerge from the propaganda campaign directed against Azerbaijan in the French media:

- France's claims against Azerbaijan are harsher than Armenia's accusations against us.
- There is speculation that Azerbaijan is attempting to create instability in France.

² 11 avril 2024 Proposition de résolution européenne visant à permettre le financement par la facilité européenne pour la paix d'une mesure d'assistance au profit de l'Arméni <https://www.senat.fr/leg/ppr23-535.html>

³ ibid

⁴ 03.10.2023 Paris City Council adopts resolution on granting honorary citizenship of France capital to Karabakh Armenians (VIDEO) <https://news.am/eng/news/784731.html>

⁵ 01.10.2023The activities of the France-Azerbaijan friendship group were suspended in the French National Assembly <https://radar.am/en/news/politics-2592316011/>

At the same time, it is worth noting that French authorities are actively involved in the anti-Azerbaijani propaganda campaign. For example, in an interview with the "France 2" TV in October 2022, French President Emmanuel Macron accused Azerbaijan of "starting a war that led to numerous victims, atrocities, and occupation" in the fall of 2020⁶. Let's also add that other opinions expressed by President E. Macron and other French officials against Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as military operations carried out in accordance with international legal norms, have been widely circulated in French and international media.

The vandalizing of the statue of Azerbaijani poet Natavan in Evian, France, where red paint was splashed on the statue and the nose was damaged, stands as an example of an incident that significantly strained bilateral relations. Primarily, we attribute this act of vandalism to the pervasive anti-Azerbaijani propaganda prevalent in France. At the same time, the fact that the French authorities did nothing to restore Natavan's statue (despite Azerbaijan's repeated diplomatic requests) demonstrated that this act of vandalism was not accidental. It should be mentioned that the vandalism of Natavan's statue at Evian, as well as the French authorities' inadequate management of the situation, caused strong protest of Azerbaijan at the highest level⁷.

The attacks on the Azerbaijani embassy in France by radical Armenian groups, as well as the failure of the country's law enforcement forces to carry out their duty during these attacks, deteriorated bilateral relations even more. For example, in September 2022, Armenian radicals began an attack on the Azerbaijani embassy in Paris, causing damage to the building. During the embassy attack, French police did not intervene. This behavior by the French police is an obvious violation of the 1961 Vienna Convention on "Diplomatic Relations". It should be mentioned that the hosting state is entirely responsible for the security of foreign embassies, according to the 1961 Vienna Convention on "Diplomatic Relations".

⁶ 02.10.2022 Russie, livraisons d'armes, carburant... ce qu'il faut retenir de l'interview d'Emmanuel Macron https://www.bfmtv.com/politique/gouvernement/russie-livraisons-d-armes-carburant-ce-qu-il-faut-retenir-de-l-interview-d-emmanuel-macron_AN-202210120780.html

⁷ 14.03.2024 İlham Aliyev: The reason for the vandalism against Nateva's statue was the failure of France's attempts to punish Azerbaijan at the UN and the Council of Europe <https://report.az/xarici-siyaset/ilham-eliyev-natevanin-heykeline-qarsi-vandalizme-sebeb-fransanin-bmt-ve-as-de-azerbaycani-cezalandirmaq-cehdlerinin-ugursuz-olmasi-idi/>

Military cooperation between France and Armenia

Following the Second Karabakh War, one of the instances that affected Azerbaijan-France relations was Paris' official arming of Armenia. Although Armenian-French military relations existed prior to the Second Karabakh War, they were limited in scope and relevance. Following the Second Karabakh War, France and Armenia's diplomatic reconciliation also projected into the military cooperation. France's arming of Armenia not only harms relations between France and Azerbaijan, but also escalates military-political tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Overall, France's military policy in the region has a negative effect on the South Caucasus' stability for two primary reasons. First, a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan has yet to be signed, and despite the conclusion of the war, long-term peace has yet to be reached due to remaining major issues between the two countries. Arming a country that has been occupying Azerbaijan's lands for nearly thirty years, has implemented an aggressive policy, and keeps making territorial claims against Azerbaijan through internal legislative documents can once again strengthen revanchist tendencies and aggressive aspirations in the Armenian political elite and society. Second, given the deterioration of Russian-Western relations in recent years, Armenia's favor to the West, as well as attempts by some leading Western countries, including France, to use Armenia against Russia, have the potential to turn the South Caucasus into a new geopolitical conflict arena. At the current stage, Armenia's gradual turning of the balance of power policy against Russia will lead to chaotic geopolitical processes in the region, which may ultimately cause serious consequences for the security system of the South Caucasus. The facts, which include the recent development of the military alliance between France and Armenia are following:

- During the Armenian Minister of Defense's visit to Paris on October 22-23, 2023, the following documents were signed:
- Contract for the purchase of three "GM200" surveillance radars from "Thales" company;
- Contract with "Safran" company on purchase of night vision devices (binoculars);
- **Letter of intent** to strengthen cooperation with the French Ministry of Armed Forces in terms of air defense equipment (*In this framework, France is planned to conduct an audit of Armenian air defense*).
- - In addition, in order to conduct combat operations training in ground forces, three areas of combat operations training for mobile training units to be sent to Armenia have been determined: "infantry combat training," "combat training in mountain conditions," and "shooting training."

- In December 2023, France has already delivered 24 "Bastion" armored vehicles to Armenia, and 26 more are expected to be sent.
- On February 22-23, 2024, the French Minister of Armed Forces visited Armenia. During his trip:
 - An agreement on the purchase of sniper rifles was signed between the French "PGM" company and the Armenian leadership;
 - An agreement on partnership was reached between the "Saint-Cyr" military educational institution and the Armenian military academy. (5 Armenian cadets will study at the mentioned academy);
 - "Offer" was submitted to Armenia by MBDA company for the purchase of MISTRAL surface-to-air missiles.
 - According to the contract signed with "Thales", one of the "GM200" surveillance radars will be delivered to Yerevan by the end of 2024.
 - The French minister announced that three **mountain combat courses** will be arranged for Armenian military in 2024. The instructors hired for the training are from France's elite mountain force, the "Alpine Hunters". In February 2024, the instructors trained Armenians in the "Armavir" training area in Armenia. The French minister observed the training sessions during his visit.
- In the framework of defense reforms, it was announced at the 2023 and 2024 meetings of French and Armenian ministers that the French adviser on military affairs would be assigned to Armenia's Ministry of Defense in 2024.
- As part of the personnel exchange program, Ishkhan Tovmassyan, a French Armed Forces sergeant of Armenian descent, has been assigned to Armenia's Ministry of Defense as of September 2023.
- From October 2022 until June 2023, two French officers (land troops and gendarmerie) were assigned to the French Embassy in Yerevan to temporarily serve as military attachés in Armenia.
- During his visit to Armenia on April 28, 2023, France's Foreign Minister announced the establishment of a "defense mission" (military attachment) at the French embassy in Yerevan.

Thus, the development of the aforementioned facts and processes reveals that, following the Second Karabakh War, which lasted 44 days, France's anti-Azerbaijani strategy, which was consistent, systematic, and extensive, had a major impact on bilateral relations. From this vantage point, we can conclude that if France seeks to resume productive relations with Azerbaijan, it must first reconsider its regional

policy, respect international laws, and recognize Azerbaijan's legitimate interests and position.