



CENTER OF ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
BEYNÖLXALQ MÜNASIBÖTLÖRİN TƏHLİLİ MƏRKƏZİ

MARCH-2024

# BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

## Table of contents

- I. The 11<sup>th</sup> Global Baku Forum on “Fixing the Fractured World”  
2**
- II. Azerbaijan takes center stage in European energy security and green transition  
5**
- III. Remembering the tragic legacy of March 31-Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis  
9**
- IV. Deconstructing the smear campaign against Azerbaijan  
11**
- V. The Ninth Trilateral Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye  
13**
- VI. The Seventh Meeting of the State Commissions on the Delimitation of the State Border between Azerbaijan and Armenia  
14**
- VII. NATO Secretary General visits Azerbaijan  
14**
- VIII. Unmasking the malign intentions behind Armenia’s recent increase in military spending and arms procurement  
15**

## I. The 11th Global Baku Forum on "Fixing the Fractured World"

The 11th Global Baku Forum, held from March 14th to 16th, 2024, under the patronage of President Ilham Aliyev, marked a significant gathering of global leaders and experts to address pressing issues under the theme "Fixing the Fractured World." With 350 guests representing over 70 countries, the forum provided a platform for comprehensive discussions on various challenges and opportunities facing the international community.

One of the central themes of the forum was the aftermath of COP28 and the preparations for COP29, highlighting the crucial role of global cooperation in addressing climate change and environmental sustainability. Discussions also centered on the factors contributing to a fractured world, including security threats, prospects for peace, and efforts to build stability amidst growing divisions.

Attendees engaged in dialogues on world-shaking conflicts and critical threats, with a focus on challenges related to climate change, food security, and nuclear proliferation. The forum served as a forum for exploring innovative solutions to these complex issues, emphasizing the importance of international collaboration and multilateralism.

Moreover, the role of military and economic alliances in global governance was extensively discussed, alongside regional perspectives and relations with the European Union and its neighbors. Participants deliberated on youth policy, strategies to enhance resilience to global challenges, and the urgent need to address inequality, scarcity of natural resources, and migration issues.

In the realm of technology and security, sessions explored the implications of artificial intelligence, drones, and cyber weapons, highlighting the evolving landscape of modern warfare and the

imperative for responsible governance and ethical considerations.

The 11th Global Baku Forum provided a platform for constructive dialogue and exchange of ideas among global leaders and experts, reaffirming Azerbaijan's commitment to fostering international cooperation and addressing the multifaceted challenges facing our world today.

President Ilham Aliyev welcomed attendees to the annual Global Baku Forum, hailing it as a pivotal international conference on par with renowned gatherings like the Davos World Economic Forum and the Munich Security Conference. The President emphasized the significant contributions of the Nizami Ganjavi International Center (NGIC) and its participants in fostering a deeper understanding of crucial global issues.

Acknowledging the rapidly changing world landscape marked by emerging areas of instability and confrontation, President Ilham Aliyev underscored the invaluable expertise and experience of NGIC members and participants, many of whom are current or former heads of state and government. With a record number of over 400 guests from 68 countries, including more than 40 acting and former heads of state and government, the Forum showcased a wealth of intellectual prowess.

President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the fruitful discussions held with the NGIC Board members, expressing gratitude for their dedicated efforts in addressing pressing global challenges throughout the year. He commended the co-chairs of NGIC, Madame Vike-Freiberga and Mr. Serageldin, for their outstanding leadership and the center's reputation as a highly respected international NGO.

Reflecting on regional developments, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized a significant geopolitical shift—the full restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty. This milestone, achieved since the previous Forum, carries far-reaching implications, particularly for resolving seemingly intractable conflicts.

President Ilham Aliyev expressed optimism about the positive ramifications of Azerbaijan's restored territorial integrity, foreseeing a transformative impact on conflict resolution efforts. As the Forum unfolded, participants engaged in substantive discussions on a wide array of global challenges, leveraging their collective wisdom and expertise to chart a path toward a more stable and interconnected world.

President Ilham Aliyev reflected on Azerbaijan's longstanding efforts to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict with Armenia, emphasizing the years of injustice, occupation, and violations of international law endured prior to the Second Karabakh War. Despite persistent advocacy and engagement with international bodies, including annual discussions preceding the war, the conflict remained unresolved.

Critically analyzing the role of the former Minsk Group, President Ilham Aliyev noted the lack of tangible progress over 28 years, ascribing the group's ineffectiveness to a deliberate agenda of perpetuating the status quo rather than facilitating genuine resolution. The President highlighted the international community's tacit acceptance of Armenian occupation and its insistence on the fallacy of there being no military solution to the conflict.

President Ilham Aliyev reiterated Azerbaijan's unwavering stance against conceding to occupation and separatism, emphasizing the necessity for the withdrawal of Armenian forces in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions. Faced with the failure of peaceful negotiations, Azerbaijan asserted its right to self-defense, culminating in the successful military-political resolution of the conflict through the 44-Day War and subsequent anti-terror operation.

Reflecting on the unprecedented achievement of restoring territorial integrity and sovereignty, President Ilham Aliyev underscored the broader implications of Azerbaijan's victory, portraying it as a potential blueprint for resolving seemingly intractable conflicts while upholding international

law. By reclaiming justice and sovereignty independently, Azerbaijan demonstrated resilience and determination in the face of adversity.

President Ilham Aliyev's remarks encapsulated the transformative impact of Azerbaijan's recent victories, positioning the country as a beacon of hope for conflict resolution grounded in principles of justice and international law. As Azerbaijan emerges stronger and more unified, the prospect of enduring peace in the Southern Caucasus becomes increasingly tangible, offering a testament to the power of self-reliance, independence and perseverance.

President Ilham Aliyev underscored the multifaceted approach and resolute determination that culminated in Azerbaijan's successful military-political resolution of the conflict. Reflecting on the confluence of political will, military capability, economic development, and diplomatic support, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the indispensable role of unity and comprehensive strategy in achieving victory.

Noting the potential for a peaceful solution, President Ilham Aliyev revealed insights into missed opportunities for resolution, particularly in 2018 following a change in Armenia's government. Azerbaijan had welcomed assurances from the new leadership regarding adherence to international law and the return of occupied territories. However, Armenia's subsequent rejection of key principles and insistence on maintaining the status quo impeded progress towards peace.

President Ilham Aliyev recounted Armenia's refusal to engage constructively in peace negotiations, citing unacceptable demands and provocative rhetoric, including claims that "Karabakh is Armenia." Such assertions not only violated international law but also demonstrated Armenia's unrealistic ambitions and disregard for Azerbaijan's sovereignty.

Highlighting Armenia's non-compliance with the capitulation agreement signed in November 2020,

President Ilham Aliyev exposed Armenia's continued military presence in Karabakh and illicit smuggling of weapons, ammunition, and mines. Azerbaijan's subsequent restoration of communication control thwarted these activities, leading to significant losses for Armenia during Azerbaijan's anti-terror operation.

President Ilham Aliyev questioned the source of Armenia's extensive military resources, estimated at billions of dollars, pointing to external support for Armenia's military aggression against Azerbaijan. The destruction and capture of military equipment during Azerbaijan's military operations underscored Armenia's reliance on foreign assistance and raised concerns about the complicity of external actors in perpetuating the conflict.

President Ilham Aliyev's remarks shed light on Azerbaijan's enduring commitment to resolving the conflict through diplomatic means, underscoring the necessity for Armenia to adhere to international law and engage constructively in negotiations. As Azerbaijan continues its efforts to consolidate peace and stability in the region, President Ilham Aliyev's insights offer valuable perspectives on the complexities and challenges inherent in conflict resolution.

President Ilham Aliyev emphasized Azerbaijan's commitment to maintaining peace and continuing the peace process following the successful resolution of conflict. With the conflict now closed, President Ilham Aliyev expressed optimism about the prospects for peace in the region, highlighting ongoing diplomatic efforts, including resumed meetings between the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Reflecting on the international community's response to Azerbaijan's anti-terror operation, President Ilham Aliyev noted widespread understanding and support for Azerbaijan's actions. The President highlighted the significance of Armenia's provocative actions, including Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's congratulatory letter to the separatist regime in Karabakh and the holding

of so-called presidential elections in the region. These actions, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized, crossed red lines and constituted violations of Azerbaijan's sovereignty.

President Ilham Aliyev recounted the sequence of events that led to Azerbaijan's anti-terror operation, which culminated in the surrender of separatist forces within hours. Importantly, President Ilham Aliyev underscored that the operation resulted in no civilian casualties, and once the separatists surrendered, Azerbaijan ceased military action.

By providing context to the triggers of the anti-terror operation, President Ilham Aliyev highlighted Azerbaijan's commitment to upholding its sovereignty and territorial integrity while seeking to restore peace in the region. The swift and decisive action taken by Azerbaijan in response to provocations from the separatist regime underscores the country's dedication to ensuring stability and security for its citizens. With the operation concluded and peace efforts ongoing, President Ilham Aliyev reiterated Azerbaijan's readiness to move forward towards a peaceful future for the region.

President Ilham Aliyev expressed disappointment with the position taken by France regarding the Second Karabakh War and Azerbaijan's subsequent anti-terror operation. Despite historically positive relations between Azerbaijan and France, President Ilham Aliyev highlighted France's inadequate response to these events.

President Ilham Aliyev noted that France made several unsuccessful attempts to bring the issue to the United Nations Security Council and impose sanctions on Azerbaijan, despite Azerbaijan's adherence to international law. Similarly, efforts to sanction Azerbaijan within the European Union also failed due to lack of support from the majority of EU member states.

The situation took a concerning turn when a monument of Azerbaijani poetess Natavan, located in the city of Evian, France, was vandalized. President Ilham Aliyev condemned the act of

vandalism, which included defacing the monument with red paint and damaging its nose. Despite Azerbaijan's requests to clean or restore the monument, the French authorities took no action beyond wrapping it in a covering. This neglect persisted for months, prompting Azerbaijan to take action to evacuate the monument from Evian to the Azerbaijani Cultural Center in Paris.

President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that the incident in France was emblematic of double standards, particularly considering France's stated commitment to supporting territorial integrity in other contexts, such as Ukraine. The discrepancy between France's actions and its purported moral leadership role highlighted the challenges Azerbaijan faced in navigating international relations following the restoration of its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

President Ilham Aliyev underscored the significance of the upcoming COP29 conference in Azerbaijan and emphasized the country's commitment to the green transition despite its oil and gas resources. The President expressed confidence in Azerbaijan's ability to make meaningful contributions to addressing climate issues and highlighted the practical steps the country has taken towards renewable energy.

Azerbaijan recently inaugurated the largest 230 MW solar power plant in the Caucasus and Central Asia region, with plans for the construction of two more plants underway. President Ilham Aliyev outlined ambitious goals to increase renewable energy generation to 5,000 megawatts by 2030, citing the signing of numerous contracts and memoranda of understanding as evidence of progress.

Additionally, Azerbaijan is actively engaged in the development of a green energy cable connecting the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea and onward to Europe, with the feasibility study for the project nearing completion.

COP29 presents an opportunity for Azerbaijan to showcase its independent development and demonstrate the success of its policy over the past

three decades. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that Azerbaijan's chairmanship in the Non-Aligned Movement for four years fostered a spirit of solidarity among its 120 member countries, including strategic partnerships with nine EU members and membership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation with over 50 member states. The President highlighted the importance of collaboration among nations to effectively address climate challenges, underscoring Azerbaijan's readiness to play a constructive role in fostering such cooperation at COP29.

## **II. Azerbaijan takes center stage in European energy security and green transition**

Azerbaijan's multifaceted approach towards energy security and sustainable development exemplifies its proactive role in shaping the future of European energy landscapes. Through strategic partnerships, innovative initiatives, and a steadfast commitment to environmental stewardship, Azerbaijan emerges as a beacon of progress and resilience in the transition towards a greener, more sustainable future. In the realm of energy security and diversification, the partnership between Azerbaijan and the European Union (EU) has been marked by significant milestones and strategic initiatives. At the forefront of this collaboration lies the ambitious goal of doubling gas exports from Azerbaijan to the EU, a commitment that underscores the mutual interests in bolstering energy security and resilience.

The 10th Ministerial Meeting of the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) Advisory Council and the 2nd Ministerial Meeting of the Green Energy Advisory Council convened in Baku on March 1, 2024, marking a significant milestone in the energy partnership between the European Union and the Republic of Azerbaijan. Representatives from 23 partner governments and 52 institutions and companies gathered for this crucial event, underscoring the shared commitment to advancing cooperation in energy-related areas.

The meeting highlighted the enduring Strategic Partnership between the European Union and Azerbaijan in the energy sector, encompassing various facets such as ensuring affordable, stable, and secure natural gas supply, promoting renewable energy generation, enhancing energy efficiency, advancing hydrogen production, reducing methane emissions, and safeguarding environmental protection.

At the ministerial meeting of the SGC Advisory Council, participants reaffirmed the pivotal role of the Southern Gas Corridor as a dependable transmission system facilitating stable and competitive energy supplies from Azerbaijan. They commended the successful operations of the SGC for the third consecutive year and acknowledged Azerbaijan's significant contributions. Notably, in 2023, Azerbaijan exported approximately 12 billion cubic meters of natural gas to the EU, marking a remarkable increase of over 45% since 2021. Moreover, Azerbaijan's total natural gas exports to the EU, Turkish, Georgian, and Serbian markets amounted to around 23.9 billion cubic meters in 2023.

Discussions centered on ongoing efforts to bolster infrastructure development and gas field exploration to further augment gas supplies from Azerbaijan to the European Union. The Solidarity Ring initiative and the Bulgaria-Serbia Interconnector were highlighted as crucial projects in this regard. Participants emphasized the importance of fully utilizing existing transmission systems, including the Trans Balkan pipeline, and urged the timely completion of ongoing projects aimed at enhancing supply diversification to the integrated European market.

The ministerial meetings underscored the mutual commitment to advancing energy cooperation, promoting sustainability, and fostering resilience in the energy sector. They laid the groundwork for continued collaboration and innovation in addressing the evolving energy needs of both Azerbaijan and the European Union while advancing common goals of energy security and environmental stewardship.

The meeting also emphasized the pivotal role of the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) in the ongoing energy transition and underscored the importance of taking proactive measures to mitigate methane emissions, aligning with both domestic and international initiatives and standards such as the Global Methane Pledge and the Oil and Gas Methane Partnership 2.0.

In parallel, the Ministerial Meeting of the Green Energy Advisory Council commended the Republic of Azerbaijan for its forthcoming hosting of the next UN Climate Change Conference (COP29). Participants engaged in discussions on recent advancements, including commitments made during the Global Stocktake to transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems in a just, orderly, and equitable manner. The focus was on accelerating actions during this critical decade to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, triple renewable energy capacity, and double energy efficiency improvements worldwide by 2030, as outlined in the latest UN Climate Change Conference.

Reaffirming the significance of strategic agreements such as the Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic Partnership in the field of Energy between Azerbaijan and the EU, as well as the "Agreement on a strategic partnership in the field of green energy development and transmission between the Governments of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary" signed in Bucharest on December 17, 2022, the meeting showcased robust commitment from partner countries, financial institutions, and companies to harness the renewable energy potential of the Caspian region. This includes advancements in power generation and transmission capacity development, with a focus on exploring the role of hydrogen and other renewable fuels.

To ensure the effective implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding, the co-chairs agreed upon a set of steps and priority tasks to guide collaboration in the forthcoming period. They also expressed a strong determination to

uphold effective dialogue and close cooperation in addressing issues related to energy security and climate change.

Additionally, in the sidelines of the Southern Gas Corridor meeting, the 6th Ministerial Meeting under the Strategic Partnership in the field of Green Energy Development and Transmission convened between the Governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary. Furthermore, the co-chairs facilitated an EU-Azerbaijan business and investment roundtable focused on offshore wind energy development, welcoming the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on wind energy cooperation between the Azerbaijan Renewable Energy Agency and WindEurope.

One of the ambitious initiatives on Azerbaijan's horizon is the development of wind farms in the Caspian Sea. Collaborating with organizations like Brussels-based WindEurope, Azerbaijan aims to harness offshore wind energy potential and channel it through innovative cross-border transmission systems. Giles Dickson, CEO of WindEurope, emphasized the significance of international cooperation in realizing such ambitious projects, highlighting the indispensable role of governmental and industry collaboration.

The energy partnership between Azerbaijan and the European Union has reached a pivotal juncture, with a concerted focus on doubling gas exports from Azerbaijan to the EU. This strategic collaboration underscores the shared commitment to bolstering energy security and resilience in the region.

Azerbaijan has been actively engaged in working closely with the EU to fulfill its pledge of ramping up gas supply to Europe to approximately 20 billion cubic meters (bcm) per annum by 2027. As part of this endeavor, European companies have been diligently upgrading and expanding the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), a vital infrastructure route aimed at diversifying Europe's gas supplies.

Recent developments, such as the commencement of gas production at another development cluster

in the Shah Deniz field complex by UK BP, highlight the tangible progress in advancing Azerbaijan's energy objectives. This milestone, part of the field's \$28 billion second development phase, underscores Azerbaijan's pivotal role as a reliable energy supplier to the EU.

Moreover, ongoing efforts to enhance oil production at the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli (ACG) offshore oil project further reinforce Azerbaijan's position as a key player in the region's energy landscape. These initiatives hold significant potential to alleviate Europe's reliance on Russian gas supply and mitigate energy shortages, particularly during colder months.

The recent attendance of Deputy Assistant Secretary Kimberly Harrington from the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Energy Resources (ENR) at the meeting underscores the international support and recognition of the SGC's pivotal role in diversifying Europe's gas supplies. Harrington reiterated the U.S. government's commitment to supporting these efforts, acknowledging the transformative impact of Azerbaijani gas expansion on regional energy dynamics.

As Europe continues its quest for alternative energy sources, the Azerbaijan-EU energy partnership stands as a beacon of cooperation and resilience. Through concerted efforts and strategic investments in critical infrastructure, both parties are poised to enhance energy security and foster sustainable energy solutions for the benefit of all stakeholders involved.

Speaking at the 10th Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council Ministerial Meeting and the 2nd Green Energy Advisory Council Ministerial Meeting, President Ilham Aliyev reiterated the pressing need for concerted global action in combating climate change. Highlighting the tangible impacts of climate change on Azerbaijan's environment, including diminishing water resources and altered landscapes, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the urgency of collective commitment to addressing this existential challenge.

The dialogue surrounding energy transition and sustainability has also taken center stage in Azerbaijan's strategic vision. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the need to shift the narrative when evaluating countries reliant on fossil fuels, stressing that environmental stewardship and green transition efforts should be the focal points of assessment. Azerbaijan is steadfast in its commitment to long-term investments in renewable energy, with a clear objective of fostering a collective understanding of its necessity.

President Ilham Aliyev extended a warm welcome to Prime Minister Edi Rama and expressed gratitude for his presence at the important event, highlighting the strong and friendly relations between Albania and Azerbaijan. The two countries actively cooperate in various areas, including political dialogue and international institutions, with a particular focus on energy security.

Welcoming the EU Commissioner Kadri Simson, co-chair of the Advisory Council of the Southern Gas Corridor, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the crucial role of the European Union in supporting Azerbaijan's energy diversification efforts. The President noted that Azerbaijan-EU cooperation has created a new geography of energy supplies, contributing to regional energy security.

President Ilham Aliyev underscored Azerbaijan's consistent commitment to energy security, considering it a vital factor for national security. The President emphasized the importance of diversifying both supply routes and sources, highlighting the significance of the Southern Gas Corridor as a new route and Azerbaijani gas as a new source.

Reflecting on recent achievements, President Ilham Aliyev mentioned the commencement of commercial natural gas production from the Absheron gas and condensate field in the Caspian Sea. The President described it as the second-largest discovery of gas deposits after Shahdeniz and emphasized its role as a resource base for

future energy diversification projects. The approval of the first phase of the Absheron project is expected to contribute significantly to international markets, with plans for additional phases to further enhance production.

President Ilham Aliyev highlighted several significant achievements in Azerbaijan's energy sector, particularly in expanding natural gas exports and enhancing energy diversification efforts.

One notable achievement is Azerbaijan's initiation of natural gas supplies to Hungary and Serbia, effectively increasing the country's presence in the European energy market. With Azerbaijan now supplying natural gas to eight countries, including six in Europe, the country's energy footprint has expanded considerably. This expansion has been facilitated by the inauguration of interconnector projects, which have been instrumental in diversifying supply routes across the continent.

President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the importance of collaboration with Türkiye in utilizing the Trans-Balkan gas pipeline system, which represents a crucial aspect of Azerbaijan's broader strategy for energy diversification. This collaboration underscores Azerbaijan's commitment to addressing energy security concerns with maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

Moreover, President Aliyev underscored Azerbaijan's reputation as a reliable energy partner, highlighting the country's track record of delivering on its commitments. The recent involvement of the United Arab Emirates' company, ADNOC, as a shareholder in the Absheron project further strengthens Azerbaijan's energy endeavors, bringing additional financing and expertise to the table.

Looking ahead, President Ilham Aliyev outlined ambitious plans for future energy projects, including the commencement of natural gas production from the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli deep gas project and the development of the second phase of the Umid gas condensate field. These projects are expected to significantly enhance



Azerbaijan's gas supply capacity, reinforcing its position as a key player in the European energy landscape.

President Ilham Aliyev debunked rumors questioning Azerbaijan's gas reserves, emphasizing that the country possesses ample resources to meet the growing demands of European consumers. The President dismissed such rumors as baseless attempts to undermine Azerbaijan's potential and reputation on the international stage.

President Ilham Aliyev underscored Azerbaijan's commitment to the green transition process, highlighting the country's ambitious renewable energy projects and its role in fostering international cooperation in the energy sector.

The announcement of the "Green World Solidarity Year" in Azerbaijan signifies the country's dedication to environmental sustainability and renewable energy development. President Ilham Aliyev proudly mentioned the inauguration of the first major solar power plant in Azerbaijan, with plans to further expand renewable energy generation capacity to 5 gigawatts by 2030. Partnerships with leading companies such as Masdar and ACWA Power from the UAE and Saudi Arabia, respectively, demonstrate international collaboration in Azerbaijan's green energy initiatives.

Azerbaijan's renewable energy potential extends beyond its borders, with plans for integrated projects involving wind farms in the Caspian Sea and transmission lines to Europe under the Black Sea. These initiatives not only contribute to the global transition to renewable energy but also complement the existing Southern Gas Corridor, enhancing energy security and cooperation in the region.

President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the need for fairness in evaluating countries' approaches to fossil fuels, urging a balanced assessment that considers their efforts in environmental protection and green transition. He highlighted Azerbaijan's hosting of COP29 as a testament to the country's

commitment to addressing climate change, despite facing unfair criticism due to its oil and gas reserves. Azerbaijan's willingness to host the global climate conference reflects its proactive stance on environmental issues and its desire to contribute to international efforts to combat climate change.

President Ilham Aliyev's remarks reaffirmed Azerbaijan's position as a proactive participant in the green transition, advocating for fair evaluation of countries' energy policies and demonstrating its readiness to play a constructive role in global climate action initiatives.

### **III. Remembering the tragic legacy of March 31 - Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis**

March 31 holds a solemn place in the collective memory of Azerbaijanis, marking a day of remembrance for the innocent lives lost to racial discrimination and intolerance. This day commemorates the harrowing events of 1918 when radical Armenian groups perpetrated heinous acts of violence against Azerbaijani communities, perpetrating a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

During March and April of 1918, radical Armenians employed various ruthless methods to cleanse Azerbaijanis from their ancestral lands, spanning centuries of history. Tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis residing in Baku, Shamakhi, Guba, Garabagh, Zangazur, Nakhchivan, Lankaran, and other regions fell victim to brutal massacres, while countless settlements, religious sites, and cultural monuments were razed to the ground. The scale of the atrocities was staggering, with over 16,000 lives lost and 167 villages destroyed in Guba alone.

The magnitude of the crimes became unmistakably clear through the discovery of mass graves in the Guba region in 2007 and the confession of Stephan Shaumyan, an ethnic Armenian who served as the Extraordinary Commissioner of the Caucasus. Shaumyan's admission implicated 6,000 armed soldiers of the Baku Soviet and 4,000 armed

soldiers of the Dashnaksutyun Party in the massacres and the destruction of settlements and cultural landmarks.

Following the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR), efforts were made to seek justice for the victims through the formation of the Extraordinary Investigation Commission. This commission aimed to uncover the truth behind the March events and hold the perpetrators accountable. Criminal proceedings were initiated against 194 individuals accused of committing crimes, resulting in the arrest of 24 individuals in Baku and approximately 100 in Shamakhi. However, the collapse of the ADR disrupted the investigative process and halted the political and legal assessment of the March massacres.

It was only after the restoration of Azerbaijan's independence that the events of March received the rightful political acknowledgment they deserved. In a historic decree issued on March 26, 1998, the National Leader Heydar Aliyev officially recognized the genocide of Azerbaijanis, designating March 31 as the "Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis."

Today, as Azerbaijanis commemorate this solemn day, it serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of preserving historical truth and honoring the memory of those who perished unjustly. It also underscores the enduring commitment to justice and the prevention of such atrocities in the future. Through remembrance and reflection, we honor the resilience of our ancestors and reaffirm our dedication to building a future free from hatred and violence.

The solemn observance of March 31 as the Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis carries profound significance, serving as a poignant reminder of the enduring legacy of ethnic hatred and intolerance. While this day is dedicated to honoring the memory of innocent Azerbaijanis who fell victim to genocide, it also prompts reflection on the ongoing challenges of preventing atrocities and promoting peace in the region.

The atrocities committed against Azerbaijanis extend beyond the events of 1918, echoing through the decades with instances of mass deportations, ethnic cleansing, and genocide crimes perpetrated during periods of conflict and aggression. The recent 44-day Patriotic War further exposed the ruthless policies of systematic ethnic hatred and intolerance, as evidenced by war crimes targeting civilians in areas far removed from the frontlines.

It is imperative to heed the lessons of history and take decisive action to prevent the recurrence of such horrific events. This entails not only holding perpetrators accountable for their crimes but also addressing the root causes of ethnic animosity and fostering a culture of reconciliation and tolerance. At the current post-conflict juncture, there exists a crucial opportunity to pursue peace and stability in the region, but this requires concerted efforts from the international community and leadership within Armenia.

Preventing the resurgence of revanchism in Armenia is essential for building a sustainable peace framework. The international community must play a proactive role in promoting dialogue, fostering mutual understanding, and supporting initiatives aimed at addressing historical grievances and building trust between communities. At the same time, the leadership of Armenia bears a significant responsibility in confronting the legacy of ethnic hatred and charting a path towards reconciliation and coexistence.

As Azerbaijan commemorates the Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis, it does so with deep grief and profound respect for the victims whose lives were tragically cut short by senseless violence and bigotry. Their memory serves as a solemn reminder of the imperative to uphold justice, promote tolerance, and strive tirelessly for a future where such atrocities are relegated to the annals of history. Only through collective action and unwavering commitment can we honor the legacy of the fallen and build a world where peace and harmony prevail.

#### IV. Deconstructing the smear campaign against Azerbaijan

On March 21, the report was released titled "Deepening EU-Armenia relations: More Europe in Armenia; More Armenia in Europe", which stirred controversy and condemnation from Azerbaijan, as it contains inflammatory and baseless accusations against the nation. Led by former Danish Prime Minister and NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the Friends of Armenia Network spearheaded the report, which is nothing more than a thinly veiled smear campaign against Azerbaijan.

The report's slanderous assertions, distorted facts, and lack of substantiated evidence cast serious doubt on its credibility and purported aim of fostering closer ties between Armenia and the European Union. Instead, it appears to serve as a tool for propagandist narratives aimed at tarnishing Azerbaijan's reputation on the international stage.

Of particular concern was the timing of the report's release, coinciding with the April 5th US-EU-Armenia trilateral conference. This strategic move by the Armenian lobby group behind the report suggested a calculated effort to influence diplomatic proceedings and sway international opinion in Armenia's favor. It raised questions about the true intentions of both the report and the former officials associated with it.

Moreover, revelations regarding financial documents highlighted potential conflicts of interest and ethical lapses. Anders Rasmussen's continued use of his former status as NATO Secretary General to advance his lobbying firm "RasmussenGlobal," with lucrative deals struck with the Armenian government, underscores the dubious nature of the report's origins. The substantial payments made by the Armenian government for the production of the report further call into question its objectivity and impartiality.

Adding another layer of complexity is the involvement of co-authors who witnessed

firsthand Armenia's occupation and ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijani territories. Their active participation in a report accusing Azerbaijan of threatening Armenia's territorial integrity raises eyebrows and exposes potential biases within the report's narrative.

The report's one-sided perspective not only emboldens revanchist elements within Armenia but also fosters a misguided perception that the "West" supports Armenia's obstructive stance in the peace process. This perpetuates regional tensions and undermines efforts towards constructive dialogue and reconciliation.

The Armenian government's funding of propaganda campaigns further underscores its lack of sincerity in pursuing genuine peace initiatives in the region. Instead of engaging in costly and futile smear campaigns, Armenia and its lobby groups should redirect their efforts towards promoting meaningful dialogue and cooperation aimed at fostering lasting peace and stability. A thorough examination of the motivations behind the report is needed and the international community should reject baseless allegations that undermine efforts towards regional peace and stability. It is imperative that all stakeholders commit to genuine engagement and constructive dialogue to address the complex challenges facing the South Caucasus region.

Moreover, on March 20, Gabriel Attal, Prime Minister of the French Republic, made concerning statements during an annual event organized by the Coordinating Council of Armenian Organizations of France. Attal's remarks, which appeared to unilaterally defend Armenia while accusing Azerbaijan of unfounded actions, have drawn strong condemnation from Azerbaijan.

At the heart of the issue lies France's condemnation of Azerbaijan's counter-terrorism measures targeting the remnants of Armenian armed forces within its sovereign territories. Despite being in line with international law and UN Security Council resolutions related to the former Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, France has expressed

disapproval, raising questions about its impartiality and understanding of the situation. What adds to the complexity is France's historical stance on the conflict. For nearly three decades, Armenia has maintained its occupation of Azerbaijani territories, defying numerous UN resolutions calling for its withdrawal. Eight Azerbaijani villages remain under Armenian occupation, yet France has largely remained silent on this matter. In light of these facts, France's accusation against Azerbaijan of using force without cause appears hypocritical. Azerbaijan has consistently pursued peaceful resolutions to conflicts and has shown restraint in the face of continued provocations. The unfounded allegations only serve to escalate tensions and undermine efforts towards regional stability. They deepen divisions and hinder progress towards peaceful resolutions.

The European Parliament's resolution on "Closer ties between the EU and Armenia and the need for a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia," adopted on March 13, 2024, has drawn strong criticism from Azerbaijan for its biased and unfounded nature. The resolution not only lacks objectivity but also perpetuates double standards against Azerbaijan. Sponsored by groups within the European Parliament influenced by Armenia and its lobby, the resolution is a tool in a smear campaign against the country. Despite being presented under the guise of promoting peace and fostering EU-Armenia relations, it is riddled with falsified facts and offensive statements that contravene the principles of international relations.

Of particular concern to Azerbaijan are statements within the resolution that undermine its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Such remarks not only challenge the essence of political ethics but also reveal the true intentions of the MEPs behind the resolution. It is a clear example of bias and double standards employed against the country within European institutions.

The European Parliament needs to focus its attention on more pressing issues affecting Europe, such as racial discrimination,

Islamophobia, xenophobia, extremism, and the inhumane treatment of migrants. By doing so, the Parliament could better fulfill its role as a meaningful institution that addresses the genuine concerns of its constituents. Furthermore, resolutions like this, which deviate from the European Parliament's declared values and interfere with the normalization process between Azerbaijan and Armenia, serve to undermine the credibility of the institution itself. Instead of perpetuating biased narratives, the European Parliament should strive for objectivity and fairness in its dealings with all parties involved in regional conflicts. Only through fair and impartial engagement can meaningful progress be achieved in resolving conflicts and fostering peace and stability in the region.

In an interview with Anadolu Agency, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan made provocative statements related to the Azerbaijan-Armenia peace process, recognition of territorial integrity and sovereignty, and the opening of communications. While emphasizing the importance of recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the significance of respecting principles for the establishment of transport links and economic relations in the region, the Armenian Foreign Minister purposefully overlooked Armenia's own violations of these principles over the past three decades.

Armenia's failure to withdraw occupying forces from Azerbaijani territories after the 44-day Patriotic War, continued transfer of weapons and military equipment to these territories, and promotion of the puppet regime are clear violations of international norms and agreements. These actions contradict the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity that the Armenian Foreign Minister claims to support.

Furthermore, Armenia's refusal to open communication lines and its failure to offer practical solutions to reach agreements on these issues undermine regional cooperation and hinder progress towards peace. Instead of making provocative statements, Armenia should prioritize

fulfilling its international commitments and actively contribute to the peace process through concrete actions. The interview highlighted the need for Armenia to demonstrate genuine commitment to peace and cooperation in the region, rather than engaging in politically manipulative rhetoric that serves to further escalate tensions

#### **V. The Ninth Trilateral Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye**

On March 15, 2024, the Ninth Trilateral Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Georgia took place in Baku, at the invitation of Jeyhun Bayramov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The meeting, attended by Hakan Fidan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye, and Ilia Darchiashvili, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, underscored the commitment of the three nations to deepen cooperation across various spheres for mutual benefit and regional stability.

The ministers, recognizing the strong ties rooted in friendship and historic bonds between their countries, expressed their desire to further enhance cooperation across multiple domains, including political, economic, trade, peace and security, science and technology, and cultural fields. They highlighted the significant contributions of their respective states to promoting peace, stability, and development in the region, emphasizing their shared vision for prosperity and security.

Acknowledging the challenges and emerging threats facing their countries, such as terrorism, cyber-attacks, and hybrid forms of warfare, the ministers reaffirmed their commitment to combatting these issues collectively. They emphasized the importance of accelerating trade and investment activities to bolster regional economic growth and resilience, recognizing regional connectivity as a cornerstone for sustainable development.

The ministers expressed solidarity with Azerbaijan in its efforts to rebuild and rehabilitate its conflict-affected territories and extended their support to Türkiye in the aftermath of devastating earthquakes and terrorist attacks. They reiterated their unwavering support for each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of borders.

Welcoming the full restoration of Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its state borders, the ministers reaffirmed their support for the country's post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts. They also expressed support for the normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia based on mutual recognition and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, believing that this would contribute significantly to regional stability and security.

The ministers highlighted the importance of regional connectivity and transportation infrastructure projects, such as the Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Corridor and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway, in facilitating trade and economic growth. They stressed the need for continued cooperation in energy, including green energy and low carbon technologies, as well as in areas such as tourism, ICT, and education.

Encouraging investments and economic cooperation, the ministers expressed readiness to strengthen bonds of friendship and kinship among the youth and athletes of their countries. They also welcomed Azerbaijan's hosting of the 29th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 29) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in November 2024.

In conclusion, the Ninth Trilateral Meeting reaffirmed the commitment of Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Georgia to deepening cooperation and fostering regional stability and prosperity. The ministers expressed gratitude to Minister Jeyhun Bayramov for hosting a successful meeting and agreed to hold the Tenth Trilateral Meeting in Türkiye in 2025.

## **VI. The Seventh Meeting of the State Commissions on the Delimitation of the State Border between Azerbaijan and Armenia**

The seventh meeting of the State Commission on the Delimitation of the State Border between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, along with the Commission on the Delimitation of the State Border and Border Security between the two nations, took place on March 7. Chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev of Azerbaijan and Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan of Armenia, the meeting marked another step forward in the ongoing efforts to delineate the border between the two countries.

During the meeting, both sides engaged in constructive discussions on delimitation issues and commenced negotiations on the draft Regulation on Joint Activity of the State Commission on Delimitation of the State Border Between Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as the Commission on Delimitation of the State Border and Border Security between the two nations. Drafts of relevant instructions concerning the procedures for delimitation works were also deliberated upon.

A key outcome of the meeting was the decision to expedite the agreement on the draft Regulation on Joint Activity of the Commissions. Additionally, the parties agreed to determine the date and venue for the next meeting of the Commissions at the working level.

As efforts to delineate the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia continue, it is crucial to maintain the momentum and build on the progress achieved thus far. The seventh meeting of the State Commission on the Delimitation of the State Border between Azerbaijan and Armenia represents a positive step forward in the ongoing efforts to establish clear and mutually recognized borders. Through continued dialogue and cooperation, both countries can contribute to regional stability and prosperity.

## **VII. NATO Secretary General visits Azerbaijan**

As part of his regional visit, on March 17, the NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, arrived in Baku, where he met with President Ilham Aliyev. The press statements by President Ilham Aliyev and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg underscored the deepening partnership between Azerbaijan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). President Ilham Aliyev welcomed Secretary General Stoltenberg to Azerbaijan, highlighting the enduring collaboration between the two entities over the past three decades.

Azerbaijan's participation in NATO-led peacekeeping missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan is a testament to its commitment to international security and stability. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized Azerbaijan's successful efforts in restoring its territorial integrity and sovereignty during the 44-Day War of 2020 and subsequent operations.

President Ilham Aliyev indicated that negotiations with Armenia have entered an active phase, with seven rounds of exchanges on a draft peace agreement completed. Recent meetings between foreign ministers and deputy prime ministers demonstrate positive momentum towards a peaceful settlement. “[A]s a result of the restoration of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, we are very close, I think, and I hope, to a breakthrough. That will be a very serious change in the South Caucasus. It will mean that long-awaited peace will come to the Caucasus,” President Ilham Aliyev noted.

Energy security emerged as another key aspect of Azerbaijan-NATO cooperation. President Ilham Aliyev highlighted Azerbaijan's role as a reliable natural gas supplier to NATO member states, with six NATO members and two NATO partners currently receiving Azerbaijani natural gas. This underscores Azerbaijan's position as a crucial partner in ensuring energy security in the region. Additionally, President Ilham Aliyev outlined

Azerbaijan's green transition agenda, emphasizing the country's commitment to renewable energy sources and combating climate change. Azerbaijan's selection as the host country for COP29 reflects international recognition of its efforts in this regard.

Secretary General Stoltenberg expressed gratitude for the warm welcome and highlighted the longstanding partnership between Azerbaijan and NATO. He recalled his previous visits to Baku in the 1990s and praised Azerbaijan's vibrant energy sector development, underscoring the critical role of energy security in ensuring societal resilience.

Acknowledging Azerbaijan's increasing ties with NATO allies, Secretary General Stoltenberg emphasized Azerbaijan's growing importance in supplying gas and potentially electricity to key NATO allies in Europe. He emphasized the role of Azerbaijan in enhancing the resilience of NATO member states and welcomed the practical cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO, citing Azerbaijan's significant contributions to NATO missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

Addressing the importance of peace and stability in the region, Secretary General Stoltenberg noted the ongoing efforts towards achieving enduring peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. He encouraged both countries to seize the opportunity to reach a lasting peace agreement, emphasizing the broader implications of regional stability for Black Sea security and North Atlantic security.

Secretary General Stoltenberg also highlighted NATO's concern over Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine and welcomed Azerbaijan's support for Ukraine, particularly in providing humanitarian aid. He stressed the need for continued support for Ukraine amid the challenging humanitarian situation.

Turning to the issue of climate change, Secretary General Stoltenberg commended Azerbaijan's hosting of the upcoming COP29 meeting, emphasizing the close link between climate change and security. He noted Azerbaijan's efforts in

investing in alternative energy sources, such as hydropower, wind power, and solar power, and highlighted the importance of reconciling energy needs with environmental concerns.

In conclusion, Secretary General Stoltenberg expressed appreciation for the opportunity to visit Azerbaijan and engage in discussions on key regional and global issues. He emphasized the importance of Azerbaijan-NATO cooperation in promoting peace, security, and sustainability in the region and beyond.

### **VIII. Unmasking the malign intentions behind Armenia's recent increase in military spending and arms procurement**

The conclusion of the 44-Day War ushered in a new era for the South Caucasus, marked by efforts towards regional economic integration and peace-building initiatives. However, despite ongoing peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the failure to sign a final peace agreement has led to escalating tensions, exacerbated by Armenia's substantial increase in military expenditures. The trilateral statement signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia on November 10 symbolized the region's post-war development trajectory, emphasizing the importance of dialogue and cooperation. Yet, Armenia's decision to allocate significant resources to military spending has raised concerns about the sustainability of peace efforts and regional stability.

Prior to the war's conclusion, Armenia had already devoted substantial financial resources to its military, with expenditures reaching \$600 million in 2021 and escalating to \$750 million in 2022. The trend continued in 2023, with the national budget earmarking a record \$1.28 billion for military expenditures, reflecting a 46% increase from the previous year. In 2024, despite ongoing peace talks and the need for economic reconstruction, the Armenian government further bolstered its defense budget, allocating approximately \$1.37 billion, equivalent to more than 17% of overall

public spending. This marked a 6% increase from the previous year, underscoring Armenia's continued prioritization of military capabilities. The significant rise in military spending, coupled with the absence of a final peace treaty, has raised concerns about Armenia's post-war trajectory. With billions of dollars' worth of military equipment lost or damaged during the conflict, Armenia's focus on replenishing its arsenal threatens to perpetuate regional tensions and hinder efforts towards reconciliation. The disproportionate allocation of resources towards military spending could impede long-term regional stability and hinder the region's development. Furthermore, Armenia's collaboration with foreign partners, including France, India, and Greece, in its military endeavors adds another layer of complexity to the regional dynamics. Such partnerships risk exacerbating existing tensions and undermining efforts towards peaceful resolution.

Armenia's recent surge in military spending and strategic partnerships with France and India has sparked questions about the country's motivations and the broader implications for regional stability. To understand these developments, it is essential to examine the shifting geopolitical landscape in Eurasia and Armenia's evolving relationships with its traditional allies and new partners.

The 44-Day War and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict have reshaped the geopolitical dynamics in the region, prompting Armenia to reassess its security strategy. Despite its longstanding economic and security ties with Moscow, Armenia has found itself unable to rely solely on Russia for military support. While trade between Armenia and Russia has seen significant growth, reaching \$4.4 billion in the first nine months of 2023, Russia's ability to supply promised weaponry has been limited, particularly in the aftermath of sweeping sanctions imposed following the invasion of Ukraine.

Armenia's response to these challenges has been multifaceted. The country has capitalized on the opportunity presented by the sanctions to re-

export goods, including second-hand cars and consumer electronics, to Russia, thereby bolstering its exports and aiding Moscow in circumventing Western sanctions. This economic cooperation has underscored Armenia's strategic importance to Russia and its role as a key trading partner. In parallel, Armenia has pursued strategic partnerships with France and India, signaling a diversification of its military procurement sources. France, in particular, has emerged as a significant supplier of arms to Armenia, with President Emmanuel Macron openly expressing support for Yerevan. The military cooperation between Paris and Yerevan encompasses a range of initiatives, including the provision of armored vehicles, arms, equipment, and munitions, as well as efforts to enhance Armenia's air-defense capabilities. French Ambassador Olivier Decottignies has emphasized the comprehensive nature of the Armenia-France partnership, highlighting not only military procurement but also training initiatives for Armenian officers. Moreover, France's alignment with Armenia extends to its relations with Iran, with Ambassador Decottignies noting areas of agreement between Paris and Tehran on Armenian issues, noting that "We disagree with Iran on many issues but we agree on Armenia issue". This convergence of interests between France, Armenia, and Iran reflects a broader strategic calculus that favors Yerevan's interests over those of its regional neighbors. In light of these developments, Armenia's strategic shift towards France and India raises concerns about the potential for heightened tensions in the region. The influx of arms from these partners has the potential to escalate conflicts and undermine efforts towards peace and stability.

The recent influx of major arms deliveries from India to Armenia, including advanced defense systems such as the Akash Air Defense System and Pinaka rocket system, signals a concerning escalation in the arms race in the South Caucasus. These deliveries, facilitated through an air corridor established by India through Iran, underscore the complex geopolitical dynamics at play in the region and the potential for increased instability.



Of particular concern is the role of external actors, notably the Paris-New Delhi-Yerevan triangle, in altering the security dynamics of the South Caucasus. By supplying Armenia with sophisticated weaponry, these actors risk exacerbating tensions and undermining efforts towards peace and stability in the region. The delivery of offensive weapons such as the Pinaka weapon system adds a dangerous dimension to the existing conflict, heightening the risk of escalation.

Furthermore, the reliance on Iran as a transit route for Indian arms shipments to Armenia has the potential to strain relations between Iran and Azerbaijan, further complicating the regional geopolitical landscape. Such developments not only destabilize the region but also hinder future peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, perpetuating the cycle of conflict and insecurity. A concerted effort towards diplomacy and dialogue are essential to address the root causes of conflict and pave the way for a secure and prosperous future for all in the South Caucasus.

Armenia and its allies must prioritize the pursuit of peace and the fostering of a climate of cooperation and mutual understanding in the South Caucasus, rather than intentionally and systematically escalating offensive military capabilities and pursuing confrontation to undermine fragile regional stability.