

ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN CONFLICT

The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict had gone down in the history of the 20th century as one of the most tragic conflicts, as its implications seriously affected the fates of millions of Azerbaijanis.

The conflict, which began with Armenia's overt territorial claims to Azerbaijan's historical lands, provocations on ethnic grounds and acts of terror in the late 1980s, resulted in military aggression against Azerbaijan.

The Armenians represented in the government of the Soviet Union, the leaders of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) and the Armenian diaspora abroad took advantage of the weakening of the central government of the USSR in the late 1980s and switched to deliberate actions to secede the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAR), which was established as part of the Azerbaijani SSR in 1923, from Azerbaijan and annex it to the Armenian SSR.

The process of brutal deportation of Azerbaijanis from their historical lands in the Gafan region of the Armenian SSR began in late 1987. The Azerbaijanis living in different cities and regions of Armenia faced the same fate in 1988-1989. More than 250,000 Azerbaijanis living in Armenia were forcibly expelled from their historical lands, 216 of them were mercilessly killed and 1,154 were injured. In an effort to save their lives from Armenian violence, they were forced to seek refuge in Azerbaijan.

Until 1988, the Azerbaijanis lived compactly across Armenia. However, in contrast to the Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Soviet government did not grant the status of autonomy to the territories within the Armenian SSR densely populated by Azerbaijanis.

The Beginning

The Azerbaijanis were deliberately expelled and deported from the territory of the present-day Armenia in 1905-1906, 1918-1920 and 1948- 1953. In 1948-1953 alone, more than 150,000 Azerbaijanis were deported en masse from their historical lands in the territory of the Armenian SSR. Some of them, especially the elderly and infants, died due to severe resettlement conditions, unfavorable climate, physical deprivation and mental suffering.

On 13 February 1988, the first Armenian rally on the Karabakh issue was held in Khankendi (then Stepanakert), the center of NKAR. Various rallies were organized in Nagorno-Karabakh from 16 February to 2 March. On 20 February, deputies of Armenian origin from the Nagorno-Karabakh Council of People's Deputies voted in favor of the proposal to have the region joined with the Armenian SSR (Azerbaijani deputies and those of other nationalities did not attend the session). On 21 February, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union issued a resolution "On the events in Nagorno-Karabakh", which described the Council's decision as one "provoked by nationalist elements". However, on 22 February, Armenians opened fire on peaceful Azerbaijanis as they were protesting against the above-mentioned decision of the Council of People's Deputies of Nagorno-Karabakh near the settlement of Asgaran on the Khankendi-Aghdam highway. As a result, two young Azerbaijanis

were killed. In early March, two organizations, “Karabakh” and “Krunk”, started to freely operate in Yerevan and Khankendi respectively with the aim of annexing Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.

On 14 June, the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR decided to “incorporate” the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region in the Armenian SSR. In protest, the Supreme Council of the Azerbaijani SSR reaffirmed on 17 June that NKAR was a part of the Azerbaijani SSR. On 18 July, the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR decided that it was impossible to change the national-territorial division of the Azerbaijani SSR and the Armenian SSR. Thus, the Supreme Council of the USSR, guided by a relevant provision of the USSR Constitution (Article 78), defended the principle of territorial integrity of the republics.

As the overall state structure of the USSR weakened, the situation in the region continued to deteriorate. Armed groups and terrorists, mainly from Armenia, were involved in acts of sabotage in Nagorno-Karabakh. Under such circumstances, the activities of the Special Governance Committee (SGC, 12 January – 28 November 1989), established by a decision of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Council of the USSR, ended in a failure.

On 1 December 1989, the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR adopted a decision “On the unification of the Armenian SSR and Nagorno-Karabakh”. On 9 January 1990, the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR included a plan on the socioeconomic development of the NKAR into the plan of the Armenian SSR for 1990. On 20 May 1990, elections of deputies of the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR from Nagorno-Karabakh were held in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The decisions of the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR clearly exposed the Armenia’s aggressive nature. Territorial claims against Azerbaijan were made not only by nationalist groups, but also by Armenian government bodies. Armenia wanted to occupy a part of the territory of Azerbaijan at whatever cost.

As a result of the victory of the Armenian National Movement in the parliamentary elections in Armenia in May 1990, extremist nationalist and chauvinist forces advocating for war ascended to power in the republic. This, in turn, accelerated their preparations for the war of aggression. Yerevan focused all its efforts on creating and arming informal military units, preferring to solve the problem by force in accordance with its goals. This is exactly why Armenia never took the process of negotiation seriously and only tried to create a semblance of it in international public opinion.

Both in the run-up to the war and in the post-war period, Azerbaijan’s position was fully justified in terms of the USSR Constitution and international law. However, the inaction by Azerbaijan’s political elite at the time and the lack of a political leader in the republic further aggravated the situation. Heydar Aliyev, a far-sighted politician, prominent statesman, the national leader of the Azerbaijani people who was capable of thoroughly analyzing the process, seeing the determined and principled position of the people and mobilizing the nation for a common goal had been forced to resign from all of his government posts at the time. His alienation from politics had a direct impact on the deepening of the conflict based on the wishes of the Armenians.

Extreme Pressure Campaign

After the invasion of Baku by Soviet troops on 20 January 1990 and the Bloody January tragedy, the Kremlin and personally President Mikhail Gorbachev completely discredited themselves. After Baku, Soviet troops killed civilians in Neftchala and Lankaran. All in all, 150 people were killed across the country during the January events. The tragedy of 20 January played a critical part in completely changing the attitude of the Azerbaijani people to the USSR and realizing the ideas of national independence. While Azerbaijani communist leaders continued to turn a blind eye to the profound changes in the national consciousness of the people, the national leader Heydar Aliyev visited the permanent representative office of Azerbaijan in Moscow on 21 January to voice his protest at the biased policy of the USSR leadership against the Azerbaijani people. He then gave up his membership of the party.

According to the decision of the Supreme Council of the USSR “On measures to normalize the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh” from 8 November 1989, the Special Governance Committee of Nagorno-Karabakh was abolished, the local Council of People’s Deputies was re-established and the Organizing Committee for the NKAR was set up. However, the Committee was doomed to failure from the very outset, as it relied on the dwindling capabilities of the all-Union system and was only interested in preserving it. After the events of August 1991, which significantly undermined the foundations of the Soviet Union, the activities of this Committee became meaningless. The new political reality showed that the power of the USSR was only nominal in nature and had actually come to an end.

In addition to influencing the course of the conflict, the Armenian diaspora and lobbying organizations were conducting propaganda in their respective countries using fabricated allegations and trying to channel them into a resolution that would meet their interests only.

On 2 September 1991, a self-styled “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic” (“NKR”) was proclaimed in the territory of NKAR and the Shaumyan (rural) district of the Azerbaijan SSR, while a “referendum” was held on 10 December. It was obvious that given the prospect of the collapse of the USSR, Armenia was pretending not to be a party to the conflict, acting upon a special plan in an effort to mislead the international community. In response, on 23 November 1991, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Azerbaijan abolished the status of autonomy for Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenia, which had been openly voicing its territorial claims to Azerbaijan, now switched to military operations against Azerbaijan without declaring war. This is how the conflict entered the “active phase”.

Large-scale Massacres, Acts of Genocide

During the military campaign, the Armenian armed forces brutally killed Azerbaijanis in the occupied districts and cities without making any distinction between servicemen and the civilian population. The Azerbaijanis were subjected to ethnic cleansing and acts of genocide. The Armenian military-political leadership pursued the goal of annihilation of a part of the Azerbaijani civilian population of Nagorno-Karabakh and breaking the resistance will of the rest to clear the region of them by committing systematic and large-scale massacres of civilians in

Meshali village of Asgaran, Malibeyli and Gushchular villages of Shusha, Garadaghli village of Khojavand, Khojaly city, Aghdaban village of Kalbadjar and other places.

In the early hours of 26 February 1992, Armenia committed an act of genocide against the Azerbaijani population of Khojaly. As a result, 613 civilians were killed, including 106 women and 63 children. As part of the “Justice for Khojaly!” campaign, the Khojaly massacre was recognized as an act of genocide by 23 US states, the Scottish Parliament of Great Britain, the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the National Assembly of Djibouti, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Czech Parliament, the Upper House of the National Assembly of Afghanistan, the National Congress of Honduras, the First Commission of the House of Representatives of Indonesia, the Senate of the Jordanian National Assembly, the Second Constitutional Committee and the Foreign Relations Commission of the Colombian Senate, the Second Commission of the House of Representatives, the Guatemalan Congress, the Mexican General Assembly Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Senate of Pakistan, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the National Assembly, the National Assembly of Panama, the Chamber of Deputies of the National Congress of Paraguay, the Congress of Peru, the National Council of Slovenia and the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the National Assembly of Sudan.

In addition, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Turkic Council have recognized the tragedy as an act of genocide.

Armenia’s escalating military aggression in 1993, as well as the threat of civil war in Azerbaijan, the chaos, economic turmoil and paralyzed public institutions, put the country on the verge of elimination. It was at this critical moment that the people of Azerbaijan saw salvation in its great son, wise statesman and national leader Heydar Aliyev, and entrusted the future of the country to him.

National Leader Heydar Aliyev’s Salvation Mission

When national leader Heydar Aliyev returned to power at the insistence of the people on 15 June 1993, the situation in the country was extremely complicated. The great leader came to the conclusion that the settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict required a comprehensive approach that would take into account crucial domestic and foreign policy factors. These included the establishment of the public and political stability, the creation a regular combat-ready army, the re-establishment and effective operation of public institutions, the economic recovery and the implementation of drastic governance reforms, the signing of strategic oil contracts that would secure the country’s development for decades to come, and the pursuit of the ideology of Azerbaijanism as a common cause for the nation.

A ceasefire agreement was reached on 12 May 1994. Up to that moment, as a result of Armenia’s military aggression, 20 percent of the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, including Khankendi, Khojaly, Shusha, Lachin, Khojavand, Kalbadjar, Aghdam, Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Gubadli, Zangilan districts, as well as 13 villages of Tartar district, seven villages of Gazakh district and one village of Sadarak district of Nakhchivan, were occupied by the Armenian army.

As a result of Armenian aggression, more than 1 million Azerbaijanis became refugees and internally displaced persons, more than 20,000 Azerbaijanis were killed during the military operations, and more than 50,000 were disabled.

As a result of the first Karabakh war, the whereabouts of 3,890 Azerbaijanis, including 71 children, 267 women and 326 elderly people, as well as 872 people who were taken hostage or prisoner (according to data as of 1 December 2020), are unknown.

A total of 900 settlements, 150,000 houses, 7,000 public buildings, 693 schools, 855 kindergartens, 695 medical institutions, 927 libraries, 44 temples, nine mosques, 473 historical sites, palaces and museums, 40,000 museum exhibits, 6,000 industrial and agricultural enterprises, 160 bridges and other infrastructure facilities were razed to the ground in Karabakh in 1988-1993.

Conflict in International Documents

The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, which had become a grave threat to international peace and security due to its interstate nature, caused a heated debate within international organizations, paving the way for the adoption of a number of important documents on the issue.

On 30 April 1993, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 822, which demanded the immediate withdrawal of Armenian troops from Kalbadjar district and other occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

On 29 July 1993, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 853, which demanded the full, immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from Aghdam district and other occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

On 14 October 1993, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 874, which demanded the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the latest occupied territories in accordance with the timetable for the settlement of the CSCE Minsk Group.

On 11 November 1993, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 884. The resolution condemned the occupation of Zangilan district and Horadiz settlement, the attack on civilians and the bombing of the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and demanded the withdrawal of the occupying forces from Zangilan district and Horadiz settlement and other recently occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The resolutions adopted in connection with the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict of the UN Security Council, which acts as the primary guarantor of international peace and security, have defined the legal groundwork of the political process for resolving the conflict on the basis of norms and principles of international law. The resolutions condemned the occupation of Azerbaijan's territories, stressed the inadmissibility of the occupation of territories by force, reaffirmed the territorial integrity, sovereignty and inviolability of Azerbaijan's borders, the fact that NagornoKarabakh is an integral part of Azerbaijan, and demanded an immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of occupying forces from Azerbaijan's territory.

The documents adopted within the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) established the legal basis and mechanisms for the process of

negotiations based on the norms of international law, as well as UN Security Council resolutions. After Azerbaijan and Armenia became members of the CSCE at a meeting of the Council of Ministers in Prague on 30-31 January 1992, the CSCE began to deal closely with the conflict. Following the sending of a mission of rapporteurs to Armenia and Azerbaijan in February, the organization's Committee of Senior Officials adopted a resolution calling on the parties to declare peace, including a ceasefire, and to give up territorial claims against neighboring countries. An additional meeting of the CSCE Council of Ministers, held at the initiative of the Committee of Senior Officials in Helsinki on 24 March 1992, stated that the CSCE should play a key role in resolving the conflict, and a decision was made to call a special conference in the capital city of Belarus – Minsk to serve as a permanent framework for negotiations.

The 1994 Summit of the organization in Budapest agreed to intensify efforts to coordinate efforts to resolve the conflict and to send multinational forces to the conflict zone to maintain peace. The CSCE Chairman-in-Office was tasked with appointing co-chairs of the Minsk Conference.

Despite Armenia's attempts to obstruct the OSCE summit in Lisbon on 2-3 December 1996, the principles of conflict resolution were discussed and were eventually reflected in the statement of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office attached to the final document. These principles, to which all OSCE participating states acceded, are as follows:

1. Territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia;
2. The legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh, including the highest self-government within Azerbaijan;
3. Guarantees for the security of Nagorno-Karabakh and its entire population, including mutual obligations to comply with the provisions of the settlement.

The approval of the above principles at the Lisbon summit, the establishment of a new co-chairing institution in the Minsk Group in early 1997 and the appointment of Russia, the United States and France as co-chair countries gave an impetus to the process of negotiations. The cochairs started making written proposals on how to resolve the conflict. In the summer of 1997, a draft of a comprehensive peace agreement was submitted to the parties. Despite Azerbaijan's constructive position, Armenia turned it down. During the visit of the co-chairs to the region in the fall of 1997, the parties were presented with a "step-by-step solution" plan. The plan envisaged the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied territories, the return of IDPs to their homes, the restoration of communications, the deployment of the OSCE peacekeeping mission in the region, and then the consideration of a status of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, Armenia demonstrated an obstructive position in the negotiations yet again.

Azerbaijan's Peace Policy, Armenia's Destructive Position

In November 2007, the Minsk Group prepared proposals for a peaceful solution to the conflict, the so-called Madrid Principles, and submitted the initial version of the document to the parties. At the end of 2009, an updated draft of the Madrid document was prepared and re-submitted to the parties. However, due to Armenia's destructive position, the expected progress was not achieved. Both documents provided for a step-by-step settlement of the

conflict, including the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, the return of IDPs to their native lands, the restoration of communication lines and other issues.

At subsequent meetings, the heads of state agreed to continue talks on a peaceful solution to the conflict and paid special attention to humanitarian aspects of the problem. However, seeing that the negotiations had intensified and was not going in the direction it would have preferred, Armenia tried to disrupt the talks by resorting to a series of military provocations. Thus, instead of addressing the specific issues on the table after the meeting of the presidents held at the initiative of France in Paris on 27 October 2014, Armenia conducted a large-scale military exercise in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan deploying more than 40,000 personnel. The intensity of negotiations dropped after the Armenian armed forces had provoked Azerbaijan's Armed Forces on the line of contact by conducting offensive over flights, and the next meeting between the presidents of the two countries was held in Bern, Switzerland only on 19 December 2015.

April 2016 Battles

In early 2016, when tangible plans on resolving the conflict were being discussed, Armenia resorted to yet another military provocation on 2 April by firing at densely populated areas along the line of contact, including schools, hospitals and places of worship.

As a result of Armenian attacks, six people, including children, were killed and 33 were seriously injured. Azerbaijan's Armed Forces, in turn, gave the enemy a fitting rebuff. As a result of the counterattack, more than 2,000 hectares of the occupied territory in Fuzuli, Jabrayil and the former Aghdara district were liberated. On the one hand, the April events showed the strength of the Azerbaijan's Army, but, on the other, they demonstrated that the preservation of the status quo and the continued presence of Armenian troops in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan were the primary cause of tensions in the conflict zone and that Azerbaijan would never come to terms with the occupation of its lands.

At the end of the meeting between the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia in Moscow on 2 November 2008, the Presidents of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia signed the Moscow Declaration. The declaration states that the conflict must be resolved through political means on the basis of the norms and principles of international law and the documents and decisions adopted in this framework, which, in turn, created environment for comprehensive cooperation in the region.

During 2016, substantive discussions were held between the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia in Vienna and St. Petersburg, but due to Armenia's obstructive position, there was no headway in resolving the conflict.

Armenia continued its political and military provocations in 2017. In June and July, as OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs stepped up their efforts to resolve the conflict, Armenia sought to escalate the situation along the line of contact amid persistent calls for substantive talks from the international community. Armenian military units continued their aggressive actions and fired heavy artillery shells at frontline positions of Azerbaijan's Armed Forces and residential settlements. As a result, on 4 July, civilians Sahiba Allahverdiyeva, born in 1966, and her

granddaughter, Zahra Guliyeva, born in 2016, were killed in the village of Alkhanli of Fuzuli district. Armenia's deliberate targeting of civilians and facilities was strongly condemned by the international community, which was further convinced of the fact that Armenia was not interested in a political resolution to the conflict.

Other international organizations also adopted numerous documents supporting Azerbaijan's fair position on the conflict based on international law and historical justice.

Offensive Diplomacy

The UN General Assembly's resolution on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, adopted on 7 September 2006 and entitled "Situation in the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan", condemned the fires committed by Armenia in the occupied territories. The resolution of the same name adopted by the UN General Assembly on 14 March 2008 covered the legal, political and humanitarian aspects of the conflict and reaffirmed the principles of its settlement. Those principles included respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, the right of IDPs to return to their native lands, the coexistence of both communities within Azerbaijan and the unlawful nature of the situation resulting from the occupation of another country's territory.

The conflict was repeatedly discussed within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The organization, guided by the principles and norms of international law, declared that Azerbaijan was subjected to military aggression. The resolution adopted at the 21st meeting of the organization's foreign ministers in Karachi, Pakistan, in 1993 condemned the Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan, demanded the immediate withdrawal of Armenian troops from all occupied territories and called on Armenia to respect Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In 1994, another resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh was adopted at the Seventh Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's Heads of State and Government in Casablanca, Morocco. The resolution strongly condemned the occupation of 20 percent of Azerbaijan's territory by Armenia and expressed concern over the fact that more than one million Azerbaijanis have become refugees and internally displaced persons. The document called for the immediate withdrawal of Armenian forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan, citing four well-known UN Security Council resolutions, and described the actions targeting civilians as a result of Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan as a crime against humanity.

The Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation held in Istanbul in 2016 established a "Contact Group on the aggression of the Republic of Armenia against Azerbaijan". The Contact Group included nine countries: Azerbaijan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Malaysia, Morocco, Djibouti, Gambia and Somalia.

The declaration of the Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States held in Baku on 15 October 2019 expressed support for the settlement of the conflict on the basis of the principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty and inviolability of the borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The Final Document adopted at the 16th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement in Tehran in 2012 stressed the importance of resolving the conflict within the framework of the territorial integrity, sovereignty and internationally recognized borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Final Document adopted at the 17th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement in 2016 on the island of Margarita in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela expressed regret that despite relevant UN Security Council resolutions, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan remained unresolved. The document also expressed support for the solution of the conflict within the framework of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

A new paragraph was included in the Final Document of the 18th Non-Aligned Movement Summit held in Baku on 25-26 October 2019. According to this paragraph, the heads of state and government stressed the inadmissibility of the occupation of territories by force. In addition, the Final Document stated that no state would recognize the legitimacy of the situation created as a result of the occupation of Azerbaijani territories and would not provide any support for maintaining the situation in the occupied territories, including economic activity. The “Document of Appreciation and Solidarity with the People and Government of Azerbaijan” adopted at the summit expressed solidarity with Azerbaijan’s efforts to restore its territorial integrity.

Resolution No. 1416 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) “On the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group” dated 25 January 2005 confirmed the occupation of Azerbaijani territories and expressed concern over the ethnic cleansing conducted in these territories. It called for the compliance with Resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884 of the UN Security Council and for the withdrawal of troops from the occupied territories. The organization also reaffirmed the right of IDPs to return to their lands and stressed the inadmissibility of occupation of the territory of a member state by another member state.

The resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe entitled “Deliberate deprivation of the residents of border regions of Azerbaijan of water”, adopted on 26 January 2016, stated that the Sarsang Reservoir, built on the Tartar River in 1976 to provide irrigation water to about 100,000 hectares of land in six districts of Azerbaijan, fell into disrepair as a result of the occupation, depriving residents of irrigation water. It called for the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the said region, described their actions as “ecological terror” and reaffirmed the occupation of a part of Azerbaijan’s territory by Armenia.

The European Court of Human Rights ruled on 16 June 2015 in the case of “Chiragov and Others vs. Armenia” that Armenia had occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding districts.

In a statement issued on 9 November 1993, the European Union called for the withdrawal of troops from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and expressed support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

In a Joint Declaration adopted at the EU Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels on 24 November 2017, the EU expressed its support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of all partners.

The “Partnership Priorities” document initialed between Azerbaijan and the European Union in 2018 also expressed support for Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, independence, sovereignty and inviolability of its internationally recognized borders.

The final documents of the NATO Summits, including the Chicago Declaration of 2012, the Cardiff Declaration of 2014, the Warsaw Declaration of 2016 and the Brussels Declaration of 2018, express support for Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence.

In addition, when the heads of the CIS member states signed a memorandum on maintaining peace and stability in the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1995, Armenia refused to accept paragraphs 7 and 8 of the document. The said paragraphs stated that “Member States ... shall take measures to prevent any manifestation of separatism, nationalism, chauvinism and fascism in their territories ... and undertake not to provide economic, financial, military or other assistance to such manifestations.”

Thus, throughout the said period, Azerbaijan pursued a resolute and principled policy, succeeded in establishing the legal groundwork for resolving the conflict on the basis of norms and principles of international law, neutralizing Armenia’s information provocations and attempts of the Armenian lobby to mislead the international community. Despite the historical reality, the fact that international law has created a solid foundation for a just settlement of the conflict, as well as Azerbaijan’s obvious superiority over Armenia in terms of economic potential, human resources and military power, Baku has demonstrated its commitment to peace talks. That is why President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev said: “Our biggest compromise is the fact that we are still committed to peace talks.”

However, Azerbaijan’s consistent efforts to resolve the conflict through negotiations were not appreciated by Armenia at all. On the contrary, the military-political leadership of Armenia began to threaten Azerbaijan with a new war and launched endeavors to expand the occupation. Due to Armenia’s hypocritical and obstructive policy, the talks became a virtually meaningless process and were therefore impossible to continue.

“Karabakh is Azerbaijan!”

On 5 August 2019, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan made a statement in Khankendi that “Karabakh is a part of Armenia and full stop”. Up until then, Armenia, aware of the international political, legal and moral implications of its policy of military occupation and annexation, tried to disguise its aggression by portraying it as the right of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination. That statement by Nikol Pashinyan explicitly showed that Armenia’s actual goal was aggression. By calling for the annexation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, Armenia violated the norms and principles of international law, the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and showed its disregard for the international community, in particular the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs tasked with resolving the conflict through negotiations. Addressing the 16th annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club on 3 October 2019, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev responded to Pashinyan’s statement: “... the statement says that ‘Karabakh is a part of Armenia and full stop’. First, this is a lie, to put it mildly. Both Lower and Upper Karabakh are recognized by the world as an integral part of Azerbaijan. Armenia does not recognize this

illegal entity itself. Karabakh is historical and ancient land of Azerbaijan. **So Karabakh is Azerbaijan and an exclamation mark.**”

Also, on 15 February 2020, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan held panel discussions within the framework of the Munich Security Conference. During the discussions, the President of Azerbaijan once again communicated Azerbaijan’s rightful position on the conflict to the attention of the international community, exposed Armenia’s policy of aggression and shattered false claims using arguments based on historical facts and international law.

The so-called “elections” organized in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan in March 2020 was yet another act of provocation. As was the case with previous “elections”, these were not recognized by the international community, any international organization or state either. On the contrary, they were strongly condemned and denounced.

Armenia deliberately attempted to disrupt the format and nature of the process of negotiations to derail the peace process mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, maintain the status quo in relation to the occupation and achieve the annexation of the occupied territories. In July 2020, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan put forward the unacceptable “seven conditions” for the settlement of the conflict, which clearly demonstrated the true colors of the occupying state. In this regard, President Ilham Aliyev said, “We have the only condition for peace. Armenian armed forces must withdraw from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. The whole world recognizes Nagorno-Karabakh as an integral part of Azerbaijan.”

Provocations in July-August 2020

In July 2020, Armenia committed yet another military provocation in the direction of Tovuz on the state border with Azerbaijan. The objective of the provocation was to create a new source of tension in the region, to put the issue of occupation of Azerbaijani territories by Armenia on the backburner, to involve third countries in the conflict and to cause damage to Azerbaijan’s strategic infrastructure. As a result, a group of Azerbaijani servicemen and a civilian, including high-ranking military officers, were killed. The Azerbaijani Army responded with a crushing blow to the enemy. Armenia conceded defeat by appealing to the Collective Security Treaty Organization for military support.v

In August 2020, Armenia resorted to another military provocation by sending a sabotage group to Azerbaijan to commit acts of terror. However, on 23 August 2020, the group was neutralized and its leader was detained. Thus, this provocation of Armenia was also thwarted.

Armenia’s adoption of an aggressive and belligerent military doctrine and national security strategy, the creation of armed groups of civilian volunteers to take part in military operations against Azerbaijan, the Armenian defense minister’s call for a “new war for new territories”, the threats by Armenia’s senior government officials to deal a blow to Azerbaijan’s critical civilian infrastructure, Armenia’s involvement of mercenaries and terrorists from various countries, acquisition of large quantities of weapons, etc. openly demonstrated that Armenia was preparing for a new war against Azerbaijan.

Armenia's new war plan

On 21 September 2020, President of Azerbaijan and Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement Ilham Aliyev said in his remarks at the High-Level Meeting dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the UN within the framework of the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly that the aggressive rhetoric and provocations were evidence of the fact that Armenia was preparing for renewed aggression against Azerbaijan. "We call on the United Nations and the international community to deter Armenia from further military aggression. Responsibility for the provocations and the escalation of tensions lies squarely with the military-political leadership of Armenia. The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict must be resolved within the framework of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions."

On 24 September 2020, in his remarks during the general debate of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev once again stated that Armenia was preparing for a new war against Azerbaijan.

Receiving the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus on 25 September 2020, the President of Azerbaijan reiterated that the intelligence data of the Azerbaijani side show that Armenia was making very serious military preparations for war against Azerbaijan, that its armed forces were concentrated on the line of contact, on the state border. "If they attack us, they will regret it. I simply want you to know that and convey this message to the European Commission and see what the European Commission can do to stop the new provocations of the aggressor."

Unfortunately, no tangible steps were taken by the international community to put an end to Armenia's successive provocations and new war plans. Emboldened by this, on 27 September 2020, Armenia attacked the positions of the Azerbaijan's Army from several directions. It used heavy artillery to fire at Azerbaijani residential settlements.

Patriotic war – Operation Iron Fist

In response to yet another attempt at military aggression by Armenia, Azerbaijan's Army launched a counterattack and, as a result of the 44-day Patriotic War, managed to crush the Armenian army, bring it to its knees and liberate the occupied territories. Operation Iron Fist carried out by the victorious Azerbaijani Army under the leadership of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, President Ilham Aliyev is inscribed in the history of the Azerbaijani people in golden letters as it led to Armenia's capitulation, a country that glorified occupation and Nazism and turned it into a state policy.

On 10 November 2020, the "Statement of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the President of the Russian Federation" was adopted and Armenia signed an act of capitulation. This put an end to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and Azerbaijan restored its territorial integrity. The President of Azerbaijan said on that occasion, "The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been resolved, Azerbaijan has resolved this conflict alone, both on the battlefield and then at the table. Victory on the battlefield forced the enemy to wave the white flag, surrender and sign an act of capitulation. The document signed on 10 November is an act of capitulation signed by Armenia. Thus,

according to this document, Aghdam, Kalbadjar and Lachin districts were liberated without a single martyr. The establishment of the Zangazur corridor has become a historical necessity.

Complete Restoration of Sovereignty

After the Patriotic War, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev put forward the initiative to prepare a peace treaty with Armenia on the basis of five fundamental principles, which envisage mutual recognition of each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

During a four-sided meeting held on the sidelines of the European Political Community Summit in Prague on October 6, 2022, Armenia declared that it recognized the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan.

In protest against Armenia's illegal exploitation of Azerbaijan's natural resources in the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where the Russian peacekeeping contingent is temporarily stationed, on December 12, 2022, representatives of non-governmental organizations and environmental activists started a peaceful action on the section of the Lachin-Khankendi road passing through Shusha. The protest action lasted for a total of 138 days.

Another historic event took place on April 23, 2023. A border checkpoint was established on the Azerbaijan-Armenia border in the Lachin district. This completed the process of restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and put an end to Armenia's abuse of the Lachin road, transportation of weaponry and ammunition along it, and other illegal acts.

However, the provocations staged by Armenia and the remaining elements of the self-styled regime did not stop at that. On September 2, 2023, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan sent a congratulatory message to the junta leaders on the anniversary of the so-called "Declaration of independence of Nagorno-Karabakh". On September 9, the so-called "presidential election" was held in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.

On September 19, 2023, in an effort to secure the implementation of provisions of the Trilateral Statement, prevent large-scale provocations committed in the Karabakh economic region, disarm and withdraw units of the Armenian armed forces from Azerbaijani territories, neutralize their military infrastructure, ensure the safety of the civilian population returning to the liberated territories, as well as construction personnel engaged in reconstruction activities and military personnel, and restore the Republic of Azerbaijan's constitutional structure, Azerbaijan launched an anti-terrorism operation in the region.

As a result of the anti-terrorism operation which lasted less than one day, the remaining Armenian armed forces in the region were completely disarmed and withdrawn from the territory of Azerbaijan and the remnants of the so-called regime announced its dissolution. Azerbaijan thus eliminated the separatism and a "gray zone" from its territory. The state sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan was fully restored.

On October 15, 2023, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Supreme Commander-in-Chief Ilham Aliyev raised the National Flag of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the

city of Khankendi, in the town of Khojaly, in the Asgaran settlement of the Khojaly district, in the towns of Khojavand and Aghdara.

On November 8, 2023, a military parade dedicated to the third anniversary of the Victory in the Patriotic War was held in the city of Khankendi. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Commander-in-Chief Ilham Aliyev said in remarks at the parade: “Our victorious Armed Forces have gifted us this day and driven the enemy out of our ancient lands by demonstrating courage, heroism and selflessness on the battlefield. This is an immensely historic event.”

Conflict Consigned to History and New Reality

During the occupation, Armenia looted and destroyed the national and cultural heritage of Azerbaijan (culturcide), destroyed cities (urbicide) and other settlements, and caused severe ecological damage to the region (ecocide). Hundreds of thousands of mines and booby traps have been planted across Azerbaijan’s territory.

Armenia will not evade legal responsibility for the numerous war crimes, massacres and genocides it committed against Azerbaijan during the conflict, for its acts of terror and vandalism, and will be forced to pay reparations for the immense socioeconomic damage caused to Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan is currently implementing large-scale restoration and reconstruction work in Karabakh and East Zangezur economic regions at its own expense. As part of the Great Return program, thousands of former IDPs have already returned to their native lands. By 2026, some 140,000 former IDPs are expected to return to their homeland. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev said: “We will turn this region, we will turn Karabakh into a paradise. We will forever live in these lands. No one can ever move us from these lands. Karabakh is ours! Karabakh is Azerbaijan!”