

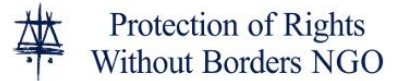
**ANTI-ARMENIAN**

**XENOPHOBIA**

**AND RACISM**

**IN AZERBAIJAN**

**2023**



## ANTI-ARMENIAN XENOPHOBIA AND RACISM IN AZERBAIJAN 2023

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YEREVAN 2024

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### ABBREVIATIONS

CERD	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CHW	Caucasus Heritage Watch
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoE	Council of Europe
CoM	Council of Europe Committee of Ministers
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EU	European Union
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
MEP	Member of European Parliament
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NK	Nagorno-Karabakh
NKAO	Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSINT	Open-source intelligence
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
RA	Republic of Armenia
UAV	Unmanned air vehicles
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHR	University Network for Human Rights
US	United States of America

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, Anti-Armenian Xenophobia and Racism in Azerbaijan 2023, is part of an ongoing effort to document the patterns of state-sponsored xenophobia and racism against Armenians that jeopardizes peace and security in the South Caucasus. The report highlights the dangerous policies pursued by the Azerbaijani government that aimed to erase Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) and to dismantle the Republic of Armenia.

The report proves that the mass exodus of Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh within merely a week in late September 2023 was actually a result of Azerbaijan's long-lasting and thoroughly-planned ethnic cleansing policy.

The report is based on the compilation of publicly available information taken from reliable and verifiable open sources. While the primary focus is on events in 2023, the report briefly presents the historical background to demonstrate the course of the hostile long-standing strategy of Azerbaijan against Armenians.

This report was jointly prepared by Transparency International Anticorruption Center, Democracy Development Foundation, Protection of Rights Without Borders, Law Development and Protection Center, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor, For Equal Rights NGO, Civic Hub NGO.

### Historical Background

Animosity towards Armenians has deep historical roots in Azerbaijan, with peaks of violence dating back to early 20th century – the time of establishment of Azerbaijan's statehood and molding of borders by Bolsheviks. Discrimination policies against Armenians were systematically fostered by Soviet Azerbaijani leadership and escalated after the fall of the Soviet Union, culminating in pogroms in cities with significant Armenian population and in First Karabakh War against Nagorno-Karabakh's people striving for self-determination.

### Cultivation of Hatred Towards Armenians

Azerbaijan's leadership, led by President Ilham Aliyev, systematically promoted dehumanization and demonization of Armenians, fostered development of a national identity rooted in the perception of superiority over Armenians and humiliation of Armenians. The demonization and dehumanization served not only to galvanize public opinion but also to provide moral cover for Azerbaijan's ongoing military actions and violations of international humanitarian law. Permanent hatred spread by the Azerbaijani leader was instrumental in feeding the national psyche of dominance, unifying the Azerbaijani populace around a common enemy, fostering hostilities against Armenia and Armenians, mobilizing public support for military aggressions and normalizing violence, hence also blocking any prospects for reconciliation and peace.

### **Fabrication of the History**

Azerbaijan's leadership has engaged in historical revisionism, developing narratives that undermined Armenia's legacy in the region. It propagated the newly created concept of "Western Azerbaijan," referring to the territory of present-day Armenia as historically Azerbaijani land. By portraying indigenous Armenians as newcomers to the region, Azerbaijan sought to legitimize its territorial claims and its anti-Armenian policies both domestically and internationally.

### **Threats of the Use of Force**

Azerbaijani authorities have repeatedly used hate speech against Armenians, bullying and threatening language, which signaled the potential for renewed military action against both Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. They have consistently communicated that will not hesitate to use force to achieve their political aims.

### **Special Operations**

Azerbaijan launched series of special and systemized actions aimed at creating unbearable conditions for the people in Nagorno-Karabakh. It included the 9-month blockade, launched on 12 December 2022, depriving 120,000 citizens of Nagorno-Karabakh access to food, healthcare services, fuel, gas and electricity, which led to numerous human rights violations affecting physical health, mental conditions, access to education, movement, labor and economic activities, civic and political liberties, etc." Azerbaijan established a checkpoint on Lachin Corridor to impede access of Nagorno-Karabakh people to Armenia, selectively arresting some people and spreading intimidation. On 19 September 2023, it launched a wide-ranging military operation all around Nagorno-Karabakh, forcing the dismantling of Nagorno-Karabakh autonomy, detaining its political leadership and taking to Baku. Almost all of the aggressive acts of Azerbaijan throughout the year were met with indifference or often facilitated by the Russian peacekeeping forces.

### **Destruction of Cultural Heritage**

The destruction of Armenian cultural sites, antique and Christian monuments, the unique Armenian scripts was part of Azerbaijan's broader strategy to erase Armenian traces from Nagorno-Karabakh as well as from parts of Azerbaijan. Another approach utilized by Azerbaijani authorities has been the appropriation of the Armenian heritage under the name of "Caucasus Albanian," a historical country located on the territory of current Azerbaijan.

### **Reaction of International Institutions**

While international institutions, both governmental and non-governmental entities, have issued statements condemning Azerbaijan's aggressive actions, there has been a lack of concrete and effective action to hold Azerbaijan accountable. The international response has been insufficient in deterring Azerbaijan from its ongoing violations of human rights and international law, allowing the

crisis to deepen and more than 100,000 Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians left with no choice but to flee their homeland in face of continued threats to mere existence.

### Concluding Observations and Call for Action

The international community must take swift and decisive action to address Azerbaijan's xenophobia and racism, human rights violations and aggression toward Armenians, which is essential to prevent further violence, protect Armenians' rights, and promote long-term peace in the region.

The following steps are critical to addressing the ongoing crisis:

- a. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) should leverage its follow-up procedures to closely monitor Azerbaijan's compliance with the recommendations provided in its 2022 concluding observations. CERD should specifically request comprehensive updates from Azerbaijan detailing measures taken to address anti-Armenian racism, including actions to counter hate speech and systemic discrimination. In cases of continued non-compliance, CERD should consider referring the matter to the Human Rights Council or the General Assembly, in line with its mandate to combat racial discrimination and uphold accountability.
- b. Council of Europe Committee of Ministers (CoM) should maintain enhanced supervision over the execution of European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments against Azerbaijan, with particular attention to cases involving racial hatred and discrimination targeting Armenians. The CoM should require Azerbaijan to submit detailed action plans and action reports demonstrating tangible progress in fulfilling its obligations under the execution proceedings of ECtHR judgments. Furthermore, the CoM should explore mechanisms to address persistent patterns of anti-Armenian racism and intolerance, utilizing findings from CERD, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), and other authoritative reports to enhance accountability measures.
- c. United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance should undertake a country visit to Azerbaijan under its standing invitation to UN special procedures. This visit should focus on monitoring and documenting incidents of racial discrimination and hate speech against Armenians in public discourse, media, and official statements. The findings should be presented in a detailed report to the Human Rights Council and other relevant UN bodies to inform concrete follow-up actions.
- d. The international community should advocate for the UN Human Rights Council, General Assembly, and Security Council to consider establishing accountability mechanisms to address systemic racism and xenophobia in Azerbaijan. Potential measures could include the creation of a Special Procedure or independent monitoring mechanism dedicated to assessing and addressing human rights violations stemming from systemic racism and ethnic discrimination.

- e. State Parties to the Rome Statute should actively support international efforts to prosecute the forced displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, including by considering a state referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC).
- f. Relevant international and regional organizations should ensure rigorous monitoring of hate speech and discriminatory rhetoric in Azerbaijani public discourse, media, and education systems. Media watchdogs, human rights organizations, and specialized UN bodies should collaborate to document and report on such practices, highlighting their implications for human rights and social cohesion, and propose actionable recommendations to mitigate these issues.
- g. The Government of the Republic of Armenia should continue its pursuit of international legal mechanisms to ensure accountability, including its ongoing cases before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Furthermore, the government should explore all available avenues under the Rome Statute, including the possibility of a self-referral to ICC to address crimes under its jurisdiction.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. The first two decades of the 20th century saw unprecedented destruction in the South Caucasus, then part of the Russian Empire, due to imperial and national tensions. Between 1905 and 1907, a decade of systematic anti-Armenian policies (1895-1905) by Russia in the Caucasus, combined with rising national sentiments among the Caucasian Tatars (Muslims), led to conflicts, mass killings, and looting in the provinces of Baku, Yerevan, Tiflis, and Yelizavetpol. Russian state reports and statistics, along with eyewitness accounts, indicate these attacks targeted Armenians and their property.<sup>1</sup>
2. Influenced by events such as the 1908 Young Turks' Revolution in Ottoman Empire, later World War I, the 1917 Russian Revolution, and the Ottoman army's eastward advance, the sense of ethnic and cultural connection of Caucasian Tatars to Turks grew stronger. On 27 May 1918, the National Muslim (Tatar) Council in the Caucasus declared the formation of a new state – Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. The earliest years of nation-building of Azerbaijan were marked by pogroms in

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<sup>1</sup> Swietochowski, Tadeusz, National Consciousness and Political Orientations in Azerbaijan. 1905–1920, in Suny, Ronald Grigor (edn.), *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social change*, 1996, Amsterdam University Press, pp. 211–234; Swietochowski, Tadeusz, *The 1905 Revolution and Azerbaijani Political Awakening*, in *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920: The Shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 37–64; Foreword: Troynitsky, Nikolay, edn., *Distribution of the Population in the Main Estates, Faiths, Mother Tongue and in Some Occupations: Brief General Information on the Empire, Saint Petersburg, 1905*, Presidential Library of Russia, <https://www.prlib.ru/en/node/441801> (accessed on 10 June 2024).



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Armenian communities, particularly in Baku and Shushi,<sup>2</sup> which was believed to be continuing the Genocide committed against Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>3</sup>

3. The Soviet regime's establishment in the South Caucasus in 1920s, along with volatile border drawings by Bolsheviks with disregard of ethnic composition and peculiarities, further fueled tensions in the region. Bolshevik's granted to Azerbaijan the major part of Armenian lands, including Nakhichevan (named Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic) and Nagorno-Karabakh (named Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, NKAO). The armed resistance of population of Syunik (also called Zangezur) forced Bolsheviks to leave this area in Soviet Armenia, making it a subject to later claims by Azerbaijan.<sup>4</sup>

4. Azerbaijan applied discriminatory policies toward its ethnic minorities, especially Armenians - its largest minority group, yet the ongoing tensions between these people were suppressed under the Soviet "brotherhood of nations" narrative.<sup>5</sup>

5. Throughout 1921-1988, the governance of both these territories by Soviet Azerbaijan was marked with discrimination against Armenians, which significantly changed the demography of the regions. More specifically, according to the first Soviet census of 1926, Armenians composed 89.2% of the 125,159 people in the NKAO.<sup>6</sup> But by 1989, their number had decreased to 76.9% (145,450) of the population of 189,085.<sup>7</sup> The Armenian population of the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan decreased from 5,643 (10.2% of the population of 55,520) in 1926<sup>8</sup> to only 1,858 (0.6% of the population of 293,875) in 1989.<sup>9</sup>

6. As later attested by Heydar Aliyev, the former president of Azerbaijan and father of the current president Ilham Aliyev, throughout the years of his leadership (since 1969) he was trying to

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<sup>2</sup> Hovannisian, Richard, *The Republic of Armenia, Vol. I: The First Year, 1918–1919*. University of California Press, 1971; Armenpress, *Retrospective - Pogroms of Armenians in Baku in 1918* on the Pages of World Press, 20 January 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1001906/retrospective-pogroms-of-armenians-in-baku-in-1918-on-the-pages-of-world-press.html> (accessed on 10 June 2024); Harutiunyan, Hamlet, *Massacres of Armenians in Shushi (June 1919 and March 1920)*, *Review of Armenian Studies* 1, 2015, pp. 50-69, <https://arar.sci.am/dlibra/publication/103110/edition/93790> (accessed on 10 June 2024); Balayan, Vahram, *The Massacre of the Armenians of Shushi on March 23, 1920 as a Consequence of Impunity of the Armenian Genocide in 1915*, *Review of Armenian Studies* 2, 2016, pp. 95-105, <https://arar.sci.am/dlibra/publication/103188/edition/93859> (accessed on 10 June 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation, *Massacres of Baku Armenians in 1918*, <http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/baku1918.php> (accessed on 10 June 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Witold Repetowicz, *New Chapter in Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, Casimir Pulaski Foundation, 19 April 2023, <https://pulaski.pl/en/experts-commentary-new-chapter-in-armenia-azerbaijan-conflict-2> (accessed on 10 June 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Geukjian, Ohannes, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus; Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy*, Routledge, 2012 pp., 105-113; <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781315580531/ethnicity-nationalism-conflict-south-caucasus-ohannes-geukjian> (accessed on 10 June 2024).

<sup>6</sup> Demoscope Weekly, *Всероссийская перепись населения 1926 года. Национальный состав населения по регионам республик СССР: Закавказская СФСР/АО Нагорного Карабаха*, 2013, [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_26.php?reg=2304](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_26.php?reg=2304) (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>7</sup> Demoscope Weekly, *Всероссийская перепись населения 1989 года, Распределение городского и сельского населения областей республик СССР по полу и национальности: Нагорный Карабах*, 2013, [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/resp\\_nac\\_89.php?reg=71](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/resp_nac_89.php?reg=71) (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Demoscope Weekly, *Всероссийская перепись населения 1926 года. Национальный состав населения по регионам республик СССР: Закавказская СФСР/Нахичеванская АССР*, 2013 [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_26.php?reg=2294](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_26.php?reg=2294) (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>9</sup> Demoscope Weekly, *Всероссийская перепись населения 1989 года, Распределение городского и сельского населения областей республик СССР по полу и национальности: Нахичеванская АССР*, 2013, [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/resp\\_nac\\_89.php?reg=70](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/resp_nac_89.php?reg=70) (accessed on 20 June 2024).

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increase the number of Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh and to decrease the number of the Armenians.<sup>10</sup>

7. In February 1988, inspired by Mikhail Gorbachev's "glasnost" policy, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh went out to streets to assert their long-suppressed right to self-determination from Moscow. On February 20, 1988, the elected representatives of the NKAO voted for "separation" from Soviet Azerbaijan. This decision and its making took place in compliance with Soviet legal norms of the time.<sup>11</sup>

8. In response to the decision of NKAO representatives' council, Azerbaijan orchestrated anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgayit, Azerbaijan's second-largest city. Later those reiterated in Kirovabad (November 1989) and Baku (January 1990), all having significant Armenian population.<sup>12</sup>

9. Ethnic hostilities were echoed also in Armenia, though more sporadically. The lack of security eventually resulted in a flow of hundreds of thousands of refugees in both directions, including about 220,000 ethnic Armenians (out of 245,055 outside the NKAO)<sup>13</sup> from Azerbaijan<sup>14</sup> and almost all (~84,860)<sup>15</sup> ethnic Azerbaijanis from Armenia.<sup>16</sup>

10. Hostilities turned into an official war (First Karabakh War, 1991-1994) of Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian majority aimed to suppress its claim for self-determination. The four years of war ended in Armenians getting the control over the majority of NKAO with the support of volunteers from Armenia, as well as the adjacent 5 regions of Azerbaijan.

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<sup>10</sup> Zerkalo, On the Historical Background of Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, including Heydar Aliyev's Meeting with Media Representatives, 22 July 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Soghomonyan V. (Herausgeber), Lösungsansätze für Berg-Karabach/Arzach: Selbstbestimmung und der Weg zur Anerkennung, 2010, [https://www.academia.edu/43274241/Solutions\\_for\\_Nagorno\\_Karabakh\\_Artsakh\\_Self\\_determination\\_and\\_Recognition](https://www.academia.edu/43274241/Solutions_for_Nagorno_Karabakh_Artsakh_Self_determination_and_Recognition) (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>12</sup> US Congress, In recognition of the Victims of the Baku and Sumgayit Pogroms; Congressional Record Vol. 166, No. 20, 30 January 2020, <https://www.congress.gov/116/crec/2020/01/30/CREC-2020-01-30-pt1-PgE112-3.pdf> (accessed on 20 June 2024); The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation, Massacres and Attacks against the Armenian Population in Sumgayit on February 27-29, 1988, 28 February 2019, [http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/28.02.2019\\_Sumgayit.php](http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/28.02.2019_Sumgayit.php) (accessed on 10 June 2024); Armenpress, Unpunished Genocide - Armenians Worldwide Commemorate 30th Anniversary of Sumgayit Pogroms, 28 February 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/924309> (accessed on 10 June 2024); Susanna Serobyan, Sumgayit Tragedy in the Soviet Periodical Press in April - May 1988, *Akunk* 1 (18) 2018, pp. 165-174; European Parliament, Joint Resolution on the Situation in Armenia. Official Journal of the European Communities. Volume 33, No C 38/81, C 38/82, 19 February 1990, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:1990:038:FULL&from=EN> (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>13</sup> Demoscope Weekly, Всесоюзная перепись населения 1989 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР: Азербайджанская ССР, 2013, [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_89.php?reg=7](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php?reg=7) (accessed on 20 June 2024); Demoscope Weekly, Всесоюзная перепись населения 1989 года, Распределение городского и сельского населения областей республик СССР по полу и национальности: Нагорный Карабах, 2013, [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/resp\\_nac\\_89.php?reg=71](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/resp_nac_89.php?reg=71) (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>14</sup> European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance, Report on Azerbaijan, 28 June 2002, <https://rm.coe.int/first-report-on-azerbaijan/16808b5579> (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>15</sup> Demoscope Weekly, Всесоюзная перепись населения 1989 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР: Армянская ССР, 2013, [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_89.php?reg=13](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php?reg=13) (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>16</sup> Council of Europe, Second Report Submitted by Armenia Pursuant to Article 25, Paragraph 1 of The Framework Convention for The Protection of National Minorities, ACFC/SR/II(2004) 010, 24 November 2004, [https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1052022/432\\_1163080631\\_pdf-2nd-sr-armenia.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1052022/432_1163080631_pdf-2nd-sr-armenia.pdf) (accessed on 20 June 2024).

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11. On May 11, 1994, a ceasefire was signed in Bishkek by the three parties - Azerbaijan, Armenia and Artsakh - under the mediation of the Russian Federation.<sup>17</sup> The ceasefire agreement put an end to active military operations on the line of contact between the conflicting parties, paving the way for negotiations to resolve the conflict.

12. On March 24, 1992, under the auspices of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Minsk Group was established,<sup>18</sup> to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. For 26 years, the ceasefire was mostly observed, though small-scale violations were common.<sup>19</sup> In parallel, negotiations were in process - led by the Minsk Group co-chairs of Russia, USA and France, though mostly ineffective.

13. While negotiating, Azerbaijan was intensively building up its military potential and preparing for war. At the same time, the Azerbaijan's government was working intensely to entrench anti-Armenian sentiment in the new generation, raising them "with a rhetoric of hate, hostility and victimhood," which has been recorded in several international organizations' reports.<sup>20</sup> Institutionalization of Armenophobia was later employed as a tool for mobilizing the public for a military action and consolidating the power of long-standing Aliyevs' regime.

14. On 27 September 2020, amid the global COVID-19 pandemic, Azerbaijan launched a large-scale military offensive on Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>21</sup> The Azerbaijani Army deployed heavy artillery, tanks, aircraft, missiles (including cluster munitions), and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to target civilian populations and infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, places of worship, and cultural monuments. Numerous incidents of executions and mutilation of military and civilian captives were reported.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The University of Edinburgh, Peace Agreements Database, Ceasefire Agreement between the Minister of Defense of Azerbaijan, Minister of Defense of Armenia, and Nagorno Karabakh Army Commander, May 1994, <https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/990> (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>18</sup> OSCE Minsk Group, <https://www.osce.org/mg>; Mandate of the Co-Chairmen of the Conference on Nagorno Karabakh under the auspices of the OSCE, March 1995, [www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/f/70125.pdf](http://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/f/70125.pdf) (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>19</sup> A major breakdown of the ceasefire was the 4-day war of April 2-5, 2016, when Azerbaijan launched a full assault. Center for Eastern Studies, The Four Day War in Karabakh, 6 April 2016, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2016-04-06/four-day-war-nagorno-karabakh> (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>20</sup> ECRI, Report on Azerbaijan (fifth monitoring cycle), June 2016, <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-azerbaijan/16808b5581> (accessed on 20 June 2024); Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Fourth Opinion on Azerbaijan, 8 November 2017, <https://bit.ly/3bVY8l> (accessed on 20 June 2024); US Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Azerbaijan, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rightspractices/azerbaijan> (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>21</sup> Duvar.English, Aliyev Admits Azerbaijan Started the Nagorno-Karabakh War, 16 August 2021, <https://bit.ly/36EsaNf> (accessed on 10 June 2024); Apa.az, President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva Attended Opening of Vagif Poetry Days in Shusha, 30 August 2021, <https://bit.ly/3BLfjdl> (accessed on 20 June 2024); Human Rights Watch, Azerbaijan: Unlawful Strikes in Nagorno-Karabakh, 11 December 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/11/azerbaijan-unlawful-strikes-nagorno-karabakh> (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>22</sup> Open Society Foundations-Armenia, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly of Vanadzor, Law Development and Protection Foundation, Protection of Rights Without Borders NGO, Human Rights Violations during the 44-day War in Artsakh: Summary of Fact-Finding Report, June 2022, [https://www.osf.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Fact-Finding-Report\\_FINAL\\_web.pdf](https://www.osf.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Fact-Finding-Report_FINAL_web.pdf) (accessed on 20 June 2024).

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15. Throughout the war, Azerbaijan received direct support from Turkey with the second largest army in NATO. Turkey contributed military instructors and weapons.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, it brought in several thousand mercenaries from the Middle East to fight in the war.<sup>24</sup>

16. The war concluded on the night of November 9-10, 2020, when a ceasefire was brokered by Russia and formalized in a trilateral statement signed by the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.<sup>25</sup> The document included provisions regarding: the withdrawal of the Armenian Armed Forces from all areas surrounding the NKAO; deployment of Russian peacekeeping troops along the new line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh for a minimum 5-year period; assurance of secure communication between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia through a 5 km-wide Lachin Corridor; the return of internally displaced persons and refugees to Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent areas, facilitated by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees; an exchange of prisoners of war, hostages and other detained persons and bodies of the dead; unblocking transportation routes to connect the Republic of Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.<sup>26</sup>

17. By the end of the 44-day war in 2020, Azerbaijan had seized control of approximately 30% of the former NKAO, including 111 settlements in the districts of Shushi, Hadrut, Martuni, and Martakert.<sup>27</sup> Russia placed its peacekeeping forces to ensure the security of local population together with the local self-defense forces along the line of contact.

18. Since 10 November, 2020, Azerbaijan's leadership has pursued terrorizing methods against Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians using military, threats, hate rhetoric, psychological tactics, destruction of historical-cultural monuments, cemeteries, villages and landscapes on the occupied parts of the region,<sup>28</sup> apparently trying to spread fear and accomplish ethnic cleansing.

19. In October 2022, Armenia requested the EU Mission in Armenia to establish a civilian monitoring mission along its borders with Azerbaijan, in order to ensure security and reveal objective information about the border incidents. The EU Monitoring Capacity (EUMCAP) was deployed on the Armenian side of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border between 20 October and 19 December 2022. Since

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<sup>23</sup> Kommersant, Принуждение к конфликту, 16 October 2020, <https://bit.ly/3p8ChQl> (accessed on 20 June 2024); Apa.az, Azerbaijani, Turkish Presidents Made Press Statements, 15 May 2021, <https://apa.az/en/xeber/domesticnews/azerbaijani-turkish-presidents-made-press-statements-updated-351731> (accessed on 20 June 2024); Jamestown Foundation, Azerbaijan, Turkey Hold Large-Scale Military Drills amidst Escalation of Tensions with Armenia, 14 August 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-turkey-hold-large-scale-military-drills-amidst-escalation-of-tensions-with-armenia> (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>24</sup> AsiaNews.it, "Turkey Sends 4,000 Syrian ISIS Mercenaries to Fight against the Armenians," 28 September 2020, <https://bit.ly/3LWgOz4> (accessed on 20 June 2024); Public Radio of Armenia, Artsakh Forces Capture Syrian Mercenary, 30 October 2020, <https://en.armradio.am/2020/10/30/artsakh-forces-capture-syrian-mercenary-video> (accessed on 20 June 2024); Hetq, Artsakh Army Captures Another Syrian Mercenary, 1 November 2020, <https://hetq.am/en/article/123824> (accessed on 20 June 2024); Greek City Times, Reward of \$100 Dollars for Each Beheaded Infidel: Testimony of Captured Syrian Mercenary in Artsakh, 1 November 2020, <https://bit.ly/3piPLGQ> (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>25</sup> Statement by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation, 10 November 2020, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384> (accessed on 20 June 2024)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Government of Armenia, Decision N 1820-L, Annex on Assistance to Citizens Registered in Communities of Republic of Artsakh Communities Passed under the Control of the Republic of Azerbaijan as a Result of War Launched on 27 September 2020 (in Armenian), 21 November 2020, <https://bit.ly/3vbmV1u> (accessed on 10 June 2024).

<sup>28</sup> Transparency International Anticorruption Center et al, Anti-Armenian Xenophobia and Racism in Azerbaijan, reports for 2020, 2021, 2022, <https://transparency.am/en/publications/research-publications> (accessed on 20 June 2024).

20 February 2023, it was replaced with a larger mission (EUMA) with about 200 personnel from more than 20 countries.<sup>29</sup>

20. On 12 December, 2022, Azerbaijani state-sponsored activists closed the road from Shushi to Stepanakert, virtually blocking the Lachin Corridor - the only road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to the outside world, hence depriving the Armenian residents of Nagorno-Karabakh of basic food supplies, medication, essential health services, electricity, fuel and gas that used to come from Armenia<sup>30</sup> as well as impeding the freedom of movement and income generation.

21. The report proves that the mass exodus of Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh within merely a week in late September 2023 was actually a result of Azerbaijan's long-lasting and thoroughly-planned ethnic cleansing policy.

### CULTIVATION OF HATRED TOWARDS ARMENIANS

#### Demonization, dehumanisation and humiliation of Armenians

22. Throughout the year of 2023, president of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, in parallel with negotiating a peace treaty with Armenia, continued systematically using the expressions "Armenian fascism," "Armenian savagery" or "Armenian savages," "Armenian barbarism," "Armenian occupants and invaders," "terrorists," "contemptible enemy" in his public speeches, interviews, addresses to the nation, receptions of the Azerbaijani youth and even international meetings. According to Aliyev's messages, Armenians pursued a "policy of aggression," committed "evil deeds" and "genocide" against the Azerbaijani people, therefore, the latter had "a sense of revenge" and "expelled the enemy from the ancient Azerbaijani lands." The demonization and dehumanization, referenced in paragraphs below, served not only to galvanize public opinion but also to provide moral cover for Azerbaijan's ongoing military actions and violations of international humanitarian law.

23. On 18 April in his interview to the Azerbaijan Television in city of Salyan, Ilham Aliyev talked about the former leadership of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh people: "The separatists should also understand that they have two options: either they will live under the Azerbaijani flag or they will leave. We have chased Serzhik Sargsyan, Robert Kocharian and Seyran Ohanyan, the main figures of the separatists, out of Karabakh like dogs and brought them to their knees. They came to Karabakh during the Second Karabakh War supposedly to fight against us. All three ran away from our lands like rabbits. None of them can poke their nose into Khankendi [Stepanakert] or any other place now... The separatists, who are currently inventing some fictitious names for themselves – one calls himself a

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<sup>29</sup> EU Mission in Armenia, About EU Mission in Armenia [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/euma/about-european-union-mission-armenia\\_en?s=410283](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/euma/about-european-union-mission-armenia_en?s=410283) (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>30</sup> Amnesty International, Azerbaijan: Blockade of Lachin corridor putting thousands of lives in peril must be immediately lifted, 9 February 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/02/azerbaijan-blockade-of-lachin-corridor-putting-thousands-of-lives-in-peril-must-be-immediately-lifted/> (accessed on 10 June 2024); Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, Report, Doc. 15840, 10 October 2023, <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/33069/html> (accessed on 20 June 2024).

president, other calls himself a minister, another one calls himself a speaker of some parliament – this group of clowns must finally understand that they cannot play with our patience. We have tried to explain to them many times in different ways that they will either follow our word or they will be rejected from there and leave the Armenians there, who have actually become their hostages and captives, in peace. I am sure that the majority of the Armenian population currently living in Karabakh is ready to accept Azerbaijani citizenship. Simply put, these leeches, these predatory animals won't let them do that. They won't let these people live comfortably, having kept them as hostages for 30 years. Therefore, my position is this. Let everyone hear it – both the Armenian leaders and the forces standing behind them today. No-one can influence our will. We have proven it – both during and after the war. If necessary, we will prove it again in any form.”<sup>31</sup>

24. On 20 June, during his speech Opening Ceremony of Global Media Forum held in Shushi Aliyev called the democratically elected leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh “shackles”. He particularly said: “Therefore, the issue of reintegration depends on when the Armenian residents of Karabakh will be able to get rid of these shackles, of this junta that took them hostage and exploited them as slaves.” He stated, “We did not just defeat Armenia. We broke the back of Armenian fascism. We almost saved the Armenian people from these evil deeds. Maybe this bitter defeat, the bitter defeat in the Second Karabakh War will be a lesson for them, and they will sit down and think about how to live in this region from now on, acknowledge their sins, confess their crimes, and bring criminals to justice.”<sup>32</sup>

25. On 20 September, during the military attack against the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, president Aliyev made a statement referring to Nagorno-Karabakh leadership: “Azerbaijan duly punished the enemy by immediately taking necessary steps. Local antiterrorist measures were started, and all pending objectives were completed in one day. The terrorists were punished, and it was shown to Armenia again that all of their provocations would be met with a fitting response...”<sup>33</sup>

26. On 27 October, Ilham Aliyev when addressing the newly settled Azerbaijanis in Fuzuli district further spread the incitement against Armenians among the Azerbaijani children, “... we must never forget the occupation and suffering. The younger generation should also know this. Children going to this school today should also know this. They should know that our people have come out of difficult trials; they didn't bend or break down; they believed in themselves and their Army – believing that this day would come, that we would stand here and celebrate this holiday with you.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by Azerbaijan Television in city of Salyan, 18 April 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59451> (accessed on 11 January 2024).

<sup>32</sup>President of Azerbaijan, Opening Ceremony of Global Media Forum was held in Shusha, 20 June 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60544> (accessed on 12 January 2024).

<sup>33</sup>President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev addressed the nation, 20 September 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/61113> (accessed on 14 January 2024).

<sup>34</sup>President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev met with residents who moved to city of Fuzuli and members of general public of the district on “Fuzuli City Day”, 17 October 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/61643> (accessed on 15 January 2024).

### Fostering the sense of superiority over Armenians

27. The public addresses delivered by President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan in 2023 predominantly focused on highlighting the superiority of the Azerbaijani populace in contrast to Armenians, extolling the virtues of the Azerbaijani people, and criticizing the shortcomings of Armenians, portraying them as weak, treacherous, and ungrateful, inferior both militarily and morally. This fostered a national psyche of dominance, further inflaming hostilities and blocking any prospects for reconciliation.

28. On 28 January, during the press conference with the President of Egypt, Aliyev said: “We applied force to restore our territorial integrity in accordance with the UN Charter, liberated the territories of Azerbaijan recognized by the international community, expelled the enemy, crushed the Armenian army, and brought it to its knees. This is our rightful duty. We are building and creating now, including here in the village of Talish, in the settlement of Sugovushan [Mataghis], in Hadrut, in Shusha [Shushi] and all other liberated lands. Armenia devastated and plundered these territories. For 30 years, they dismantled the stones from our buildings one by one and sold them in the markets both in Armenia and in its neighboring country. But we are building and creating. Today, Armenia, which used to say that “Karabakh is Armenia, full stop” and threatened us with a new war, is going out of its way to find itself a new patron. They are showing to the world again how treacherous and ungrateful they are.”<sup>35</sup>

29. On 9 March, at the opening ceremony of the 10th Global Baku Forum, Aliyev said: “We hope that international actors who try to facilitate will persuade Armenia not to miss this chance. They lost the chance to become an independent country. They become totally dependent, kind of a colony of another country, and maybe some other countries. So, they lost their chance to become truly independent and to build their future because of aggression against us”<sup>36</sup>.

30. On 18 March, during in the congratulatory message addressed to the people of Azerbaijan on the Novruz holiday, Ilham Aliyev said. “We have restored our rights; we have restored on the battlefield. In 44 days, we expelled the contemptible enemy from our lands and raised the Azerbaijani flag in Karabakh. This is the brightest page of the centuries-old history of Azerbaijan. For 44 days, the people of Azerbaijan were united behind our army like a fist. We liberated the occupied lands by shedding blood.” Aliyev said: “We applied force to restore our territorial integrity in accordance with the UN Charter, liberated the territories of Azerbaijan recognized by the international community, expelled the enemy, crushed the Armenian army, and brought it to its knees. This is our rightful duty. We are building and creating now, including here in the village of Talish, in the settlement of Sugovushan [Mataghis], in Hadrut, in Shusha [Shushi] and all other liberated lands. Armenia devastated and plundered these territories... today, Armenia, which used to say that “Karabakh is

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<sup>35</sup>President of Azerbaijan, Presidents of Azerbaijan and Egypt made press statements, 28 January 2023, [https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Presidents\\_of\\_Azerbaijan\\_and\\_Egypt\\_made\\_press\\_statements\\_VIDEO-2464256](https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Presidents_of_Azerbaijan_and_Egypt_made_press_statements_VIDEO-2464256) (accessed on 8 January 2023).

<sup>36</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev attended the opening ceremony of the 10th Global Baku Forum, 09 March 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59135> (accessed on 8 January 2024).

Armenia, full stop” and threatened us with a new war, is going out of its way to find itself a new patron. They are showing to the world again how treacherous and ungrateful they are.”<sup>37</sup>

31. On 3 May, at his speech during the international conference on “Shaping the Geopolitics of the Greater Eurasia: from Past to Present to Future” in Shushi, Ilham Aliyev said: “They lost the chance to become a really independent country, not formally but in fact. They are looking now for a new master or masters. But the history, the recent history, should teach them a lesson. So, we hope that they will understand it.”<sup>38</sup>

32. On 28 May, Aliyev said: “Armenia is in a completely helpless state. It is still unable to heal the pain and wounds of the bitter defeat. They have sustained great psychological damage, and this is natural. Therefore, Azerbaijan showed leadership here again. The reality we live in today emerged on the basis of the results achieved after the Second Karabakh war.” He also mentioned: “Now, after Armenia has recognized our territorial integrity, there are practically no serious obstacles in the way of a peace treaty. I am sure that if Armenia does not cheat again and does not change its position, a peace treaty can be signed in the near future. If it is signed, it is very good, but even if it is not signed, the state of Azerbaijan cannot face any problems because of that. Because we are the stronger side, we are the ones who have a strong position at the negotiating table, we are the ones who have a strong position on the border. Even if the peace treaty is not signed, we will live comfortably and safely.”<sup>39</sup>

33. On 20 June, during his speech Opening Ceremony of Global Media Forum held in Shushi Ilham Aliyev said: “For me, as a President it was always important, even during the times of occupation, that Azerbaijan does not transform into the area of rivalry. This is the worst scenario one can imagine for any country. We see that Armenia now is slowly becoming such an area of rivalry, which can lead to serious problems. Not only Russian-American, but also other countries are actively stepping in, and I think that the Armenian government does not have a clear foreign policy strategy. They had it before the Second Karabakh War. But now we see that they don't have it and this could lead to serious problems for them. But with respect to Azerbaijan, our area is free from rivalry. We are the area of cooperation. As you know, many times Russian and American military commanders gathered in Baku for meetings.”<sup>40</sup>

34. On 1 August, in his interview with Euronews TV channel Ilham Aliyev said: “We think that Azerbaijanis, who were deported forcefully from Armenia, have a right to return when Azerbaijan and Armenia will normalize their relations and establish diplomatic relations. Another message to them is to clearly realize the current geopolitical situation and the balance of forces. For many years, leaders

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<sup>37</sup>President of Azerbaijan, The message of congratulation from Ilham Aliyev to the people of Azerbaijan on the Novruz holiday, 18 March 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59221> (accessed on 11 January 2024).

<sup>38</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev attended international conference on “Shaping the Geopolitics of the Greater Eurasia: from Past to Present to Future” in Shusha, 3 May 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59576> (accessed on 11 January 2024).

<sup>39</sup>President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev met with people who returned to the city of Lachin and presented house keys to them, 28 May 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60027> (accessed on 12 January 2024).

<sup>40</sup>President of Azerbaijan, Opening Ceremony of Global Media Forum was held in Shusha, 20 June 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60544> (accessed on 12 January 2024).



of Armenia were persuading their people that they have the strongest army in the world, that if the war starts they will come to Baku and that Azerbaijan will not fight for its lands, already agreed with occupation. All these narratives were absolutely false and were nothing more than propaganda. So, the war destroyed those narratives and not only that. It also destroyed a lot of ideological columns of the Armenian state. They realized that they lost the war and most probably it was very painful for them psychologically. So now, when we say that we want peace, it's not because we are weak and we are seeking peace. No, they know that we are much stronger."<sup>41</sup>

35. On 26 August, during "Lachin City Day" festivities Aliyev said: "Today, we have proved to the whole world that no one can impact our determination. We showed this during the war by advancing for 44 days, crushing the enemy and raising our flag. We are compelled to prove it again in the three years that have passed since the war. Because the campaign against us, the ugly propaganda, cannot affect our determination or make us turn back. Justice is on our side, international law is on our side, we are not afraid of anyone, and we have shown it both on the battlefield and the political plane. The sooner Armenia's patrons understand this, the better it will be for Armenia and the region, because we are a nation of builders."<sup>42</sup>

36. On 20 September, during the military attack against the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, president Aliyev made a statement: "Our servicemen have shown extraordinary heroism, bravery and professionalism during the anti-terrorist measures. In challenging terrain and despite the presence of fortifications created over the years of engineering works by the enemy, given that the enemy's positions are located on hills and in favorable places, our servicemen once again, as I mentioned, showed heroism and professionalism and achieved significant military success in all directions in a short time.... As a result of short-term local anti-terrorist measures, I would like to note again that most of the enemy's weapons and equipment have been incapacitated... I said that the units of the Armenian Army illegally settled in our territory should lay down their weapons, be disarmed, and completely withdrawn from our territory. Simultaneously, they should hand over all weapons and equipment. Only in that case can Azerbaijan stop anti-terror measures. Otherwise, we will go until the end, and the enemy is very aware of our strength and determination... My response was that Azerbaijan always stands by its words. Both our friends and enemies know this... We were saying that the illegal junta should fold up its so-called flag, worth no more than a piece of cloth, and vacate our lands. It is our sovereign right... Therefore, all these factors are further evidence that the regime of the illegal criminal junta has become impertinent and impudent. They forgot that they were living in the territory of Azerbaijan. Therefore, all our steps are legitimate, legal, and fair, and we are both responsible and proud. Again, the anti-terror measures were carried out with high professionalism and accuracy so that the civilian population was not affected and the civil infrastructure was not damaged. Only enemy positions, their weapons and equipment were destroyed... After the surrender of the criminal junta, this source of tension, this den of poison, has already been consigned to history. The Armenian population of Karabakh can finally breathe a sigh of relief. I said this before, and I want

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<sup>41</sup>President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by Euronews TV channel, 1 August 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60723> (accessed on 14 January 2024).

<sup>42</sup>President of Azerbaijan, Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the "Lachin City Day" festivities held on the bank of the Hakari, 26 August 2023, River <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60990> (accessed on 14 January 2024).

to repeat it: the Armenian population of Karabakh are our citizens. Armenian nationalists, war criminals, and the so-called leaders of Armenia and Karabakh took these people hostages and poisoned their brains. They concocted endless lies about Azerbaijan and its people, brainwashed and poisoned them... The junta, the bloodsucking leeches, have already been completely exposed and surrendered. They threw in the towel.” He also said: “When the Second Karabakh War ended, and Armenia threw in the towel, was brought to its knees, and signed the act of capitulation, I said that the status went to hell. For some time after the war, we did not hear any nonsense about the status. But as this fear slowly dissipated, revengeful forces started emerging again. Therefore, all these factors are further evidence that the regime of the illegal criminal junta has become impertinent and impudent. They forgot that they were living in the territory of Azerbaijan. Therefore, all our steps are legitimate, legal, and fair, and we are both responsible and proud. Again, the anti-terror measures were carried out with high professionalism and accuracy so that the civilian population was not affected and the civil infrastructure was not damaged. Only enemy positions, their weapons and equipment were destroyed...”<sup>43</sup>

37. On 8 November, during the military parade in occupied Stepanakert, after forcing all the Armenians flee their homes in Nagorno-Karabakh, Ilham Aliyev stated: “The Shusha [Shushi] operation and indeed all other military operations we carried out in 44 days, the bravery of our soldiers are an epic of heroism. By defeating the enemy on the battlefield and liberating our cities and villages, Azerbaijani soldiers and officers showed true heroism for forty-four days. Every day we went forward, we never took a step back. The enemy army seeing the professionalism and selflessness of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces was in a huge state of panic, and according to their own admission, there were 12,000 deserters in the Armenian army during the 44-day war. Not a single soldier of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces left the battlefield. This once again demonstrated the indomitable spirit and high moral qualities of the Azerbaijani people to the whole world.”<sup>44</sup>

### Utilizing the victory in war to strengthen the regime

38. Throughout 2023, Aliyev’s rhetoric continued normalizing the use of force and the threat of force as a means to reinforce dominance of his nation and recognition of his leadership in the victory, its preparation and international recognition, hence strengthening of his power within the Azerbaijani society. He ensured that “war was his life mission”, emphasized his attitude to the long-lasting negotiations and mocked international actors’ role in that regard.

39. On 9 January, during the ceremony dedicated to 2022 sports results Aliyev said: “Our historic Victory is a source of pride for every Azerbaijani, every citizen, and all Azerbaijanis worldwide. We will educate the next generation in the spirit of patriotism, as we have always done, and we have raised such an incredible young generation that raises the flag of our country both in sports arenas and on the battlefield. The absolute majority of those who took part in the second Karabakh war were young

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<sup>43</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev addressed the nation, 20 September 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/61113> (accessed on 14 January 2024).

<sup>44</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Military parade dedicated to 3rd anniversary of the Victory in the Patriotic War was held in city of Khankendi, 8 November 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/62139> (accessed on 15 January 2024).

people – young people who grew up based on our policy and received good education both in society and in their families. This factor, of course, manifests itself in all areas. So, our nation has been living as a victorious nation for more than two years now, and this significant factor will remain with us forever.”<sup>45</sup>

40. On 10 January, during the interview by the local TV channels, Aliyev said: “After the Second Karabakh War, our primary task was to substantiate our glorious military Victory on the political level. We started to work immediately. Because we understand perfectly well that if we do not reaffirm this Victory in the political sphere and do not urge the international community to accept this Victory, we may face particular challenges. We immediately began working hard, and today, two years after the war, we can say with complete certainty that the world has accepted the war’s outcome. Azerbaijan’s just cause has been confirmed again, and we must strengthen the situation created at the war’s end, i.e., our positions. During the last two years, we have achieved what we wanted both at the level of international relations and within the country. Today, it is no secret that Azerbaijan is recognized as a very reliable and serious partner worldwide. Azerbaijan is one of the countries that voice their position openly and conduct an independent policy. Of course, it is based on our military power and glorious Victory. Because I have witnessed that Azerbaijan’s policies have been embraced even more after the war. In other words, the sympathy towards us has grown. World’s political elite understands well at what cost we achieved this Victory, what risks we took, and what forces we were and are still up against. So even though the war is over, the struggle is still ongoing, and I am confident we will prevail. Because we are on the righteous path, and our military and political power, including our economic independence, certainly boost our prowess.”<sup>46</sup>

41. In the same interview, Aliyev said: “The primary reason for “Operation Farrukh” [referring to the occupation and ethnic cleansing of village Parukh in Nagorno-Karabakh in March 2022] was not only to take control of those strategic heights. At the same time, a large area of our territory was under fire from those heights, and illegal Armenian armed groups that remained there occasionally fired in our direction. It was even impossible to repair the Khachinchay reservoir. “Operation Farrukh” eliminated that threat, unexpected for many, including Armenia and the separatists nested in Karabakh. They thought the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan would never conduct any operations in those areas. We have shattered this myth. It is our territory, and the reason for not conducting a large-scale combat operation is not because we are afraid of anyone but because we believe that we must achieve our goals through political means... The Saribaba, Buzlukh and Girkhgiz operations, including “Operation Revenge,” were taken in retaliation for our military personnel’s loss. We had martyrs and were compelled to show our strength again. We thought this would eventually be a lesson for them, but it was not. So, the September clashes [2-day military assault against Armenia and actual occupation of Armenian territories in 2022] were inevitable... I now hope that there will be no such situations in the future. Because last year, since March, we have shown three times that no one can

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<sup>45</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev attended ceremony dedicated to 2022 sporting results, 9 January 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/58541> (accessed on 8 January 2024).

<sup>46</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by local TV channels, 10 January 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/58555> (accessed on 8 January 2024).

withstand us and we will achieve what we want. No Armenian patron can come to their rescue. Secondly, the heights controlled both in the direction of the Azerbaijan-Armenia border and in the direction of Karabakh provide us with a tremendous strategic advantage.” Aliyev referred to negotiations following the war. He said: “... First, the fact that we were victorious and won the war probably annoys many. Now, when we look back, we see and are further convinced that – although we have seen this for many years during the negotiations – the Minsk Group, especially France, has been trying hard not to resolve this issue, i.e., neither peace nor war, the issue should remain frozen, and Armenians should de facto live there. Time will pass, generations will change, Azerbaijanis will forget, and among other things, the theses of contacts between these people and the strengthening of cooperation with Armenia were thrown around, suggesting that we should reconcile and become friends. We did not come to terms with that, and I think the primary reason for such an anti-Azerbaijani position is that we have shattered their plans, and they could not save Armenia, which they took under their protection.” He also added: “But they do not want to say “B” after saying “A.” They are bending over backward to include the Karabakh issue in a possible peace agreement and block it. It is absolutely unacceptable that they ignored the meeting of foreign ministers in Moscow. But why did they ignore the meeting held in Prague on 6 October? After all, an incident also had happened at the border less than a month before that. Quite serious events had happened there. I do not want to go back to the details of how this ended for Armenia. For some reason, the Armenian side went to Prague to meet with Macron but did not go to Moscow. Then the comments of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the conduct of the Armenian side purely from the diplomatic protocol standpoint are further evidence of that. In other words, it is convenient and suitable to take the position of an offended party, but this position is very harmful to both public figures and the country. Pity is not the best tool in a politician's arsenal, especially when it is all fake, as it is now common to say.”<sup>47</sup>

42. On 8 March, during the press statement made with the President of Latvia, Aliyev said: “They will make the right decision and not try to buy time as it was during the times of occupation when we had negotiations for 28 years, which ended, unfortunately, with a serious military outbreak that ended with the liberation of Azerbaijani territories. We had to do it by force, unfortunately.”<sup>48</sup>

43. On 18 March, during the message of congratulation addressed to the people of Azerbaijan on the Novruz holiday, Ilham Aliyev said: “They [Armenians] are showing to the world again how treacherous and ungrateful they are. Now they are looking for a new owner. They don't know whose feet to fall under. All this is to no avail. There is one condition for them to live comfortably on an area of 29,000 square kilometers.... If Armenia does not recognize our territorial integrity, we will not recognize their territorial integrity either. Armenia and the hypocritical countries behind it should know what the result will be. They should know that no dirty plan against us will work. We have power, we have friends, we have a strong position in the world and we have a strong determination. We demonstrated this during the war and in the post-war period... For 44 days, we were only moving forward and did not take a single step back. We showed the strength and high moral qualities of the

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<sup>47</sup>President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by local TV channels, 10 January 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/58555> (accessed on 8 January 2024).

<sup>48</sup>President of Azerbaijan, Presidents of Azerbaijan and Latvia made press statements, 8 March 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59130> (accessed on 8 January 2024).

Azerbaijani people on the battlefield for 44 days. Not a single person deserted our Army. According to the latest information, there were not 10,000 but 11,000 deserters in the Armenian army. They should not forget this, and if they do, we will remind them. Let no-one forget the results of the Second Karabakh War.”<sup>49</sup>

44. On 10 May, in his address Ilham Aliyev mentioned: “... Azerbaijan is among such countries; no external force can impact our determination. Because we have a strong will, a strong army, and at the same time, we have strong capabilities. Our financial resources and material situation allow us the opportunity to live at the expense of our own resources. We are rebuilding Karabakh and Zangezur at the expense of our own resources.” He also mentioned: “In some countries that are eager to lecture us, it is 100 percent, perhaps even more. So what does this show? It shows that we do not depend on anyone and do not interfere in anyone's affairs. But we do not and will not allow anyone to poke their noses into our affairs, be it political issues, Azerbaijan-Armenia issues, or Karabakh, which is an integral part of Azerbaijan. We have not and will not allow anyone to do that. Our resolve and strength are in place to ensure this.” Aliyev also mentioned: “Of course, we systematically worked on army building and are still doing that today. After the Second Karabakh War, we did not stop. On the contrary, we are still moving forward. Additions will be made to this year's state budget, and a large part of those additions is intended for military purposes. Why? Because we must always be ready. The threats and dangers are increasing, and we must be able to overcome every single threat. It is the case today. The Azerbaijani Army is among the most powerful armies in the world – both from the point of view of equipment and combat capability. Our army has been in the battle. Our army has shown its strength not in a parade but on the battlefield. During 44 days, not a single person took a step back. Not a single person was a deserter. This is what our army is. This is what our people are. Because the army is a part of the people, those who serve in the army are the people's children, the children we have raised. We have raised such wonderful children who defeated the enemy here in Shusha [Shushi], drove the enemy out of our lands and raised our flag, a symbol of our pride, on this building and in all other liberated lands. Army building is provided at the required level today and will continue to be provided in the future.” Aliyev also stressed: “We had to implement the Security Council resolutions of United Nations on the battlefield. Now, situation is different.”<sup>50</sup>

45. On 28 May, Aliyev said: “Today, thanks to the heroism of the victorious Azerbaijani Army, we have achieved this. We have defeated the enemy on the battlefield... We have built a strong army. This army crushed the enemy in 44 days, brought them to their knees and expelled them from our lands. We have raised a wonderful young generation – a patriotic and well-educated young generation was brought up in the national spirit. These young people liberated our lands. Young people from these regions who had not seen Lachin, Kalbajar and other lands under occupation were ready to die. They were facing death. May Allah rest the souls of all our martyrs in peace. We will never forget their heroism. Thanks to their heroism and bravery, we are sitting here and life is reviving in these lands today.” He also mentioned: “So, on August 25 [2022], the last Armenian invader or illegal resident left

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<sup>49</sup>President of Azerbaijan, Congratulatory message from Ilham Aliyev to the people of Azerbaijan on the Novruz holiday, 18 March 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59221> (accessed on 11 January 2024).

<sup>50</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Address by Ilham Aliyev, 10 May 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59672> (accessed on 11 January 2024).

Lachin and we returned on August 26. This shows again that every inch of this land is dear and native to us. Every city and every village is ours. Land cannot be given away. During the negotiations, there were different stages and different moments. There were pressures and threats. Some made great effort to make us come to terms with this occupation. However, our unbending position and resolve overpowered all those efforts. I was saying that there could be no compromise. “Five districts should be returned to us and two should remain under Armenian control forever” – this is impossible. We were not going to compromise a single village, and we proved it.”<sup>51</sup>

46. On 1 August, in his interview with Euronews TV channel Ilham Aliyev said: “Well, to win a war was a mission of my life, of my political life, which ended successfully. So, we won the war, despite many factors, political, despite factors of long-lasting infrastructure projects on the occupied territories, which made it very difficult for our military servicemen to break several defense lines. They had in some parts five, in some parts seven defense lines full of mines. And also, you have notice coming from Fuzulu that the road climbs up. So, that’s how our military servicemen came here. The road, which you came, the Victory Road, as I called it later, did not exist. It was the road through which our military servicemen were moving towards Shusha [Shushi]. They were climbing these rocky mountains. So, despite these factors, despite strong political support from many countries, which have a big Armenian diaspora, we did what was right to do. We restored justice, and we restored our territorial integrity. We fought on our land. We didn’t fight on the Armenian land and we won. So, that was a mission number one, which is over.”<sup>52</sup>

47. On 26 August, during “Lachin City Day” festivities Ilham Aliyev said: “Every Azerbaijani, all Azerbaijani citizens throughout Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijanis of the world live with a sense of tremendous pride because we have shown the strength and determination of the Azerbaijani people to the whole world. We had shed blood, won a historic Victory and returned to our native land. This couldn’t have been done through negotiations. War was the only option. We fought a just war. We fought on our land.”<sup>53</sup>

48. On 10 October, about two weeks from of totally cleansing Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenians, in occupied Stepanakert, capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, Ilham Aliyev clearly emphasized his Armenophobic intentions: “We forced the enemy to sign the act of capitulation in just 44 days during the Patriotic War three years ago. At the same time, the anti-terror operation which we carried out last month and which lasted only 23 hours, showed our strength, and the enemy surrendered by waving the white flag. We are rightly proud of our Armed Forces.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev met with people who returned to the city of Lachin and presented house keys to them, 28 May 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60027> (accessed on 12 January 2024).

<sup>52</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by Euronews TV channel, 1 August 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60723> (accessed on 14 January 2024).

<sup>53</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the “Lachin City Day” festivities held on the bank of the Hakari River, 26 August 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60990> (accessed on 14 January 2024).

<sup>54</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev raised the National Flag of Azerbaijan in Khankendi city and delivered a speech, 15 October 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/61587> (accessed on 15 January 2024).

### Hatred spread by other high-ranking officials

49. On 8 February, an MP from the ruling “New Azerbaijan” Party, Elshad Mirbashir oghlu, commenting on the fact that Armenia sent rescuers to Turkey to cope with the consequences of the deadly earthquake, said: “Anyone who knows the essence of the Armenian state and the Armenian people does not believe in the sincerity of Armenia. Armenia, which has shown humanism in relation to the victims of the earthquake in brother Turkey, has committed bloody crimes against the people of Azerbaijan until now. They killed Azerbaijanis, regardless of children, women, and the elderly. In other words, I don't think that any humanitarian step of the state and the people, whose hands are stained with blood in such crimes, will be sincere. If Armenia wants to normalize its relations, the main step it would take in relation to brother Turkey would be to announce that it has abandoned the false genocide claim. But it carries these baseless claims to all platforms. Therefore, I think that Armenia is not sincere in sending aid to Turkey.”<sup>55</sup>

50. On 24 February, an MP from the ruling “New Azerbaijan” Party, Malahat Ibrahimgizi, said: “This state's [referring to Armenia] has no eternal friendship with anyone in history; they have never had cooperation, partnership. They have always established insidious relations with treachery, flattery, and deceit. The official Yerevan and the Armenian people should understand that their state was built on the historical lands of Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus. There has never been a state called Armenia in the region.”<sup>56</sup>

51. On 30 March, an MP from the ruling “New Azerbaijan” Party, Tahir Rzayev, said: “It is very difficult to lead a nation whose foundation is treason and treachery to the right path and to prevent their dirty deeds. History has proven this in the example of Armenians. Many thinkers and politicians of the world have repeatedly stated that Armenians are thieves, indeed renegades, liars, traitors, oppressors, and have shown their ignorance, dishonor, and backstabbing of friends.”<sup>57</sup>

52. On the same day, on 30 March, an MP from the ruling “New Azerbaijan” Party, Kamran Bayramov, said: “The time will come when the world community will accept the conclusion that Armenians are both a stain and a danger to humanity. Then the world will give an objective assessment of the crimes and genocide committed against the people of Azerbaijan.”<sup>58</sup>

53. On 1 May, an MP from the ruling “New Azerbaijan” Party, Tahir Rzayev, commenting on French Minister of Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna's visit to the region, said: “The French, like the Armenians, were bloodthirsty, oppressive, aggressors, and traitors...”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> “Ermənistan Türkiyəyə yardım göndərməkdə səmimi deyil” — Deputat, 8 February 2023,

<https://demokrat.az/az/news/139329/ermenistan-turkiyeye-yardim-gondermekde-semimi-devil-deputat> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>56</sup> “Bölgədə heç vaxt Ermənistan adlı bir dövlət olmayıb” — Deputat, 24 February 2023, <https://demokrat.az/az/news/141065/bolgede-hec-vaxt-ermenistan-adli-bir-dovlet-olmayib-deputat> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>57</sup> Deputat: Paşinyan Putini yenə də satdı, 30 March 2023, <https://pravda.az/news/109343> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>58</sup> “Vaxt gələcək dünya ermənilərin başəriyyəət üçün təhlükəli olduğunu qəbul edəcək”, 30 March 2023, <https://demokrat.az/az/news/144497/vaxt-gelecek-dunya-ermenilerin-beseriyvet-ucun-tehlukeli-oldugunu-qebul-edecek> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>59</sup> Deputat: “Ermənilər kimi fransızlarda qana hərisdilər, zalım və zülmkardılar, təcavüzkar və xəyanətkardılar”, 1 May 2023, <https://pravda.az/news/112610> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

54. On 12 May, an MP Gudrat Hasanguliyev, who also ran for the snap presidential election of 2024, said: "I still say that this nation is sick, it has suffered from the "Great Armenia" ["Greater Armenia" or "Armenia Major" was an ancient name of the part of the country to distinguish it from Roman-controlled Lesser Armenia or "Armenia Minor"] disease."<sup>60</sup>

55. On 16 July, Azerbaijani MP Javanshir Feyziyev, in his article titled "A thousand colors of Armenian hypocrisy", wrote: "Armenian hypocrisy has a thousand colors, a thousand shades. It manifests itself everywhere in a different way, but always with the same goal and intention - to betray the state of which it is a subject in order to spread hatred against the local people in the areas where they live and to open up to foreign powers... The international community should learn from the next manifestation of Armenian treachery and understand what kind of hatred this tribe, which they call a "suffering nation", harbors against other peoples and religions."<sup>61</sup>

56. On 30 July, commenting on the kidnapping of Vagif Khachatryan, a 68-year-old Armenian, by Azeri border guards during his ICRC-mediated medical evacuation on 29 July, Azerbaijani MP Vugar İskandarov, from the ruling party, stated: "It is an indisputable fact that the Armenians have carried out a genocidal policy against the Azerbaijani people at all stages of history. In the early 90s of the last century, our hated enemies committed atrocities in almost every border region and carried out mass slaughter. One such crime was committed in the Meshali village of Khojaly district in 1991."<sup>62</sup>

57. On 31 August, an Azerbaijani MP from the ruling "New Azerbaijan" Party, Elman Mammadov said: "Are you aware of the Armenian pigs standing on the road between Aghdam and Askeran today? Should France's pro-Armenian president Macron examine their faces and appearances to determine if there is anyone among them who is starving? They all seem robust, like colts, and you have fed them all like pigs. Alternatively, let them inspect the composition of those who participated in the demonstration in Khankendi [Stepanakert]. They will find that there is no one with a hungry face. Certainly!"<sup>63</sup>

58. On 21 September, an Azerbaijani MP from the ruling "New Azerbaijan" Party, Nesib Mahamaliyev said: "We are witnessing a historical moment that defies expression through words. In just 24 hours, the anti-terrorist measures taken have brought down the artificially constructed "Armenian knee" that stood for 150 years. The label of a "defeated nation" has been permanently removed from our forehead. We have bequeathed to future generations an honorable legacy, portraying us as a heroic nation with a proud Azerbaijani identity. The global influence of Armenianism

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<sup>60</sup> Belə bir cəhd etmək istəyənləri Türkiyə xalqı əfv etməz - Həsənquliyev, 12 May 2023, <https://telegraf.com/news/siyaset/376942.html> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>61</sup> Erməni riyakarlığının min rəngi, 16 July 2023, <https://modern.az/aktual/422019/ermeni-riyakarlighinin-min-rengi> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>62</sup> Xaçaturyan hay-küyü Ermənistanın cinayətkarlığı, soyqırımını dəstəklədiyini sübut etdi – RƏY, 30 July 2023, <https://report.az/daxili-siyaset/xacaturyan-hay-kuys-ermenistanin-cinayetkarligi-soyqirimini-desteklediyyini-subut-etdi-rey> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>63</sup> Deputat: "Orda ac adam yoxdur, hamısı sipa kimidir", 31 August 2023, <https://demokrat.az/az/news/161404/deputat-orda-ac-adam-yoxdur-hamisi-sipa-kimidir> (accessed on 16 January 2024).



has been shattered, and lobbying organizations aligned with them have suffered an irreparable blow.”<sup>64</sup>

### FABRICATION OF THE HISTORY

59. Azerbaijan’s policy towards Armenians and Armenia is based on statements that Armenian history is fake, Armenians are newcomers in the region. Moreover, Azerbaijan claims that both – the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Republic of Armenia are “ancient Azerbaijani lands.” Yet, these assertions are rebutted at least referring to Greek geographer Strabo (63 BC – c. 24 AD), who speaks about Armenia and Armenians in his book of “Geography,”<sup>65</sup> or looking at the geographical terms “Armenian Plateau” or “Armenian Highlands” referring to the region.<sup>66</sup>

60. Aliyev continued to question the Armenian statehood, on one hand calling the area of Armenia “Western Azerbaijan”, on the other hand claiming for opening “Zangezur corridor,” hence threatening the territorial integrity of Armenia.

### Denial of existence of Nagorno-Karabakh

61. Throughout 2023, Aliyev persisted in denying the existence of Nagorno-Karabakh as a political unit and calling for Armenians residing in Nagorno-Karabakh to vacate the land.

62. On 18 March, in the congratulatory message addressed to the people of Azerbaijan on the Novruz holiday, Ilham Aliyev said: “Unfortunately, the forces behind Armenia, including the countries that co-chaired the Minsk Group at the time, did not react to this statement in any way. And now, after Azerbaijan has liberated its native land, just look at how many unfair steps are being taken against us and how many shady dealings are being committed. Armenia’s patrons, the countries involved in Armenia's policy of aggression have declared an information war on us. In some countries, they organize certain conferences and symposia related to the internal affairs of Azerbaijan. Some pro-Armenian countries recognize the “independence of Nagorno-Karabakh”, which is not on the world map and does not exist in the territory of Azerbaijan.”<sup>67</sup>

63. On 18 April in his interview by Azerbaijan Television in city of Salyan, Aliyev said: “Karabakh is our internal matter. Armenians living in Karabakh should either accept Azerbaijani citizenship or find another place to live.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>“Antiterror tədbirləri alınımızdan “məğlub xalq” damğasını birdəfəlik götürdü”, 21 September 2023, <https://moderator.az/az/aktual/683063/antiterror-tedbirleri-alinimizdan-melub-xalq-damasini-birdefelik-gturdu> (accessed on 16 January 2024).

<sup>65</sup> Strabo, Geography, Book XI, Chapter 14, published in Vol. V of the Loeb Classical Library edition, 1928, [https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Strabo/11N\\*.html#ref1](https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Strabo/11N*.html#ref1) (accessed on 5 February 2024).

<sup>66</sup> Britannica, Armenian Highland, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Armenian-Highland> (accessed on 5 February 2024).

<sup>67</sup> President of Azerbaijan, The message of congratulation from Ilham Aliyev to the people of Azerbaijan on the Novruz holiday, 18 March 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59221> (accessed on 11 January 2024).

<sup>68</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by Azerbaijan Television in city of Salyan, 18 April 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59451> (accessed on 11 January 2024).

64. On 3 May, at his speech during the international conference on “Shaping the Geopolitics of the Greater Eurasia: from Past to Present to Future” in Shushi, Aliyev said: “It was clear to Armenia and international players during my numerous communications with the US and EU officials that there should be a two-track approach. One is Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization and other communications between Azerbaijan’s authorities and the Armenian community in Karabakh. Therefore, any attempt to put the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, which does not exist, into the text of the peace treaty is counterproductive... France’s two chambers of Parliament recognized the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh, which no country in the world, including Armenia, recognized. Therefore, this is what they call real politics.”<sup>69</sup>

65. On 20 June, during his speech Opening Ceremony of Global Media Forum held in Shushi Ilham Aliyev said: “By the way, this hotel is also a good illustration of what we're doing. Two hotels have been restored - Karabakh and Khari Bulbul and they were built from scratch. Interesting thing about this hotel is that here on this particular place, the separatists wanted to build a parliament for so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. And when I came here first time in January, I came to see it, they did not finish it. There was only construction. They wanted to move their so-called parliament here, and to continue Armenisation of Shusha [Shushi]. And standing in front of that, I called it the “*House of the Devil.*” And the “*House of the Devil*” was knocked down, and we built this beautiful hotel, which is a five-star hotel. I hope guests also feel themselves comfortable. This also demonstrates how quickly Shusha [Shushi] is being developed.”<sup>70</sup>

66. On June 20, during his speech Opening Ceremony of Global Media Forum held in Shushi Aliyev continues to propagate hatred towards the Armenian people, portraying them as “*guests of the Karabakh land.*” “...Armenians have lived in the territory of Azerbaijan for a long time. Their migration to Karabakh en masse began in the first half of the 19th century. In 1805, as a result of the Kurakchay agreement, the Karabakh Khanate was included in the Russian Empire. The agreements of Gulustan and Turkmenchay signed after that included other khanates of Azerbaijan into the Russian Empire. After that, the process of settlement of Armenians from Iran and Eastern Anatolia began. There are many documents to confirm this. Therefore, the writings, letters and statements of prominent statesmen are all confirmed historically. So they came to these lands as guests of the Karabakh land, including Shusha [Shushi]. They claimed that Shusha [Shushi] is an Armenian city. First, the history of the city of Shusha [Shushi] doesn’t date too far back. In 1752, Panahali Khan built a city in Shusha [Shushi], and last year was declared the year of Shusha [Shushi] in Azerbaijan because we were celebrating the 270th anniversary of Shusha [Shushi]. From then and until the occupation, the absolute majority of people living in Shusha [Shushi] were Azerbaijanis... If Shusha [Shushi] was an Armenian city, why was it in such a deplorable state?”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev attended international conference on “Shaping the Geopolitics of the Greater Eurasia: from Past to Present to Future” in Shusha, 03 May 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59576> (accessed on 11 January 2024).

<sup>70</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Opening Ceremony of Global Media Forum was held in Shusha, 20 June 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60544> (accessed on 12 January 2024).

<sup>71</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Opening Ceremony of Global Media Forum was held in Shusha, 20 June 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60544> (accessed on 12 January 2024).

67. On 1 August, in his interview with Euronews TV channel Aliyev said: “People who live in Karabakh - in area, which is controlled now temporarily by Russian peacekeepers – they live in Azerbaijan. They should choose whether to live as citizens of Azerbaijan as ethnic minority, as any other ethnic minority, which Azerbaijan is rich of or to leave... they should understand that situation, which they are in now today, will not change in their favor, if they continue to ignore us, if they continue to behave like we do not exist or live in so-called country, which has “president”, “ministers”, “parliamentarians.” This is all fake. We offer them normal life. I think if they listen to me, they should understand and they know that I mean what I say.”<sup>72</sup>

68. On December 21, after completing the ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh, in his speech in occupied Stepanakert Ilham Aliyev said: “The valiant army of Azerbaijan demonstrated to both Armenia and the global community that these are our historical and ancestral territories, rightfully belonging to the people of Azerbaijan. The imperative to reclaim what is rightfully ours was realized, and we successfully accomplished this mission... Khankendi [Stepanakert] was liberated from occupation three months ago. As a result of a one-day anti-terrorist operation, Azerbaijan fully ensured its state sovereignty. Today, the Azerbaijani flag flies across the entire Karabakh region. This is an immensely historic event and this history will live forever in our hearts. The people of Azerbaijan and all Azerbaijanis of the world will forever be proud of this Victory... We, the owners of these lands, are building and creating.”<sup>73</sup>

### Territorial claims under the name of “Zangezur Corridor”

69. On January 10, during the interview by the local TV channels, Aliyev said: “The economic viability of the Zangezur Corridor is beyond doubt. Of course, it is more than just an economic and transport project for us, it is a project of strategic significance. We are sure that the realization of this project is our natural right. In addition, the realization of this project was also reflected in the trilateral statement of November 10, 2020. Indeed, there is no mention of the “Zangezur Corridor” in it because I introduced the term “Zangezur Corridor” in the geopolitical lexicon afterward. However, it is explicitly stated that there should be a transport connection between the western regions of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, and Armenia should provide it. Armenia wants to shy away from that and has not fulfilled its obligations for more than two years. But that won't stop us. So, for us, this is a strategic project, not just for us but also for several neighboring countries and the broader geography.” He also added: “In other words, Azerbaijan has become a serious actor across a very extensive transport market. Of course, the realization of the Zangezur Corridor is a historical necessity. That is why I said it would happen whether Armenia wants it or not. Although they perceive it as another threat in Armenia, I had no such idea. It is simply inevitable. It will happen sooner or later. Of course, we want it to materialize soon.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by Euronews TV channel, 1 August 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60723> (accessed on 14 January 2024).

<sup>73</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev delivered speech at Khankendi Stadium, 21 December 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/62625> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>74</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by local TV channels 10 January 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/58555> (accessed on 8 January 2024).

70. On 13 June, during the joint press statement with Turkish President Erdogan, Ilham Aliyev stated: "At the same time, we exchanged views on the speedy opening of the Zangezur corridor. We have discussed this issue. The opening of the Zangezur corridor is inevitable, the sooner the better. In any case, we will increase our efforts in this direction. The opening of this corridor will usher new opportunities for all countries and will have a positive impact on cooperation in the region"<sup>75</sup>.

71. On 20 June, during his speech Opening Ceremony of Global Media Forum held in Shushi Aliyev said: "No-one has canceled the Zangezur corridor and this project remains on the agenda and will remain until it is implemented." In the same speech, Aliyev avoids using the Armenian names for places within the territorial integrity of Armenia, specifically for the Syunik and Gegharkunik regions: "Because if Armenians want to talk about rights and securities of Armenians in Karabakh, then we want to talk about rights and securities of Azerbaijanis in Zangazur, in Goycha [Lake Sevan area], and in Yerevan. So, I think, this is logical absolutely."<sup>76</sup>

72. On 24 July, in his interview with China Media Group corporation Ilham Aliyev said: "We are working very actively on the Zangezur corridor, which will be an additional road from Azerbaijan to Türkiye and Europe. About 70% of construction work has already been done in the Azerbaijani territory. So, through Azerbaijan, there'll not be only one route through the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, but also through the Zangezur corridor."<sup>77</sup>

73. On 6 December, Ilham Aliyev said: "We all know how the Bolsheviks took Zangezur from Azerbaijan in November 1920, and adjusted it to Armenia just less than six months after sovietization of Azerbaijan. This part was taken from us. So, I told him that we have more historical and political and legal rights to contest your territorial integrity... As I told Prime Minister Pashinyan that will be a road from Azerbaijan to Azerbaijan. And there should be no customs duties, no checks, no border security, when it goes from mainland to Nakhchivan. When it goes from other destination from the Eastern Caspian region to Armenia or even, yes, okay, of course, you can have all these customs duties as in any other country. But from Azerbaijan to Azerbaijan, there should be no checks, no interference, and this is our legitimate right... But for three years, Armenia was blocking the opening of the Zangezur corridor. It was not us. Türkiye was actively promoting. Azerbaijan was promoting, many other countries. But they were blocking. So, I think they need to rethink the situation. And also they need to understand that no matter how strong your big brother is, you live here among these countries. You will have to find your place"<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani and Turkish Presidents are making press statements, 13 June 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60227> (accessed on 12 January 2024).

<sup>76</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Opening Ceremony of Global Media Forum was held in Shusha, 20 June 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60544> (accessed on 12 January 2024).

<sup>77</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by China Media Group media corporation, 24 July 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60572> (accessed on 12 January 2024).

<sup>78</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev attended Forum titled "Karabakh: Back Home After 30 Years. Accomplishments and Challenges", 6 December 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/62400> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

### Territorial claims under the name of “Western Azerbaijan”

74. Since coining the term and claim of “Western Azerbaijan” in late 2022, Azerbaijan’s leadership started intensely developing and propagating the concept, referring to the territory of present-day Armenia as historically Azerbaijani land. This narrative, used at both domestic and international platforms, was obviously intended to justify territorial claims and perpetuate a sense of grievance within Azerbaijan, keeping hostilities toward Armenia alive and consolidated. The concept was further enriched with a number of state-sponsored events, exhibitions, festivals, etc.

75. On January 10, in the interview by the local TV channels Aliyev said: “Today, it is no secret that the Western Azerbaijan Community was denied its rights as a community that was deported for many years. Of course, talking about the rights of Western Azerbaijanis in a place where there was a problem with Karabakh might have looked like a premature fire. But today, we have brought this topic to the international arena. My recommendations, i.e., those I gave on 24 December [2022], are being implemented. A special working group has been set up based on all the tasks I set and, at the same time, based on the suggestions from the ground. We have started working on a single concept. Of course, Western Azerbaijanis should return to their ancestral lands; this is their right, and all international conventions recognize this right of theirs. As the state of Azerbaijan, we must do our best to secure this right.”<sup>79</sup>

76. On 4 March, during his speech at the Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State of Organization of Turkic States, Aliyev said: “The decision of the Soviet government in November 1920 to separate West Zangezur, our historical land, from Azerbaijan and hand it over to Armenia led to the geographical separation of the Turkic world. By 1991, all Azerbaijanis were driven out forcefully of the territory of present-day Armenia. He claimed for the return of Azerbaijani population to Armenia, saying: “Our fellow compatriots who suffered from ethnic cleansing in Western Azerbaijan have now united in the Western Azerbaijan Community. They have set the goal of a peaceful return to their historical lands. According to the Concept of Return developed by the Western Azerbaijan Community, an international legally binding agreement with an appropriate verification and guarantee mechanism for the return of Azerbaijanis forcefully deported from the territory of present-day Armenia should be put in place.”<sup>80</sup> He said: “As in Karabakh and East Zangezur, Armenia has also destroyed our cultural heritage, mosques and historical sites in present-day Armenia – in Western Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani community has repeatedly appealed to UNESCO to send a fact-finding mission to monitor the Azerbaijani people’s cultural heritage in present-day Armenia and still awaits a positive response from UNESCO.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by local TV channels 10 January 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/58555> (accessed on 8 January 2024).

<sup>80</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State of Organization of Turkic States, 16 March 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59195> (accessed on 8 January 2024).

<sup>81</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State of Organization of Turkic States, 16 March 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59195> (accessed on 8 January 2024).

77. On 3 September, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan organized an event titled "Journey to the Ethno-Cultural Landscape of West Azerbaijan."<sup>82</sup> The event was attended by deputies of the Milli Majlis, media representatives, residents of the capital, etc.

78. On 20 October, a republican scientific conference on the "History and Cultural Heritage of Western Azerbaijan" was held by the "Virtual Karabakh" Information Communication Technologies Youth Public Union with the financial support of the State Support Agency for Non-Governmental Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Articles titled "Western Azerbaijan - Azerbaijan as the Ancestral Homeland of Turks", "Armenian Vandalism Against Turkish-Muslim Monuments in the Territory of Western Azerbaijan", "Irevan - The Tragic Fate of the Largest City of Western Azerbaijan", "Culture of Western Azerbaijan", "Toponyms of Turkish Origin in Western Azerbaijan", and "Mass Resettlement of Armenians to the Territory of Western Azerbaijan" were presented.<sup>83</sup>

79. On 23-24 November, an festival titled "Return to Western Azerbaijan" was held in Nakhichevan, preceded by the "Road to Western Azerbaijan" conference.<sup>84</sup> The event was organized by the authorized representative office of Baku in Nakhichevan, the Ministry of Education and Science of Azerbaijan, and Nakhichevan State University. Notably, the festival's poster replicated the political map of the Republic of Armenia. Through various photographs and decorative art objects showcased during the festival, an endeavor was made to depict the map of Armenia with Azerbaijani names assigned to cities and villages. As part of the festival, numerous Armenian and regional cultural expressions were showcased under the Azerbaijani language umbrella. These included presentations of folklore, a book exhibition, displays featuring samples of culinary and material culture, a concert program, films, literature excerpts, scientific research, a collection of articles, and artwork dedicated to "Western Azerbaijan." Additionally, various cuisines were presented under the name "Irevan cuisine" within the festival's framework.<sup>85</sup>

80. On 15 December, an exhibition titled "Western Azerbaijan in Cultural Memory" was inaugurated at the National Museum of Art in Azerbaijan.<sup>86</sup> The exhibition relied on photographs of the palace of the Persian [Iranian] khans of Yerevan, artifacts from the Yerevan fortress, and numerous monuments, all presented as representative of the culture of "Western Azerbaijan."

81. In December 2023, Azerbaijan organized a conference in Tbilisi "Return to Western Azerbaijan at the International Level - Georgia Forum."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> An event titled "Journey to the Ethno-cultural Landscape of West Azerbaijan" organized in Baku, 4 September 2023, <https://culture.gov.az/en/common-news/15242> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>83</sup> "Qərbi Azərbaycanın tarixi və mədəni irsi" - elmi konfrans, 20 October 2023, <https://azertag.az/xeber/gerbi-azerbaycanin-tarixi-ve-medeni-irsi-elmi-konfrans-2794798> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>84</sup> Festival themed "Return to Western Azerbaijan" is underway in Nakhchivan, 23 November 2023, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/217870.html> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>85</sup> Caliber.az, 23 November 2023, <https://twitter.com/CaliberEnglish/status/1727686293759377761> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>86</sup> "Mədəni yaddaşımızda Qərbi Azərbaycan", 15 December 2023, <https://xalqgazeti.az/az/medeniyyet/154217-medeni-yaddasimizda-gerbi-azerbaycan> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>87</sup> Nagif Hamzayev, "Return to Western Azerbaijan at the International Level - Georgia Forum," 18 December 2023, <https://t.co/QBmn64AXgV> (accessed on 20 January 2024); Tweet, 18 December 2023, <https://twitter.com/hamzanagif/status/1736704120025751695> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

### THREATS OF THE USE OF FORCE

82. Throughout 2023, Azerbaijani authorities repeatedly used bullying and threatening language, which signaled the potential for renewed military action against both Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. They consistently communicated that will not hesitate to use force if Armenia or Nagorno-Karabakh people do not follow their various dictates, thus perpetuating a climate of fear and uncertainty particularly in Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan's threats also directly or indirectly targeted Armenia's partner countries that are helping to ensure its defence and security.

#### Intimidation rhetoric by the Azerbaijani president

83. On 10 January, during the interview by the local TV channels, Aliyev said: "I must also note that no matter what weapons are given to Armenia, it will not help them, and I have said this to the Armenian side several times. I told them not to waste money on that. Because, first of all, it will not help you, and secondly, it may create an illusion among the revanchist forces in your country. It can create the illusion that you can retaliate. You will not be able to! If we see a serious threat to us, we will crush this threat immediately – no matter where this threat emanates from, both within and beyond our borders. It is our legitimate right. That is why there are such attempts. We monitor and know which countries are preparing to supply arms to Armenia. Regrettably, India is now playing a role among them. We consider this an unfriendly action. Because these weapons, especially offensive weapons, have a target, and it is Azerbaijan. Therefore, of course, we are taking the necessary measures and cannot allow Armenia to pose a threat to us. We can never tolerate that. I hope Armenia understands that these provocations are futile. After the Second Karabakh War, the signals we sent to the Armenian side were that you should come to terms with this situation, and the signing of the act of capitulation should end this conflict between us. Unfortunately, we did not see this. On the contrary, Armenia continued its plans in Karabakh and along the border... I should also note that we have increased the number of special forces within the State Border Service, Internal Troops, State Security Service and Foreign Intelligence Service - new detachments and groups have been created. We have increased the number of marines several times. We have increased the number of special forces of the Nakhchivan Standalone Army. I will not disclose the numbers here for obvious reasons. Their numbers will grow as we have yet to reach our goal. We have and will continue to create such a force that it would be suicidal not to reckon with." Aliyev stated: "We do not need it if they are not interested in delimitation. This means that the border will pass where we believe it should. I am already compelled to use such terms. If the border has yet to be delimited, who can say that the border passes here and not there? I think it should be here. I have all the reasons to say this – historically and based on the maps. Therefore, this issue should concern them more than us. We can live like this for a long time, and there is no need for a peace treaty. But what will happen then? Time will tell. That is why I think they will hear my messages and draw the correct conclusions. Again, I do not want to be seen as someone putting pressure. Under no circumstances have I shown any disrespect, not even about someone not deserving respect. I have to point it out again. Because I think this year will be the last

chance for them. Because then comes 2024, and then in 2025, Russia's peacekeeping mission ends. They need to see slightly farther than their noses.”<sup>88</sup>

84. On 18 March, during in the message of congratulation addressed to the people of Azerbaijan on the Novruz holiday, Ilham Aliyev said: “Unfortunately, Armenia has not yet learned the lessons of the Second Karabakh War. Because we are seeing that revengeful forces have risen in Armenia. Territorial claims against Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani lands are still being put forward in Armenia. We are warning the Armenian leadership to refrain from these dirty deeds. We are also warning certain countries that stand behind Armenia from here, from the liberated village of Talish, to stop these dirty deeds. No external force can shatter the will of the state and the people of Azerbaijan.” He also mentioned: “Armenia’s allies tried to stop us in different ways. But no-one could stand in our way. I said that we would rather die than go back. Either the freedom of Karabakh or death! No-one could stand in our way. They cannot stand in our way today and won’t be able to tomorrow either. If someone thinks that the ugly plans drawn up against us can succeed, they are wrong. Every dirty plan against us will be met with our strong will, our strong policy and our Victorious Army.”<sup>89</sup>

85. On 28 May, Aliyev said: “As long as Armenia has legal independence, albeit not de facto, as long as the concept of Armenia's borders is accepted in a certain sense. They must accept our terms. If they don't want delimitation, then there will be no delimitation. Whatever will happen there, the border will be where we say it should be. They know that we can do it. No one will help them, not the retired French policemen from Europe, not others, not anyone else... Therefore, the delimitation should be conducted on our conditions, i.e. on the basis of fair conditions. The peace treaty should be based on international conditions, our road to Nakhchivan should be opened, and representatives of the Armenian army still rooted in Karabakh should be removed from there. These are our conditions. I am saying these conditions here in the city of Lachin so that everyone can see that we are here today and we will be here forever. Let them know that we can see Armenian villages from here. We can see those villages, so they shouldn’t forget about that.” Aliyev also said: “The border checkpoint established on the border on April 23 should be a lesson for the Armenians living in the Karabakh region today. Unfortunately, they are still relying on someone, thinking that someone will save them in the future, someone will fight a war with Azerbaijan in the future. This is all nonsense. During the second Karabakh war, we showed a strong determination, and if no-one ventured to intervene at that time, who will come and fight against us for the Armenians after we regained all these lands? First of all, it is illegal. We are in our native land, and the Karabakh region where Armenians live today is our ancestral and legitimate land. We simply think that they will understand everything and will come to live under the flag of Azerbaijan. We are waiting for that. Therefore, we are not taking any other steps, and I think that the events of the last two and a half years should wake them up from this dream.” “I am telling them again from here, from the land of Lachin which they had been exploiting for many years and were engaged in illegal settlement, that their book is closed. The book “Miatsum” is closed, the book of separatism is closed. The dream of independence follows the path of the status. As for the

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<sup>88</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by local TV channels 10 January 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/58555> (accessed on 8 January 2024).

<sup>89</sup> President of Azerbaijan, The message of congratulation from Ilham Aliyev to the people of Azerbaijan on the Novruz holiday, 18 March 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59221> (accessed on 11 January 2024).



status, we sent it to where it belongs during the second Karabakh war. Therefore, there is only one option left – to obey the laws of Azerbaijan, be a loyal and normal citizen of Azerbaijan, throw the false state attributes in the trash, and dissolve the “parliament” – as if there is a “parliament” there, as if there is a president, as if there is a minister, all this is funny. We are simply being patient. However, everyone knows perfectly well that we have all the opportunities to carry out any operation in that region today. Therefore, the “parliament” should be dissolved, the element calling himself “president” should surrender, all “ministers”, “deputies” and others should give up their positions. Only in that case can a concession be made to them. Only in that case can we talk of an amnesty. I should also state that international organizations have actually completely agreed with our position of late. I already see this during various meetings. Why do they agree with us? Because we are right and because we don't depart from our position. This is why no one talks about independence, autonomy or anything else these days. The latest messages we have been receiving are what will be the fate of the leadership there. Are they liable to an amnesty or not? I say that it is necessary to look at that. First, we sent a delegation there. My representative went and held the first meeting with them and then we invited them to Baku to talk. They refused to do that. After that, we invited them to Baku for the second time, i.e. representatives of the Armenian minority living in Karabakh. They refused that too. There will be no third invitation. Either they will bend their necks and come themselves or things will develop differently now. Therefore, they can count on an amnesty only if they voluntarily put aside all their false duties and apply for Azerbaijani citizenship. We will look at that. My word is final, and everyone knows that both in Azerbaijan and the rest of the world, including Armenia. We do what we say. Not a single word of ours, as they say, has been left in the air and never will be in the future either. If I say that amnesty can be an option, they should not miss this opportunity. They have missed many opportunities, a number of opportunities, and each time, as they say, we had to knock them over to bring them to their senses.”<sup>90</sup>

86. On 29 September, on the days when the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh was rapidly fleeing its ancestral homeland, at the 2nd Azerbaijan National Urban Forum in Zangilan, Ilham Aliyev still threatened: The Armenian leadership, those who stand behind them, and those who may think about some unacceptable plans against Azerbaijan - my advice is not to test our patience again. We are patient but firm, and we can prove that we are right. Not because we have power but because the truth is on our side.”<sup>91</sup>

87. On 11 October, after completing the ethnic cleansing act, during the meeting with the participants of the 53rd meeting of CIS Council of Heads of Security Agencies and Special Services Ilham Aliyev said: “...the whole operation lasted less than 24 hours. It was enough for the illegal armed formations of Armenia to be completely demoralized and, in fact, to surrender... Today, the process of cleansing the territories from bandit gangs is underway. According to our information, there are still certain groups hiding in this territory. After September 20, there were armed provocations in

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<sup>90</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev met with people who returned to the city of Lachin and presented house keys to them, 28 May 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60027> (accessed on 12 January 2024).

<sup>91</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the 2nd Azerbaijan National Urban Forum in Zangilan, 29 September, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/61532> (accessed on 14 January 2024).

Karabakh. The territory is quite large, with mountains and forests, so we will need time to clear the territory from these gangs completely. This is basically the history of the issue.”<sup>92</sup>

88. On 15 October, in his speech in occupied Stepanakert city of Nagorno-Karabakh, Ilham Aliyev said: “We worked tirelessly to strengthen our army. We have created such a strong army that the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan can honorably fulfill any task today, and we proved that on the battlefield. We forced the enemy to sign the act of capitulation in just 44 days during the Patriotic War three years ago. At the same time, the anti-terror operation which we carried out last month and which lasted only 23 hours, showed our strength, and the enemy surrendered by waving the white flag. We are rightly proud of our Armed Forces... The Patriotic War lasted only 44 days. During all these days, I repeatedly addressed the people and, at the same time, addressed the enemy, urging it to lay down guns, provide a timetable of when they would vacate our lands, and we are ready to stop the war. After we had liberated Shusha [Shushi], our sacred hearth and the impregnable fortress, the enemy realized his defeat, waved the white flag, and we stopped the war.” Aliyev also referred to the former Armenian leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh, detained and jailed in Baku: “the three clowns who used to sit here and call themselves “president” are waiting for their deserved punishment today. I wonder if the man who used to sit in one of these buildings and call himself “prime minister” will dare to threaten us again now? His tea is being served in the detention center too now. A separatist who called himself “foreign minister” sarcastically said that if Azerbaijan wanted to raise its flag in Khankendi [Stepanakert], it should open an embassy in our country. Now his tea is served there as well, in the detention center. Our flag is here. This should be a lesson to them. Unfortunately, the words I said 20 years ago and repeated many times did not register with them. They thought those were just words. No, I do what I say, everyone knows it, including Armenia, and they should not forget it either. Don't forget the Patriotic War! Don't forget the anti-terror operation! If some forces in Armenia ever think about a revenge, let them take a good look at these images”<sup>93</sup>.

89. On 8 November, during the military parade in occupied Stepanakert, Ilham Aliyev said: “Three years ago, the city of Shusha [Shushi], the crown jewel of Karabakh, was liberated from the occupiers. A day later, the enemy army surrendered and waved the white flag. Thus, the Second Karabakh War resulted in a complete victory of the Azerbaijani state. This is a historic event.” He then referred to his latest military aggression: “The anti-terror operation in September took only one day, even less than that. Showing professionalism and heroism, the Azerbaijani Army decided the fate of that operation in a short time, capturing all strategic locations and forcing the enemy army to surrender. Not only did they surrender, even the so-called regime they had created in our lands 30 years ago was terminated. That regime also fell apart, although it was an illegal regime. Thus, we restored historical justice. 20 September 2023 will remain in our history, just like 8 November. After the Shusha [Shushi] operation on 8 November, the back of the enemy army was broken and a day later, they signed the act of capitulation... We showed to them that Karabakh is Azerbaijan – by fighting in spite of everything, and today everyone should know that no one can joke with us. If the Armenian leadership cherishes some

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<sup>92</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev received participants of the 53rd meeting of CIS Council of Heads of Security Agencies and Special Services, 11 October 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/61538> (accessed on 14 January 2024)

<sup>93</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev raised the National Flag of Azerbaijan in Khankendi city and delivered a speech, 15 October 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/61587> (accessed on 15 January 2024).

revanchist sentiments, if the countries that are used to manipulations behind Armenia still prepare some insidious plans against Azerbaijan, let them take a look at today's parade. Let them know that more than a thousand of our brave men are lined up here, and we have more than 100,000 brave men like them. No force can threaten us. We are ready to fight on any level, we have shown this on the political and, if necessary, on the military front. In the 21st century, no army has shown as much professionalism and dedication as ours.”<sup>94</sup>

90. On 31 December, in his address on the occasion of the World Azerbaijanis Solidarity Day and New Year Ilham Aliyev said: “Following a one-day anti-terrorist operation carried out in 2023, Azerbaijan fully restored its state sovereignty, the occupying forces were expelled from the territory of Azerbaijan, the enemy army was crushed, and its military hardware was either destroyed or taken over as trophy. I would like to once again sincerely congratulate all the people of Azerbaijan on the occasion of this historic event. When the Second Karabakh War ended in 2020, and our flag was raised in Shusha [Shushi] and other liberated territories, we all knew perfectly well that our work was not completed. Azerbaijan had to restore its state sovereignty in full, and so it did... the separatist regime collapsed, fell to its knees before us, waved the white flag, surrendered, was forever expelled from our lands, and thrown into the trashcan of history. With this, the very roots of separatism in Azerbaijan were eradicated, and separatism – that scourge will never raise its head in our lands again... The Iron Fist has been the symbol of our victorious chronicle. Today, the Iron Fist is also a symbol of our unity, and I would like to assure the people of Azerbaijan and all Azerbaijanis of the world that the Iron Fist will always be in place”<sup>95</sup>.

### Intimidation rhetoric spread by other high-ranking officials

91. Azerbaijani high-ranking officials reiterating President Ilham Aliyev’s rhetoric of threats, along the way targeting Azerbaijani citizens who advocated for peace and reconciliation, branding them as “traitors.”

92. On 18 January, an MP from the ruling “New Azerbaijan” Party, Anar Isgandarov, said: “Today, Azerbaijan is one of the most democratic states in the world. At the same time, it is a state with a great position among the Turkish states. Azerbaijan has great influence in the Muslim world. Azerbaijan is influential both in the West and in the East, as well as among the Turkic states. Because of that reputation, no country can look down on Azerbaijan. If Armenia, which is our enemy, has such an idea, our last base will be Irvan and West Azerbaijan.”<sup>96</sup>

93. On 23 April, following the establishment of an illegal checkpoint on the Lachin corridor, Azerbaijani MP Tahir Mirkishili from the ruling party said: “We put an end to this policy of Armenia by

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<sup>94</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Military parade dedicated to 3rd anniversary of the Victory in the Patriotic War was held in city of Khankendi, 8 November 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/62139> (accessed on 15 January 2024).

<sup>95</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Address by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev on the occasion of the World Azerbaijanis Solidarity Day and New Year, 01 January 2024, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/62976> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>96</sup> “O qədər böyük güc sahibidir ki, heç bir dövlət Azərbaycanla müharibə edə bilməz” — Deputat, 18 January 2023, <https://demokrat.az/az/news/136891/o-qeder-boyuk-guc-sahibidir-ki-hec-bir-dovlet-azerbaycanla-muharibe-edebilmez-deputat> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

liberating Shusha [Shushi] and Lachin and by fully controlling our borders. Thus, the ideas of “Great Armenia”, “Miatsum” (the idea of creating a 'united' Armenian state at the expense of Azerbaijani lands) were destroyed. Soon our flag will fly in all villages and cities of Karabakh. This is the demand of the time, not just ours... The enemy will always remain an enemy. They will strike at our most vulnerable moment. Each of us should take a united stand on matters of the nation and the state, and we should not deviate from Heydar Aliyev's path, which is the basic path of national statehood!”<sup>97</sup>

94. On 11 May, an MP from the ruling “New Azerbaijan” Party, Elman Mammadov, stated: “I believe that the blows they received in the 44-day Patriotic War and the lessons we gave were not enough for the Armenians. It turns out that we did not completely crush the head of the snake, since it is incomplete. Armenia is trying to revive itself through its patrons. Iran-made drones are already flying to our positions and using various means. This means that after the end of the 44-day war, Armenians are again engaged in building an army and providing weapons and ammunition. This, of course, is on purpose; they are preparing for a new war. It will be difficult to convince the Armenians without destroying them and bringing them to their knees... I may be wrong, but I will give my opinion. I think that even at the meeting in Brussels and after the next meetings, some document called a “peace agreement” can be signed. But the Armenians will not comply with it. How many documents did they sign and commit to? But did they fulfill it? No. In other words, even if they sign a document called a “peace agreement”, they will not comply with its requirements. Until they are completely destroyed and eradicated. The traces of the Armenians, its roots must be purged from the entire South Caucasus. As long as they are rooted in our historical lands, they are ambitious against us and Turkey; they will never want to live in peace. They must be constantly subdued; the “iron fist” must be on their heads, hitting them as soon as they raise their heads. There is no other way. If you follow the rules of behavior with Armenians like a normal person, they get mad, get out of their ruts, get ready and do what they know.”<sup>98</sup>

95. On 21 July, commenting on Ilham Aliyev’s visit to Khojalu, an MP from the ruling “New Azerbaijan” Party, Elman Mammadov, said: “Hopefully, those areas will be restored and beautified in the future. The agriculture and tourism sectors can be developed in those areas. Of course, President Ilham Aliyev knows these issues better than anyone. He gave his assignments on the subject. It is gratifying that the president is in Khojalu because gradually other areas will be cleared of the enemy. We are also looking forward to returning to our native Khojalu.”<sup>99</sup>

96. On 8 August, an Azerbaijani MP from the ruling “New Azerbaijan” Party, Aqil Mammadov, said: “Armenians will become Azerbaijani citizens at some point, but it is not known when. Considering their characteristics, we can say that after experiencing another blow to the head, they may be compelled

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<sup>97</sup> “Sərhəd-buraxılış məntəqəsinin qurulması İlham Əliyevin xarici və hərbi siyasətinin mühüm uğurudur”, 23 April 2023, <https://report.az/daxili-siyaset/serhed-buraxilis-menteqesinin-qurulmasi-ilham-eliyevin-xarici-ve-herbi-siyasetinin-muhum-ugurudur> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>98</sup> Elman Məmmədov: “Məhv etmədən, diz çökdürmədən erməniləri başa salmaq çətin olacaq”, 11 May 2023, <https://pravda.az/news/113863> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>99</sup> Prezidentin Xocalıya səfəri: Tezliklə evimizə qayıdacağıq... – Səkinlərdən reaksiya, 21 July 2023, <https://modern.az/olke/422839/prezidentin-xocaliya-getdiyini-grende-chox-sevindim> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

to take this step, much like the events surrounding the November 10 document. They will yield and acquiesce.”<sup>100</sup>

97. On 12 August, an Azerbaijani MP Vahid Ahmedov said: “Armenians do not seem willing to abandon the notion of “Greater Armenia” even today, but it appears that they may require the next “punch.”<sup>101</sup>

98. On 21 August, an Azerbaijani MP from the ruling “New Azerbaijan” Party, Elman Mammadov said: “Three years have elapsed since the conclusion of the 44-day Patriotic War. During this period, Armenians have not chosen the right path; instead, they have opted for arming themselves, preparing for another conflict, and persisting in hostile and provocative actions against Azerbaijan, often with the support of entities such as Russia, Iran, India, and others... Those Armenians who are now rational understand that the resurgence of the “Iron Fist” is imminent, and its time has arrived. No sovereign state can tolerate the continued existence and operation of a criminal organization within its borders. They realize that Azerbaijan, in accordance with international law and its own Constitution, will cleanse its territory of these criminals, with or without external consent. The choice for them is to leave voluntarily, or we will employ our military strength to remove them from our land. This is an acknowledged issue that has been overdue for resolution... Consequently, Russian passport holders, affluent Armenians, and others are gradually departing from our territory. We hope that their number will continue to increase.”<sup>102</sup>

99. On 30 August, an Azerbaijani MP Vahid Ahmedov said: “I reiterate once again that if Armenia does not succeed in establishing normal relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, if it does not permanently set aside the Karabakh issue, if it does not acknowledge the territorial integrity of Turkey, and if it does not address the delimitation and demarcation of its borders with Azerbaijan, Yerevan may encounter significant challenges in the future. In summary, the future of Armenia as a state may come into question.”<sup>103</sup>

100. On 31 August, an Azerbaijani MP from the ruling “New Azerbaijan” Party, Elman Mammadov said: “Look at the terms they are using today. They insist that Azerbaijan should negotiate with “Artsakh” and so on. Consequently, we have no choice but to cut the tongues and roots of those who utter “Artsakh” and remove them from our territory...”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Qarabağda “humanitar yardım” şousu - Təxribata nə qədər dözəcəyik..., 9 August 2023, <https://modern.az/analitika/425638/qarabagda-humanitar-yardim-shousu-texribata-ne-qeder-dzeceyik> (accessed on 16 January 2024).

<sup>101</sup>“Görünür onların növbəti yumruğa ehtiyacları var” — Vahid Əhmədov, 12 August 2023, <https://demokrat.az/az/news/159329/gorunur-onlarin-novbeti-yumruqa-ehiyaclari-var-vahid-ehmedov> (accessed on 16 January 2024).

<sup>102</sup>“Ermənilər başa düşür ki, yeni müharibə başlanmaq üzrədir” — Sensasion açıqlama, 21 August 2023, <https://demokrat.az/az/news/160290/ermeniler-basa-dusur-ki-yeni-muharibe-baslanmaq-uzredir-sensasion-aciqlama> (accessed on 16 January 2024).

<sup>103</sup>“Dünən cənab Prezident də Makrona dedi ki, əgər biz...” — Vahid Əhmədov, 30 August 2023, <https://demokrat.az/az/news/161300/dunen-cenab-prezident-de-makrona-dedi-ki-eger-biz-vahid-ehmedov> (accessed on 16 January 2024).

<sup>104</sup>Deputat: “Orda ac adam yoxdur, hamısı sığa kimidir”, 31 August 2023, <https://demokrat.az/az/news/161404/deputat-orda-ac-adam-yoxdur-hamisi-siga-kimidir> (accessed on 16 January 2024).

101. On November 16, an Azerbaijani politician Bayram Safarov, who has been appointed as the Head of the Executive Power of Shushi since 2009, said: “A while back, I expressed that if I were to encounter Pashinyan, I would throw him off a rock. Now, I sense that strength within me, and it has only grown stronger. Criticism came my way due to those words. During that period, I was asked what I would do if I saw Pashinyan in the Huniot Canyon. My response remained consistent; I declared that I would throw him off the cliff in Shusha [Shushi]...”<sup>105</sup>

### Targeting the EU civilian mission in Armenia and foreign supporters of Armenia

102. Since the establishment of the EU monitoring mission in October 2022, Azerbaijan, both on official and non-official levels, continuously targeted the mission and attempted to "demonize" the West within that context.

103. On 10 January, during the interview by the local TV channels, Aliyev said: “It remained outside the general context, which was sending a European observer mission to the territory of Armenia - to our border regions. That issue was also discussed extensively. One of the proposals was to send this mission to the Azerbaijani side. We objected to it. However, we agreed to this mission being sent to Armenia. It was also discussed and agreed at the time that this mission would be short-term, consist of 40 people and last only two months. I agreed to that. But then, for some reason, this conversation, that is, this arrangement, was disrupted. This, of course, was a very disappointing moment. Because we are serious people. Serious conversations are going on here. If we agree to something, even verbally, we must follow through on it. How can it be otherwise? After a while, a high-ranking official of the European Union said that the mission would be extended. After that, the French foreign minister said that we would extend the mission. Of course, we immediately took action and demanded an explanation. What is this? How will you extend it? After all, you agreed to send this mission with us. Why? Because it will be near our border. How can that not be agreed with us?... On 19 December, that mission should have ended, and members should have returned. In other words, it means that we were deceived. How can we work with you? How can we discuss anything if you deceive us on such a small matter – it is not a very serious matter – less than two months later? What did they do after that? After that, they officially stopped the mission operation on 19 December. But on 20 December, they sent a new mission. This is just manipulation. Representatives of the new mission are in Armenia now, holding meetings with high-ranking officials. According to our information, they will be sent there again in February with a large delegation. Again, without our agreement.”<sup>106</sup>

104. On 24 July, in his interview with China Media Group corporation Ilham Aliyev said: “But with respect to Azerbaijan, there are a variety of factors. One of them - which is not the main one - is that Armenian lobby, which has a big infrastructure in the United States, in France, in some other Western countries, is attacking Azerbaijan on a regular basis. They corrupt politicians, they penetrate into establishment, in parliaments, in media, in governmental offices. They target all their arrows at

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<sup>105</sup> Prezident sanki dedi ki, götürün papağınızı... - Bayram Səfərov, 16 November 2023, <https://modern.az/aktual/441434/prezident-sanki-dedi-ki-gturun-papaghinizi-bayram-seferov> (accessed on 16 January 2024).

<sup>106</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by local TV channels, 10 January 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/58555> (accessed on 8 January 2023).

Azerbaijan and they are creating a kind of atmosphere of Azerbaijanophobia. But this is not the only reason. The main reason, I think, is that Azerbaijan pursues an independent policy based on its national interests. Azerbaijan, unlike some countries, does not engage in any adventure, which is not in line with our priorities and our national interests. In other words, we behave independently and our policy is independent. We will defend our identity and our dignity with all the means, which we have. So, I think this is a basic reason, why Azerbaijan continues to be a target for media attacks, attacks from so-called independent NGOs. We all know that they're not independent. Who can say that "Human Rights Watch", "Amnesty International" and "Freedom House" are independent? Look from whom they get the money, who ordered the music, and then you will see that they are totally dependent." He also added, "If somebody in the West think that by insulting the government officials, by spreading slander and rumors, they can influence public opinion of Azerbaijan, maybe they're right, but their influence is not in the directions they would like to see. On the contrary, society consolidates even more, because we see that this is unjust. We have been occupied for 30 years and there was no denouncement of Armenian occupation." He also mentioned: "Exactly, these are double standards and our society very well understands that. And also, it's important once again to see it's not only interview of some journalists, but the governments. Now we're facing very, how to say, unjustified attacks from the French government. Can you imagine France that became the biggest advocate for Armenia. Okay, it's their business, but they became the biggest anti-Azerbaijani source in Europe. They attack us on every direction. Their foreign policy statements and statements of officials are beyond any political ethics. So, they're accusing us of what we have not done during the war, and did not apologize for that. They accuse us now of what we're doing on our territory. And look who is doing that? The country, which bans Corsican language, which suppresses brutally self-determination movement in Corsica. They advocate for self-determination of Armenians in Karabakh. How can this happen? During the war, when their political aggression was beyond any borders, I said that if they want to have "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic" somewhere, they can have it on their own territory. For instance, around the city of Marseille, where there are so many Armenians. Let them announce "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic" there, and we will recognize it. This country still continues its colonial policy. Look at the island of Mayotte, the French colony. New Caledonia, the French colony. And they talk about human rights. So, this is a political hypocrisy. When we say what I say now, you will see immediately as they will again organize all the media and will start insulting, attacking, spreading rumors about Azerbaijan, its leaders and his policy", "...our position on One China policy is absolutely clear and I hope that some Western governments also follow this position."<sup>107</sup>

105. On 11 October during the meeting with the participants of the 53rd meeting of CIS Council of Heads of Security Agencies and Special Services Ilham Aliyev openly targeted Western countries and criticized Western mediation platforms, simultaneously phrasing the Russian side. He particularly said: "Nevertheless, Armenia's patrons in the West have launched a dirty, provocative, false campaign against Azerbaijan, accusing us of all possible sins. France plays the first violin here, and this is reflected in the statements of officials of this country, attempts to discredit Azerbaijan, an extensive media campaign against Azerbaijan, where everything is turned upside down... By the way, I must say that

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<sup>107</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by China Media Group media corporation, 24 July 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60572> (accessed on 12 January 2024).

just yesterday, I was shown a video where a candidate for the U.S. President makes accusations against Azerbaijan while showing the footage of Armenia's missile attack against Gandja. Just imagine the degree of falsification and cynicism! ...What can we talk to these people about, and what can we explain to them? They do not want to hear anything. They have their own instructions, which are sent down to them from the center, and they act upon them. That is why now we are facing an unprecedented information war against Azerbaijan. Of course, we are fighting it with our own resources, trying to convey the truth about what happened. But we should realize that the forces are unequal. Countries such as France, which has a long colonial history, have much more media resources around the world than we do. Nevertheless, using various platforms, international organizations and other ways, we are conveying and will continue to convey the truth about what has happened. ...Speaking about France, I would also like to note the destructive and provocative role of the leadership of this country during the entire period between 2020 and now. Numerous accusations, groundless threats and blackmail against Azerbaijan have had no effect. The recent statement by the President of France that Azerbaijan has problems with international law is laughable. Azerbaijan has not violated international law. We fought on our territory; we suppressed separatism, and we observed all humanitarian norms and Geneva Conventions. In fact, international law has been violated for 30 years by France's protégé and today's main ally, Armenia, which occupied the territory of another state. As the saying goes, "remove the log from your own eye before trying to remove the speck from someone else's eye." One and a half million Algerians were exterminated by the French regime just because they were Algerians and Muslims. That is genocide. Not to mention France's bloody crimes across Africa, in other parts of Africa and around the world. And the fact that France still retains its colonies to this day is incomprehensible. Azerbaijan, as the Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, and I personally raised this issue at the summits of the Non-Aligned Movement. And this country, which has a bloody colonial past, which some African countries cannot get rid of to this day no matter how hard they try, accuses us of violating international law. This is absurd. ...Some countries and international organizations are trying to mediate the normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia today. I recently said that if this policy is not one-sided and biased, we will accept these efforts. But when we see from the side of France, on the one hand, a flagrant violation of all diplomatic norms, statements bordering on insults, dirty insinuations, provocations and lies, and on the other, attempts to provide mediation services, it defies any logic. We do not need such mediators. That is the first. Secondly, if someone wants to engage in mediation, this should not be a PR attempt but actually aim to achieve a result... I would also like to inform you that on 12 October, a day later, at the suggestion of the Russian side, a meeting of the foreign ministers of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia was to be held in Bishkek. We perceive the mediation of the Russian Federation with gratitude because Russia is our neighbor and ally, as well as Armenia's ally. This country is located in our region, unlike those who are thousands of kilometers away. Naturally, the history of relations between our countries presupposes the mediation of the Russian side. We took this proposal positively, and our foreign minister was ready to meet with his Russian and Armenian colleagues. Unfortunately, the Armenian side refused to attend that meeting. Now, this begs the question - does Armenia want peace? I think not because if it had wanted peace, it would not have missed this opportunity. The Armenian prime minister flies six hours to Granada and participates in an incomprehensible meeting there, where Azerbaijan is discussed without actually being present, but



he cannot fly for two to three hours to Bishkek. He has other important things to do. This is what we all have to say openly.”<sup>108</sup>

106. On 20 November, during the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Conference Ilham Aliyev said: “Most of the bloody crimes in the colonial history of humanity have been committed by France. France, which occupied dozens of countries in Africa, South-East Asia, the Pacific Ocean, the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, and Latin America, plundered their wealth and enslaved their people for many years, committing numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity. The French armed forces discriminated against their ethnic and religious affiliation and subjected hundreds of thousands of civilians to genocide. The slave trade, which France was actively engaged in, is one of the most shameful pages of humanity. Millions of Africans fell victim to the French slavery policy... As chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, I have repeatedly provided listed facts of numerous crimes against humanity and atrocities committed by France in the occupied countries. Millions of innocent people in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Mali, Djibouti, Nigeria, Chad, Senegal, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Gabon, Togo, Cameroon, Vietnam, the Union of the Comoros, Haiti, and other countries, including women and children, were killed by France. France is also responsible for the massacre of more than 800,000 members of the Tutsi tribe in Rwanda in 1994... Centuries have passed, but the new shameful methods of French colonialism continue to this day because policies and mindsets have not changed. The peoples of the overseas territories gathered at this conference have been fighting for independence for many years. Unable to abandon the history of colonialism, France does not respect the freedom, aspirations, and rights of the peoples living in overseas communities and territories outside of Europe, in the Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic oceans, and works hard to undermine the realization of those aspirations. Also, it continues to make gross interventions in the internal affairs of its former colonies on the African continent, which is an obstacle to achieving stability. The views expressed by politicians from overseas regions about French colonialism are truly terrifying... France destabilizes not only its past and present colonies but also our region, the South Caucasus, by supporting separatist tendencies and separatists. By arming Armenia, it implements a militaristic policy, encourages revanchist forces in Armenia, and prepares the ground for the start of new wars in our region. At the same time, France abuses its status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to carry out its biased and prejudiced policy, engages in geopolitical intrigues in various regions, and tries to use Western organizations as a means of pressure on other states... We observe that racism and Islamophobia are growing in parallel with the tendencies of neocolonialism in France. Having to deal with such disturbing and dangerous trends at home, French authorities are trying to lecture other countries. The recent expulsion of French troops from Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso showed yet again that its ruthless neo-colonialist policies in Africa are doomed to failure. France, which should be ashamed of its history of colonialism rich in bloody crimes, instead of apologizing for the atrocities it has committed, talks about fictitious ethnic cleansing in other countries.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev received participants of the 53rd meeting of CIS Council of Heads of Security Agencies and Special Services, 11 October 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/61538> (accessed on 14 January 2024).

<sup>109</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani president addresses participants of NAM Conference on advancing rights and empowerment of women, 20 November 2023, <https://news.az/news/azerbaijani-president-addresses-participants-of-nam-conference-on-advancing-rights-and-empowerment-of-women> (accessed on 16 January 2024).

107. On 6 December, Ilham Aliyev said: “ I think when we talk about peace agreement, we should not be preoccupied with the formal side of that. What do we need actually, now I mean Azerbaijan? We need firm, verified guarantees that there'll be no attempt of revanchism in Armenia. Why we need it? Because we know what is happening in Armenia, and also we know that Armenia have very bad advisors in some European capitals. Because we won the war, not because he transformed his ideology. Ideology is the same. They still live with this ideology. The difference between the Armenian government and opposition only is that the Armenian government clearly understands that if they continue to contest our territorial integrity, we will crush them again, no matter who stands behind them. No matter who tells them what in that famous, beautiful European capital... Though, I would say that recent statement of Mr. Borrell are absolutely counterproductive. His yesterday's statement about 150,000 of Armenians who left Karabakh are false. I regret such an experienced European diplomat is lying. Even Armenians themselves said there have been 100,000 of people who left Karabakh, not 150,000. If Mr. Borrell continues like that in one month, he will say there'll be 200,000. It will depend on the dreams, which he sees. But again, it is absolutely unacceptable, not only this manipulation with figures, but also accusations against Azerbaijan with respect to something, which we haven't done. Especially, it is strange that his country as our Foreign Ministry already announced suffered from separatism. So, how can he defend separatists? This is very strange. So, approaching broader to your question, first, I'm sure that when Georgia becomes an EU member, nothing will change in our relations. On the contrary, we will have another close friend in EU, which will defend us. We hope that the Georgian members of European Parliament will educate European parliamentarians about Azerbaijan, and they will be more realistic... Why I say that? In one of my telephone conversations with President of the European Council, Mr. Charles Michel, I told him that Chairman of the European Parliament Madame Metsola, after our anti-terror operation, said that gas relationship and gas contracts with Azerbaijan must be terminated. I told Mr. Charles Michel that probably she does not know how these things are being managed. Because if one side terminate the contract, it should pay a penalty. And first, she should ask those who are in charge of the energy policy of the European Union how the European Union asked Azerbaijan to help them last year with more gas for Europe, because of the cuts of supplies from Russia, and how we responded? Unfortunately, we have these kinds of people. I would say there are populist leaders in Europe like Mr. Borrell, like Madame Metsola. I always prefer to speak openly, because I fully disagree with their policy and their attitude to Azerbaijan, because it is not fair and it is not in the interests of the European Union and European institutions... For people like Josep Borrell, it's enough to look at the map and see where Azerbaijan is situated. If they want to be active in the Central Asia, and we see that they do want, and we see traffic in both directions. How they can avoid Azerbaijan? Are they going to contact the Central Asia countries through Iran or through Russia? Or they have wings? They have to think about that before making these statements... There are the group of very irresponsible people in the European Parliament, behave like *maniacs*. Because of their anti-Azerbaijani sentiments and statements are beyond any normal psychological status of a human being. I want to use maximum diplomatic vocabulary. So, what can we do? They adopted more than 10 anti-Azerbaijan resolutions. One more, one less doesn't make any difference for us. It is regretful, and what we regret most of all is that – we don't consider all the members of European Union – but those who are organizing anti-Azerbaijani orchestra, they brainwash the others. And many of the members think that Azerbaijan is like these people present us.

Some of their anti-Azerbaijani activists, fortunately, no longer are there, like Madame Eva Kaili, who was one of the activists of the anti-Azerbaijani front, but we know what happened to her and it was in media. I think this also reflects that the European Parliament needs to address its own issues with corruption, first before accusing someone of any wrongdoing. Of course, it is not only for the government of Azerbaijan, but for the people of Azerbaijan. When they misinterpret the situation in the Caucasus, when they accuse us, the country, which suffered occupation, devastation and genocide, accuse us for restoration of our sovereignty and territorial integrity, they speak against 10 million Azerbaijani people. They need to understand it. If they select me as a target and use insulting statements against me, for me, it doesn't make anything. But for the people of Azerbaijan, who stand behind me and stood behind me during the war and during the anti-terror operation and now, this is a signal for them that this is a group of people, which treat Azerbaijan like an enemy. So, this is regretful. There's a noise, which they produce is not pleasant, it is not damaging, we can live with that. But it is not pleasant."<sup>110</sup>

108. On 31 December, in his address on the occasion of the World Azerbaijanis Solidarity Day and New Year Ilham Aliyev said: "Double standards are pervasive in the West today. The people of Azerbaijan are well aware of this and, at the same time, know perfectly well that we will do what we think is right despite all the pressures, threats and unfounded accusations. Just as we have done to this day, we will continue to do so. The Armenian leadership should also draw the right conclusions from these historical lessons and behave in such a way as not to provoke our anger."<sup>111</sup>

### Military build-up with Turkey and joint threats

109. Throughout 2023, Turkey and Azerbaijan deepened their military cooperation. Based on a declaration signed between Azerbaijan and Turkey in Shushi on 15 June 2021<sup>112</sup>, these two countries held 16 joint military exercises in 2023, predominantly near the border with Armenia.<sup>113</sup>

110. On 29 April, at his speech at the TEKNOFEST Festival in Istanbul, Ilham Aliyev said: "Türkiye and Azerbaijan officially became allies after the signing of the Shusha Declaration two years ago. The signing of that historic Declaration in Shusha [Shushi], the crown jewel of Karabakh, has a special significance. Shusha [Shushi] is a dear city for the Azerbaijani people and a beloved city of the entire Turkic world... As a result of the liberation of Shusha [Shushi] from occupation, Azerbaijan restored its territorial integrity. Türkiye, its President and the brotherly Turkish people were always by our side... From the very first to the last minutes of the Second Karabakh War, my dear brother President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was with us. His statements and messages expressed unequivocal support for Azerbaijan. He said that Azerbaijan was not alone, that Türkiye was with Azerbaijan, and this gave us

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<sup>110</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev attended Forum titled "Karabakh: Back Home After 30 Years. Accomplishments and Challenges", 6 December 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/62400> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>111</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Address by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev on the occasion of the World Azerbaijanis Solidarity Day and New Year, 01 January 2024, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/62976> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>112</sup> Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey, 21 June 2023, <https://coe.mfa.gov.az/en/news/3509/shusha-declaration-on-allied-relations-between-the-republic-of-azerbaijan-and-the-republic-of-turkey> (accessed on 21 January 2024).

<sup>113</sup> Türkiye Today, Joint military exercises by Turkish and Azerbaijani troops, 24 October 2023, <https://www.turkiyenewspaper.com/politics/16872> (accessed on 21 January 2024).

additional strength and boosted our morale... While participating in TEKNOFEST today, I would like to emphasize the contributions of our dear brother Selcuk Bayraktar, the founder of TEKNOFEST. Selcuk bey has visited Azerbaijan many times, including the liberated lands, Shusha [Shushi]. During his last visit, on 3 April, when he was in Azerbaijan, we talked about future cooperation and agreed on the establishment of the Bayraktar center in Azerbaijan. Inshallah, the Bayraktar center will be established in Azerbaijan soon, and there will be training, maintenance and production there. While in Baku, Mr. Selcuk presented us with a model of Kizilelma as a gift. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all our brothers on Kizilelma, and I do hope that Kizilelma will be in the skies of Azerbaijan in the near future. Kizilelma in the air, Altay and Togg on the ground, Anatolia at sea – this is today's Türkiye... In a few days, the Azerbaijani people will celebrate the 100th anniversary of Heydar Aliyev, the founder of the modern Azerbaijan state Heydar Aliyev said that “Türkiye and Azerbaijan are one nation in two states.” Today we are proving that. The souls of all our fathers and forefathers are happy because Türkiye and Azerbaijan are together. As my father said, “One nation in two states,” and I want to add to that – like “One fist.””<sup>114</sup>

111. On 13 June, during the joint press statement with Turkish President Erdogan, Ilham Aliyev stated: “In two days, we will celebrate the second anniversary of the Shusha Declaration. The Shusha Declaration is a historic agreement. As a result of this agreement, Türkiye and Azerbaijan officially became allies. We had been acting as allies de facto for many years, but the Shusha Declaration made it an official document. The signing of this document in Shusha [Shushi] is, of course, quite symbolic because Shusha [Shushi] is the crown jewel of Karabakh, and the liberation of Shusha [Shushi] from occupation put an end to the Second Karabakh War. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to you and brotherly Türkiye on behalf of the people of Azerbaijan for the fraternal, moral and political support you gave us during the Second Karabakh War... Of course, the program of our future cooperation is among the issues we discussed today. Work is underway in all areas on the basis of specific programs. First of all, Türkiye and Azerbaijan will take a unified position in the field of foreign policy. Our joint activities related to foreign policy are of great importance for the region. The factor of Turkish-Azerbaijani unity is highly important in terms of development, stability and security of the region... Today, we also talked about our future plans in the fields of defense and defense industry. It was noted with satisfaction that 16 joint military exercises would be held this year, six of which had already been held. I said after the Second Karabakh War that the Azerbaijani Army would be developing on the basis of the Turkish model, and we can clearly see that now. I want to express my special appreciation to you for this support... In the present-day world, the power factor comes to the fore. Unfortunately, international law does not work. We saw this during the 30-years of occupation, the discussions and negotiations did not yield any results, it was our strength that led to the results. Therefore, the joint work to be carried out will further increase our strength both in the region and in the world.” Aliyev also stated: “We are determined to continue successfully implementing the provisions of the Shusha Declaration, and we will not compromise on this issue. The issue of the

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<sup>114</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the TEKNOFEST Festival in Istanbul, 29 April 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/59722> (accessed on 11 January 2024).

Zangezur corridor, which we have been sensitively working on the most, will, Inshallah, provide us with two important opportunities.”<sup>115</sup>

112. On 11 July, at the meeting on the results of six months of 2023 year Ilham Aliyev said: “Our two critical directions during the reconciliation are very clearly defined. More than 3 billion manats were added, of which 1.8 billion was channeled into the restoration of Karabakh and East Zangezur, and 1.1 billion manats were allocated to strengthen our military potential. In other words, the lion’s share of this amount has been channeled into these two directions, which is only natural because these are the two main tasks facing the country today.” He also said: “As I mentioned, when additions were made to our budget, the second main direction was to increase our military strength. And this is also natural. The international situation is clear. What I have said for many years is manifested today. International law in different parts of the world does not work. International law, decisions and resolutions of international organizations cannot be relied upon.... I have already stated this, but I want to repeat that the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan now have more significant military potential. We will become stronger both in terms of combat capability and equipment because this process does not and should not stop. I have said that we will allocate as much funds as necessary for two directions – restoring the liberated lands and building up our military potential... By pursuing this policy, we are also increasing the power of our country. Because in today’s world, the power factor is at the forefront. Power is reckoned with. Power is avoided. And we have shown it several times in the last two and a half years, and no one can interfere with our determination. On the contrary, we were able to break all the arrows aimed at us and protect our dignity and interests. There is no need for additional words; everything is obvious. I don’t want to go into too much detail, but everyone can and should see and know that no one can speak to Azerbaijan in the language of threats and ultimatums, and I think there will be no such attempts from now on... In the following years, the modernization of our Armed Forces, the deepening of reforms in this area, in the direction of creation and improvement of new armed units, including the acquisition of the most advanced weapons and equipment, will be carried out according to plan. The reforms carried out in the Armed Forces after the Second Karabakh War are not yet completed, including structural reforms, and we must bring our Armed Forces to the level of the world’s most advanced armies – of course, considering the size of Azerbaijan. Regarding structural reforms, governance and self-defense, we are building a force to keep us confident in this geography. It is the case today, but more must be done. And I want to repeat that this is a domain where we need to talk less and do more. This is why I don’t want to say anything more. In any case, the people of Azerbaijan can rest assured that our security is in safe hands; the people of Azerbaijan can and should live comfortably from now on.”<sup>116</sup>

113. On 26 July, a contract to upgrade Azerbaijan's Sukhoi Su-25 ground attack aircraft was signed during the International Defence Industry Fair held in Istanbul. The Azerbaijani Ministry of Defence released a statement saying the contract was signed with Turkish Aerospace (TUSAŞ) in a ceremony attended by Azerbaijani Deputy Minister of Defence Agil Gurbanov and Haluk Görgun, the head of

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<sup>115</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani and Turkish Presidents are making press statements, 13 June 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60227> (accessed on 12 January 2024).

<sup>116</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the meeting on the results of six months of 2023 year, 11 July 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60430> (accessed on 12 January 2024).

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Turkey's Defence Industry Presidency (SSB). It said: "The main purpose of signing the contract is the integration of Turkish-made smart bombs and missiles into the aircraft used by the Azerbaijan Air Force and the implementation of modernisation activities for their avionics."<sup>117</sup>

114. On 20 September, Turkish President Erdogan expressed "full support" for the military offensive toward Nagorno-Karabakh organized by Azerbaijan,<sup>118</sup> which resulted in ethnic cleansing.

### Pursuit of anti-war activists

115. The Azerbaijani state not only targets the Armenian people but also those Azerbaijanis who speak about peace and reconciliation. A vivid example of this was the reactions of Azerbaijani MPs towards the "No War" movement.<sup>119</sup>

116. On 25 August a state sponsored campaign began, targeting Azerbaijan's anti-war activists<sup>120</sup>. Members of parliament, including ruling party MP Elman Mammadov, joined the campaign.

117. On August 25, an MP from the ruling party, Elman Mammadov, stated: "The anti-war campaign is an action against Azerbaijani statehood and security. This should be investigated at the state level; their identities should be determined, and very serious measures should be taken within the framework of Azerbaijani laws."<sup>121</sup>

118. On 26 August, another legislator, Aydin Mirzazadeh, also from Aliyev's ruling party, noted that in any society, there are groups opposing national interests and financed from abroad. He identified the "no war" advocates as one such group, accusing them of both openly and secretly supporting Armenian interests during the occupation.<sup>122</sup>

## ONGOING TERROR POLICIES AND PRACTICES

119. Azerbaijan used terror tactics against Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, including the blockade started on 12 December 2022, various military operations and special raids, kidnapping of people, torture of hostages, psychological terror, which was culminated with fleeing of Armenians from their ancestral lands and complete ethnic cleansing.

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<sup>117</sup> Janes, IDEF 2023: Turkish Aerospace to upgrade Azerbaijan's Su-25s, 28 July 2023, <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/idef-2023-turkish-aerospace-to-upgrade-azerbaijans-su-25s> (accessed on 12 January 2024).

<sup>118</sup> Al Jazeera, Turkey supports 'steps taken by Azerbaijan' in Nagorno-Karabakh: Erdogan, 20 September 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/20/turkey-supports-steps-taken-by-azerbaijan-in-nagorno-karabakh-erdogan> (accessed on 12 January 2024).

<sup>119</sup> Eurasianet, Perspectives: Government campaign targets Azerbaijan's anti-war activists, 13 September 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-government-campaign-targets-azerbaijans-anti-war-activists> (accessed on 16 January 2024).

<sup>120</sup> "Feminist Sülh Kollektivi": Azərbaycanda erməniləri qoruyan yeni "müxalifət" qurulur, 18 August 2023, [https://publika.az/news/nida\\_tehlil/468314.html](https://publika.az/news/nida_tehlil/468314.html) (accessed on 16 January 2024).

<sup>121</sup> "Onların torpaq, vətən, namusla əlaqəsi yoxdur" - "No war"çılara sərt reaksiya, 25 August 2023, <https://yenisabah.az/onlarin-torpaq-veten-namusla-elagesi-yoxdur-no-warcilara-sert-reaksiya> (accessed on 16 January 2024).

<sup>122</sup> "Tərix "no war"çıları özünün zibilliyinə atacaq" - ŞƏRH + FOTO, August 26, <https://oxu.az/politics/769572> (accessed on 16 January 2024).

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120. On 23 April, Azerbaijan set up a checkpoint at the Hakari Bridge, thereby blocking the Lachin Corridor, the only passage between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan's president Aliyev declared that the border checkpoint "should be a lesson" to Armenians<sup>123</sup>.

121. Over the following months, Azerbaijani state forces took advantage of their oversight of the border crossing to arrest ethnic Armenians attempting to cross into Armenia on spurious accusations.<sup>124</sup>

122. The peacekeeping force's passivity in the face of repeated efforts to restrict Armenia's access to the region has eroded trust in Russia as a viable security guarantor.<sup>125</sup>

### Incidents of inhumane and aggressive acts

123. The blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh, launched on 12 December 2022, first staged as a demonstration of Azerbaijani environmental activists,<sup>126</sup> continued throughout 2023 by taking more acute manifestations, which appeared to be the culmination and the prologue to the last stage of the ethnic cleansing policy.

124. Some of the environmental activists appeared to be Azerbaijani government-created NGOs,<sup>127</sup> university students getting financial support<sup>128</sup> or credit class,<sup>129</sup> employees of the Military Trophies Park in Baku<sup>130</sup> and others,<sup>131</sup> including those calling to slaughter Armenians.<sup>132</sup>

125. In January 2023, almost a month after the blockade of the Lachin corridor, Azerbaijani authorities cut off gas and electricity to the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. Disruption of utilities and Azerbaijan's prevention of necessary repairs led to numerous human rights violations in

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<sup>123</sup> President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev met with people who returned to the city of Lachin and presented house keys to them, 28 May 2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60027> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

<sup>124</sup> Human Rights Network, We Are No One: How Three Years of Atrocities Led to the Ethnic Cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians, Chapter 1. Arbitrary Detention, <https://humanrightsnetwork.shorthandstories.com/we-are-no-one/index.html> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

<sup>125</sup> Center for Preventive Action, Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict By the Center for Preventive Action, 24 September 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/nagorno-karabakh-conflict> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>126</sup> Amnesty International, Azerbaijan: Blockade of Lachin Corridor Putting Thousands of Lives in Peril Must be Immediately Lifted, 9 February 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/02/azerbaijan-blockade-of-lachin-corridor-putting-thousands-of-lives-in-peril-must-be-immediately-lifted/> (accessed on 20 January 2024); Time, How Azerbaijan Weaponized Environmentalism to Justify Ethnic Cleansing, 22 February 2023, <https://time.com/6257467/armenia-azerbaijan-nagorno-karabakh-lachin-environment-icj/> (accessed on 20 January 2024); Caucasus Watch, Azerbaijani Activists Stop Protest Along Lachin Corridor, 30 April 2023, <https://caucasuswatch.de/en/news/azerbaijani-activists-stop-protest-along-lachin-corridor.html> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>127</sup> Lindsey Snell on Facebook, 1 March 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?mibextid=WC7FNe&v=5707334412723067&rdid=tEPrFH4o2sPz2kq0> (accessed on 20 January 2024); "Regional Development" Public Union, [https://riib.az/site/about/riib\\_hagginda](https://riib.az/site/about/riib_hagginda) (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>128</sup> Cavid Aga on X citing student rights activist Farid Imanov from Baku State University, 6 January 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/3mwmhvam> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

<sup>129</sup> Lindsey Snell on Facebook, 2 March 2023, [https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10103695375474830&id=10909213&mibextid=WC7FNe&rdid=GmguvBkpRH8rnidM#](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10103695375474830&id=10909213&mibextid=WC7FNe&rdid=GmguvBkpRH8rnidM#) (accessed on 28 February 2024).

<sup>130</sup> Lindsey Snell on Facebook, 4 March 2023, [https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10103696568189620&id=10909213&mibextid=WC7FNe&rdid=MKPsum3rLzKbsbBD#](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10103696568189620&id=10909213&mibextid=WC7FNe&rdid=MKPsum3rLzKbsbBD#) (accessed on 28 February 2024).

<sup>131</sup> Radio Liberty, Who Are The Azerbaijani Eco-Activists?, 14 December 2022, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32176325.html> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

<sup>132</sup> Edmon Marukyan on X reporting on , 21 March 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/77cdkymd> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

Nagorno-Karabakh, including the rights to life, economic freedom, liberty and security, protection against torture, standard of living, and education, among others.”<sup>133</sup>

126. On 15 June, after a failed advancement into the Republic of Armenia territory, Azerbaijan blocked all passage through the Lachin corridor, including humanitarian convoys from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Russian peacekeeping contingent for a few weeks.<sup>134</sup>

127. On 29 July, Azerbaijani forces detained Vagif Khachatryan, a 68-year-old man from the Patara community of Nagorno-Karabakh, at the Hakari Bridge checkpoint. Khachatryan was part of an ICRC medical convoy and his detention was carried out in the presence of ICRC representatives. Azerbaijani officials seized Khachatryan’s passport and brought him to a medical office, where they subjected him to abusive interrogation. They threatened to use force against him, his daughter, and the ICRC representative if he did not comply. Azerbaijani officials then took Khachatryan away in a car to an undisclosed location. At that time, the ICRC representative who had been with Khachatryan was transported by Azerbaijani forces back to the Hakari Bridge. Following Khachatryan’s detention, Azerbaijan’s Prosecutor General’s Office initiated criminal proceedings against him, accusing him of involvement in what Azerbaijani officials refer to as the “Meshalinka massacre” of 1991. On 7 November 2023, an Azerbaijani court sentenced Khachatryan to a 15-year prison term.<sup>135</sup>

128. On August 1, 61 year-old Rashid Beglaryan was kidnapped by Azerbaijani military, as he was walking towards Lachin from the nearby Mets Shen village. Azerbaijan said that he was trying to illegally cross the border, while Nagorno-Karabakh authorities insisted that he had lost his way.<sup>136</sup>

129. On 14 August, a car accident occurred in Armenia on the Yerevan-Gyumri highway, resulting in 11 people killed and nine injured.<sup>137</sup> Among the victims of this tragic accident was 21-year-old Helen Dadayan from Nagorno-Karabakh, who had been separated from her family for 10 months because of the blockade.<sup>138</sup> Azerbaijani authorities never allowed Helen Dadayan’s body to be returned to her parents in Nagorno-Karabakh.

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<sup>133</sup> Center for Truth and Justice, Azerbaijan in Violation of International Law in the Context Electrical Utility Disruptions to Nagorno-Karabakh, 5 July 2023, <https://www.cftjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Electrical-Utilities-Report-2.docx.pdf> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

<sup>134</sup> Eurasianet, Nagorno-Karabakh under total blockade, 23 June 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/nagorno-karabakh-under-total-blockade> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>135</sup> Apa.az, Armenian criminal Vagif Khachatryan was sentenced to 15 years in prison, 7 November 2023, <https://en.apa.az/incident/armenian-criminal-vagif-khachatryan-was-sentenced-to-15-years-in-prison-updated-5-video-415746> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

<sup>136</sup> Radio Liberty, Another Karabakh Resident Detained By Azerbaijan, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32531362.html> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

<sup>137</sup> Radio Liberty, Eleven Killed, Nine Injured In Minibus-Truck Collision In Armenia, 14 August 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-fatal-minibus-crash/32547086.html> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

<sup>138</sup> News.am, Azerbaijan does not allow body of young woman who died in tragic Armenia road accident to be sent back to Karabakh, 18 August 2023, <https://news.am/eng/news/776086.html> (accessed on 28 February 2024).



130. On 28 August, three young men from Artsakh were arrested by Azerbaijani authorities while traveling along the Lachin Corridor. They have been sentenced to 10 days of detention on charges of violating Azerbaijan's national flag.<sup>139</sup>

### Military offensives and direct targeting of civilians

131. On 28 February, at about 16:55, shots from rifles of various calibers were fired from Azerbaijani combat positions at 53-year-old A. Avanesyan from the village of Myurishen, Martuni region of Nagorno-Karabakh, who was engaged in agricultural work with a Jonder tractor in the area called "Asfalten tak" of the administrative district of the village of Berdashen. As a result, agricultural work aimed to relieve the consequences of the blockade was stopped.<sup>140</sup>

132. On 1 March, in the area called "Davala" of the village of Berdashen the Azerbaijani military opened fire from small arms at 59-year-old S. Vardanyan who was performing agricultural work on a Belarus tractor. Agricultural work aimed to relieve the consequences of the blockade was forced to stop.<sup>141</sup>

133. On 5 March, an ambush group of the Azerbaijani armed forces crossed the line of contact defined by the Trilateral Statement of the Armed Forces of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan and attacked the car of the Police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Nagorno-Karabakh, driving from Stepanakert along a road about 1km from the contact line. As a result of this attack, three police officers were killed, and one was wounded.<sup>142</sup>

134. On 25 March, the Azerbaijani armed forces crossed the line of contact and seized a height near the Stepanakert-Lisagor road in Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>143</sup> Azerbaijan's Defense Ministry announced that its units had taken "necessary local control measures" to cut off a rough dirt road that passed slightly to the north of the main road connecting Karabakh to Armenia, known as the Lachin Corridor.<sup>144</sup> The Russian defence ministry confirmed that "on 25 March... a unit of the armed forces of Azerbaijan crossed a line of contact in the district of Shusha [Shushi], in violation" of the agreement of 9 November 2020.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Armenian Weekly, Three Artsakh students arrested by Azerbaijan, charged with "violating" national flag, 30 August 2023, <https://armenianweekly.com/2023/08/30/three-artsakh-students-arrested-by-azerbaijan-charged-with-violating-national-flag/> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

<sup>140</sup> Artsakh Ombudsman, Report on the Terrorist Act Carried out by the Azerbaijani Armed Forces Ambush Group on March 5, 2023, 8 March 2023, <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/document/1000> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid

<sup>142</sup> Artsakh Ombudsman, Report on the terrorist attack, carried out by the Azerbaijani Forces ambush group on 5 March 2023, <https://artsakhombuds.am/sites/default/files/2023-03/Ambush-report.pdf> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>143</sup> Jam News, Political scientist on the invitation of NK Armenians to negotiations in Baku, 27 March 2023, <https://jam-news.net/two-attempts-to-advance-to-nk/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>144</sup> Eurasianet, Azerbaijani armed forces advance to close off Armenia-Karabakh road, 26 March 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijani-armed-forces-advance-to-close-off-armenia-karabakh-road> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>145</sup> France 24, Russia accuses Azerbaijan of violating ceasefire agreement with Armenia, 25 March 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20230325-russia-accuses-azerbaijan-of-violating-ceasefire-agreement-with-armenia> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

135. On 28 June the units of the Azerbaijani armed forces opened artillery fire in the direction of Martuni and Martakert of Nagorno-Karabakh, using UAVs as well. There are 4 casualties from the Armenian side.<sup>146</sup>

### Special operation and ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh

136. On 19 September, Azerbaijan initiated a ground and aerial military campaign against numerous Armenian towns and cities in Nagorno-Karabakh. The military offensive lasted for about 24 hours.<sup>147</sup>

137. According to the head of Armenia's Investigative Committee, 223 people were killed during Azerbaijan's aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh, with 25 being civilians, including five minors. Another 244 people were wounded, 76 of whom were civilians, including 10 minors. Additionally, 20 people have been reported missing, including five civilians. About 20 cases of desecration of bodies have been recorded, as confirmed by expert examinations.<sup>148</sup> The military operation triggered a widespread forced displacement of the indigenous Armenians, compelling them to abandon their ancestral homeland that spans a few millennia.

138. Within minutes of the opening of the Lachin Corridor by Azerbaijan, the terrorized and starved people of Nagorno-Karabakh, frantically grabbed the bare minimum of belongings, such as passports, legal documents and a few items of clothing, and using cars, trucks, carriages, and tractors drove towards Armenia. As hundreds of Armenians were trying to arrange for gasoline for their families to flee to Armenia in a panic, gasoline storage facility outside Stepanakert exploded, taking away more than 200 additional lives.<sup>149</sup>

139. The process of forced deportation lasted eight (8) days, during which more than 100,000 Armenians, almost all the population of Nagorno-Karabakh left after the war of 2020, fled to Armenia, leaving behind their homes, personal belongings, churches, centuries-old cemeteries, museums and all that defined them as the indigenous people of Nagorno-Karabakh with roots tracing back for dozens of centuries.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Armenpress, Breaking: Azerbaijan launches artillery attack, air strikes in Nagorno Karabakh, 4 dead, 28 June 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1114278.html#:~:text=YEREVAN%2C%20JUNE%2028%2C%20ARMENPRESS.,Defense%20said%20in%20a%20statement>. (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>147</sup> Politico, Azerbaijan launches attack in Nagorno-Karabakh, announces 'evacuation' of Armenian population, 19 September 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/azerbaijan-launch-anti-terror-operation-nagorno-karabakh-armenia/> (accessed on 20 January 2024); Nagorno-Karabakh enclave emptied after entire ethnic Armenian population flees, 2 October 2023, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/nagorno-karabakh-enclave-emptied-entire-armenian-population-flees/story?id=103655356> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>148</sup> Massis Post, 223 People Killed in Azerbaijan's September Aggression Against Nagorno-Karabakh, 6 January 2024, <https://massispost.com/2024/01/223-people-killed-in-azerbaijans-september-aggression-against-nagorno-karabakh/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>149</sup> Radio Liberty, 218 Confirmed Dead In Karabakh Fuel Depot Blast, 22 December 2023, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32743695.html> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>150</sup> Center for Truth and Justice, To All State Parties of the Genocide Convention Azerbaijan's Policy of Irredentism: Illegitimate Territorial Claims on the Republic of Armenia Primary Source of Evidence: Azerbaijan January 2023, <https://www.cftjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Azerbaijans-Policy-of-Irredentism-Illegitimate-Territorial-Claims-on-the-Republic-of-Armenia-.pdf> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

140. A trip that would normally last no more than 2 hours, took up to 38 hours given the traffic jam through the highway and Lachin Corridor.<sup>151</sup> Over 70 people died on route from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, as well as shortly after arrival.<sup>152</sup>

141. Azerbaijan's Prosecutor General Kamran Aliyev indicated that the detention of these men was just the beginning, as criminal investigations had been opened against a total of 300 former officials.<sup>153</sup> Such a statement increased intimidation and fear of revenge among the population.

142. On the way to Armenia the former political leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh were arrested and taken to Baku with multiple charges.<sup>154</sup>

### Military offensives against the Republic of Armenia

143. On 29 March, the Azerbaijani side occupied new positions in Tegh village, Syunik region of the Republic of Armenia. According to the bilateral agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, on 1 April in the middle of Tegh and Aghavno villages, the placement of new positions was supposed to commence simultaneously. However, Azerbaijan violated the agreement by occupying advantageous positions prematurely and initiating engineering works.<sup>155</sup>

144. On 11 April, units of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces opened fire at the servicemen of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia carrying out engineering works in the area of Tegh village of Armenia.<sup>156</sup> The Armenian Defense Ministry said that 4 Armenian soldiers were killed and 6 wounded as a result of the Azerbaijani provocation, while the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry reported 3 Azerbaijani soldiers died.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.; Nagorno-Karabakh enclave emptied after entire ethnic Armenian population flees, 2 October 2023,

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/nagorno-karabakh-enclave-emptied-entire-armenian-population-flees/story?id=103655356> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>152</sup> Massis Post, 223 People Killed in Azerbaijan's September Aggression Against Nagorno-Karabakh, 6 January 2024,

<https://massispost.com/2024/01/223-people-killed-in-azerbaijans-september-aggression-against-nagorno-karabakh/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>153</sup> Al Jazeera, UN Team in Nagorno-Karabakh, a First in 30 Years, as Ethnic Armenians Flee, 1 October 2023,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/1/un-team-in-nagorno-karabakh-a-first-in-30-years-as-ethnic-armenians-flee> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>154</sup> News.am, Azerbaijan Files Charges Against Davit Babayan on Over 20 Counts, 30 September 2023,

<https://news.am/eng/news/784294.html> (accessed on 20 January 2024); AzerNews, State Security Service Releases Official Statement on Arrest of Arkadi Ghukasayan, Bako Sahakyan and Davit Ishkhanyan, 5 October 2023, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/215717.html> (accessed on 20 January 2024); France 24, Azerbaijan Says It Has Detained Former Karabakh Separatist President Harutyunyan, 5 October, 2023, (accessed on 20 January 2024)

<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20231005-azerbaijan-says-it-has-detained-former-karabakhseparatist-president-harutyunyan> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>155</sup> Hetq.am, Չայկական և արդթեջանական Նոր դիրթերի հեռավորությունը 15 մետր է. Տեղ գյուղի մոտակայքում զուգահեռ դիրթաշինական աշխատանքներ են ընթանում, 30 March 2023, <https://hetq.am/hy/article/154615> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>156</sup> Armenian Public Radio, Azerbaijani forces target Armenian soldiers carrying out engineering work: Casualties reported, 11 April 2023, <https://en.armradio.am/2023/04/11/azerbaijani-forces-target-armenian-soldiers-carrying-out-engineering-work-casualties-reported/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>157</sup> Radio Liberty, Seven Deaths Reported In Fresh Armenian-Azerbaijani Border Skirmish, 11 April 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-azerbaijan-border-skirmish-casualties/32359252.html> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

145. On 11 May, Azerbaijan launched an artillery and mortar attack on Armenian positions near the town of Sotk in the Gegharkunik Province of RA.<sup>158</sup> Border clashes left an Azerbaijani serviceman dead and 4 Armenian troops injured.<sup>159</sup>

146. On 15 June, Azerbaijani border guards made an attempt to advance into Armenian territory near the Lachin corridor. The country's security service reported one Armenian border guard was injured when an Azerbaijani serviceman opened fire on the Armenian village of Togh.<sup>160</sup>

147. On 1 September, Azerbaijani Armed Forces, employing UAVs and mortars, launched an attack on positions near the Armenian combat outposts situated close to the border villages of Sotk and Norabak. This assault resulted in the loss of 4 Armenian servicemen and left one wounded.<sup>161</sup>

### Inhumane and degrading treatment of Armenian captives

148. In December 2023, 32 prisoners returned to Armenia upon the exchange with 2 Azerbaijani sabotage group members as well as an agreement received from Armenia to hold Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP) in Baku.<sup>162</sup>

149. Captives returned from Azerbaijani jails told in their testimonies about the physical and psychological torture they had gone through during their captivity.<sup>163</sup>

150. By the end of 2023, there were 23 Armenians held captive in Azerbaijan,<sup>164</sup> confirmed by Baku. This number includes 5 detained during the 44-day war, 2 elderly civilians arrested during the blockade, and 16 were captured on September 19, 2023 and in the immediate aftermath, including 6 members of Nagorno Karabakh political and 2 defence leadership. All detainees are men, and most face politically-motivated charges of terrorism and similar offenses.<sup>165</sup> Photos and videos published by

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<sup>158</sup> Armenpress, Azerbaijan continues shelling Armenian positions in Sotk, 11 May 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1110637/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>159</sup> Al Jazeera, Armenia reports new border clashes with Azerbaijan forces, 12 May 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/12/armenia-reports-fresh-border-clashes-with-azerbaijan-forces> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>160</sup> Civilnet, Special Report: Tensions Soar as Baku Blocks Humanitarian Aid to Karabakh, 15 June 2023, <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/742007/special-report-tensions-soar-as-baku-blocks-humanitarian-aid-to-karabakh/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>161</sup> Reuters, Armenia, Azerbaijan report border clash casualties as Yerevan spars with Moscow, 1 September 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/two-armenian-soldiers-killed-azerbaijani-shelling-defence-ministry-2023-09-01> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>162</sup> Civilnet, 32 Armenian POWs return as Yerevan consents to the hosting of Climate Conference in Baku, 13 December 2023, <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/759768/32-armenian-pows-return-as-yerevan-consents-to-the-hosting-of-climate-conference-in-baku> (accessed on 22 January 2024).

<sup>163</sup> Human Rights Network, We are No One: How Three Years of Atrocities Led to the Ethnic Cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians, Chapter 2: Torture, <https://humanrightsnetwork.shorthandstories.com/we-are-no-one/we-are-no-one-all-chapters/chapter-2-torture/index.html> (accessed on 22 January 2024).

<sup>164</sup> Center for Truth and Justice, Azerbaijan Must Release All Armenian Political Prisoners, PoWs, and Hostages, 21 November 2023, <https://www.cftjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Armenian-POW-List6.pdf> (accessed on 22 January 2024).

<sup>165</sup> Joint Statement by Armenian Human Rights Defender Organizations on Unlawful Arrests by Azerbaijan, 11 October 2023, <https://prwb.am/en/2023/10/11/hayastanyan-iravapashpan-kazmakerputhyunneri-hamategh-haytararuthyuneh-adrbejani-koghmic-aporini-dzerbakaluthyunneri-veraberyal/> (accessed on 22 January 2024).

the Azerbaijani authorities depict humiliating scenes of the arrests of some of them.<sup>166</sup> The detained persons are largely seen as hostages and there are serious concerns that the trials against them by the Azerbaijani courts will be fair.<sup>167</sup>

151. On July 31, MP Tahir Kerimli called for the death penalty for Vagif Khachatryan who was kidnapped from ICRC at the Hakari checkpoint, stating: “Despite being a driver, this person committed murders, damaged civil and state property, and should be severely punished for that. No doubt, this man deserves the death penalty. The constitution provides for the death penalty, but a moratorium was imposed in 1998. This does not mean that the death penalty cannot be imposed on someone, and the Constitution cannot be limited. Death sentences are carried out in times of war. Is there a war situation in Azerbaijan? A peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan has not yet been signed. There is a trilateral statement that was not approved by the Milli Majlis. If a peace treaty is not signed, then the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is not over yet. Khachatryan also committed the crime in a war situation. International pressure will be great. The death penalty can also be replaced by life imprisonment. If the Milli Majlis decides that there is now a state of war, the death penalty can be carried out.”<sup>168</sup>

152. On July 31, in reference to Vagif Khachatryan's case, another MP from the ruling “New Azerbaijan” Party, Elman Mammadov, commented: “The ungrateful, the cowards, the traitors killed the civilians. There is a similar expression: showing mercy to the oppressor is injustice to the oppressed. Definitely, such a thing cannot happen. They have committed such historical crimes against the state and people of Azerbaijan that it is genocide, mass murders. Inshallah, they will all be caught one by one, and they will receive the punishment they deserve.”<sup>169</sup>

153. On July 31, an MP İltizam Yusifov said: “The fate faced by Vagif Khachaturian also awaits the Vardanyans, Arutyunyans, Narsisyans, Babayans, and other terrorist-bandits. They are handcuffed and have to answer for the crimes they have committed in the court of justice. Even their hoped-for patrons will not be able to save them...”<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> DTX Official Channel, 28 September 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgCsuEUoE4A> (accessed on 22 January 2024); DTX Official Channel, 5 October 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ND8u6PPybu> (accessed on 22 January 2024); DTX Official Channel, 5 October 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-68wdW3fGEw> (accessed on 22 January 2024).

<sup>167</sup> Radio Liberty, Concerns About Victor's Justice As Nagorno-Karabakh's Leaders Are Behind Bars And Facing Trial In Azerbaijan, 11 October 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/karabakh-leaders-arrested-azerbaijani-victor-justice-armenia-courts/32633354.html> (accessed on 22 January 2024).

<sup>168</sup> Tahir Kərimli: “Milli Məclis qərara gəlsə müharibə şəraitidir, o zaman Xaçaturyan barəsində ölüm hökmü çıxarıla bilər”, 31 July 2023, <https://pravda.az/news/121747> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>169</sup> Deputat: “Xaçaturyanın cinayətləri Meşəli camaatına qarşı soyqırımla bitmir”, July 31 2023, <https://demokrat.az/az/news/157898/deputat-xacaturyanin-cinayetleri-meseli-camaatina-qarsi-soyqirimla-bitmir> (accessed on 17 January 2024).

<sup>170</sup> Rubenlərin, araklərin də qollarının qandallanması günə çox az qaldı – AÇIQLAMA, 31 July 2023, <https://olke.az/siyaset/338088/rubenlerin-araklerin-de-qollarinin-qandallanmasi-gune-cox-az-qaldi-aiqlama> (accessed on 22 January 2024).

154. On October 13, a Baku court held a preliminary hearing in the show trial of Vagif Khachatryan.<sup>171</sup> On November 7, 2023, Azerbaijani court sentenced him to a 15-year prison term.<sup>172</sup>

155. In addition to 23 captives, there has been evidence showing the capture at least 80 more persons, which is not acknowledged by Azerbaijan, though is confirmed by evidence in the form of videos, photos, witness testimonies who had seen these people alive in captivity.<sup>173</sup>

### DESTRUCTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

156. Since the core of the policy of Azerbaijan towards the Armenian people is to deny their indigenous history and present them as newcomers in the region, Azerbaijan has been making attempts to erase the Armenian traces on the territories under its control. For this purpose, Azerbaijan generally has used several methods: full destruction of historical-cultural monuments (e.g. erasure of Armenian cross-stones in Nakhichevan), damage to a degree that the historical-cultural property loses its Armenian origin (e.g. removal of Armenian scripts and crosses, turning to cafes, kebab restaurants, mosques, etc.), misrepresentation of Christian monuments as belonging to other cultures (e.g. belonging to Russian orthodox church or “Caucasus Albania“- an ancient state that existed on the territory of current Azerbaijan – to the northeast of Nagorno-Karabakh).

157. Recent studies of satellite imagery by Caucasus Heritage Watch (CHW) research initiative led by archaeologists of Cornell and Purdue Universities, between 1997 and 2011, about 98% of Armenian cultural heritage sites in the Azerbaijani region of Nakhchivan were completely destroyed. Attacks on Armenian cultural heritage have intensified during and after the 44-Day War, once getting control to the territories with Armenian historical presence. Numerous sites in Nagorno-Karabakh, including cemeteries, churches, and the ancient city of Tigranakert, have been threatened, damaged, or destroyed by Azerbaijani forces during and after the conflict. The University Network for Human Rights (UNHR) review of numerous sources found documentation of at least 40 cultural sites in Nagorno-Karabakh that had been damaged, destroyed, or desecrated, wholly or in part, some on multiple different occasions, since the region came under Azerbaijani control. Another several dozen sites have been threatened or are identified as being at risk of similar destruction.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Armenpress, Kidnapped Red Cross evacuee to stand trial in Azerbaijan on fabricated charges, 13 October 2023, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1121893.html> (accessed on 22 January 2024).

<sup>172</sup> Apa.az, Armenian criminal Vagif Khachatryan was sentenced to 15 years in prison, 7 November 2023, <https://en.apa.az/incident/armenian-criminal-vagif-khachatryan-was-sentenced-to-15-years-in-prison-updated-5-video-415746> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

<sup>173</sup> Medialab, «38 հաստատված գերիներ շարունակում են պահվել Ադրբեջանում, իսկ առնվազն 80 գերեվարվածի հրաժարվում են հաստատել», Սիրանուշ Սահակյան, 18 March 2022, <https://medialab.am/218154> (accessed on 1 February 2023).

<sup>174</sup> Human Rights Network, We Are No One: How Three Years of Atrocities Led to the Ethnic Cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians, Chapter 6: Attacks on Cultural Heritage, <https://humanrightsnetwork.shorthandstories.com/we-are-no-on/attacks-on-cultural-heritage/index.html> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

### Destructions in Nagorno-Karabakh

158. On 15 January, the Azerbaijani state-owned CBC TV Azerbaijan channel broadcasted a propagandistic program titled "Destroyed Temples of Karabakh: Exposure of Armenian Vandalism," a Russian-language documentary.<sup>175</sup> The author and presenter of the film was Anastasia Lavrina, journalist and the deputy head of the Russian community in Azerbaijan. The film showed St. The Most Saviour's Church in Talish village of Nagorno-Karabakh, presenting it as Aghvana-Udian (Albanian-Udi), attributing to the 12th-13th centuries. However, in reality, the Church of the Savior in Talish was built in 1894 with funds provided by local residents.<sup>176</sup>

159. On 18 March, in the occupied Talish village of the Martakert region of Nagorno-Karabakh, the President of Azerbaijan announced the resettlement of 20 Azerbaijani families in the village. Distributed pictures reveal that a small square was constructed next to the residential houses on the main road into the village, likely intended for flag-raising ceremonies. A comparison of satellite aerial photos with the current imagery indicates that it was built on the site of a former residential house, which was demolished to the ground. Talish is a historically Armenian settlement with a rich Armenian culture. It is home to the Glho or Horeka monastery, the fortress and palaces of the Melik Beglarians, St. Astvatsatsin Church, and other monuments. Numerous videos and photos circulating on the internet after the 44-day war confirm that Azerbaijanis destroyed the "Revived Talish" monument, along with the village square containing many monuments and khachkars. Thus, Azerbaijan is crafting an official image of Talish erecting new symbols at the expense of Armenian heritage.<sup>177</sup>

160. On 5 April, the satellite photo showed that the Azerbaijanis demolished most of the houses in the residential area of Aghavno village of Kashatagh region in Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>178</sup>

161. On 22 April, photos of Kashatagh's Tsitsernavank were posted on the Facebook page of the so-called "Aghvana-Udian" community of Azerbaijan and by Robert Mobili, the president of the Bible Society of Azerbaijan. From the images it becomes evident that Tsitsernavank was desecrated. Its Holy Table was damaged, and the shroud carefully laid on its floor was destroyed by the rituals of the "Aghvana-Udian" community.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup>Разрушенные храмы Карабаха: разоблачение армянского вандализма, 15 January 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbgRzebJwA> (accessed on 2 February 2024).

<sup>176</sup> Monument Watch, Թալիշ գյուղի սբ. Ամենափրկիչ եկեղեցին «աղվանա-ուդիական» հոչակելու մասին, 19 January 2023, <https://monumentwatch.org/hy/alerts/%d5%a9%d5%a1%d5%ac%d5%ab%d5%b7-%d5%a3%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b2%d5%ab-%d5%bd%d5%a2%e2%80%a4-%d5%a1%d5%b4%d5%a5%d5%b6%d5%a1%d6%83%d6%80%d5%af%d5%ab%d5%b9-%d5%a5%d5%af%d5%a5%d5%b2%d5%a5%d6%81%d5%ab%d5%b6/> (accessed on 2 February 2024); Monument Watch, The Church of the Holy Savior in Talish, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/the-church-of-the-holy-savior-in-talish/> (accessed on 2 February 2024);

<sup>177</sup> Monument Watch, Creation of the Azerbaijani settlement of Talish at the cost of the Armenian one, 3 April 2023, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/creation-of-the-azerbaijani-settlement-of-talish-at-the-cost-of-the-armenian-one/> (accessed on 2 February 2024).

<sup>178</sup> Center for Truth and Justice, 5 April 2023, <https://twitter.com/CFTJustice/status/1643689331461353474> (accessed on 2 February 2024).

<sup>179</sup> Monument Watch, Representatives of the "Albanian-Udi" community of Azerbaijan desecrated and destroyed the unique pit inside the Armenian church of the Tsitsernavank monastery in the Kashatagh region of Artsakh, 8 May 2023, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/representatives-of-the-albanian-udi-community-of-azerbaijan-desecrated-and-destroyed-the-unique-pit-inside-the-armenian-church-of-the-tsitsernavank-monastery-in-the-kashatagh-region-of-artsakh/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

162. Between 15 October 2022 and 29 April 2023, a cemetery in Lachin, Nagorno-Karabakh, has been damaged due to construction. Road work encroached into the northeastern and southern areas of the cemetery, which dated back to the 14th to 16th centuries.<sup>180</sup>

163. On 16 October, the Azerbaijani state TV channel "Az TV" showed footage from Aliyev's visit to Stepanakert, where it was evident that the cross of Stepanakert's Surb Astvatsatsatsin Church had been removed.<sup>181</sup> Ironically, just a day before, on October 15, Pope Francis appealed to Azerbaijan to protect houses of worship in Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>182</sup>

164. On 11 May, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan visited Shushi and took part in the opening of a photo exhibition dedicated to his father Heydar Aliyev, held in the former Fine Arts Museum of Shushi. The video evidence showed that the sculptures previously placed at the museum's entrance and the artworks once displayed within its halls were now missing. The current condition and whereabouts of all the works comprising the collection of the Shushi Museum of Fine Arts remain unknown.<sup>183</sup>

165. On 30 May, it became evident from the photos circulated in international press that the memorial dedicated to World War II (1941-1945) in Lachin/Berdzor, built during the Soviet era and situated in the center of the city, on the hill adjacent to Peace Square, had been razed to the ground.<sup>184</sup>

166. On 14 June, satellite pictures revealed that Azerbaijan had destroyed the historic bridge "Halivor,"<sup>185</sup> which was constructed in 1835. The bridge was located 2 km southwest of the village of Mets Tagher in Hadrut region of Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>186</sup>

167. On 14 June, footage<sup>187</sup> appeared on social media showing that the "Kavaqavank" monastery<sup>188</sup>, located in the Hadrut region of Nagorno-Karabakh and dating back to 18th century, was looted and damaged. The video depicted the Azerbaijani side leveling the area around the church

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<sup>180</sup> Caucasus Heritage Watch, <https://indd.adobe.com/view/0da94550-19a5-4b85-a682-9666a644bb79>, page 9 (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>181</sup> Prezident separatçıların "parlament binası"na belə daxil oldu - Xankəndidən GÖRÜNTÜLƏR, 16 October 2023, [https://t.me/aztv\\_resmi/27720](https://t.me/aztv_resmi/27720) (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>182</sup> Vatican News, Pope calls attention to humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, 15 October 2023, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-10/pope-calls-attention-to-humanitarian-crisis-in-nagorno-karabakh.html> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>183</sup> Monument Watch, On the destruction of the State Museum of Fine Arts of the city of Shushi, 19 May 2023, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/on-the-destruction-of-the-state-museum-of-fine-arts-of-the-city-of-shushi/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>184</sup> Monument Watch, Azerbaijan destroyed the Memorial Complex of Glory in the city of Berdzor, 31 May 2023, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/azerbaijan-destroyed-the-memorial-complex-of-glory-in-the-city-of-berdzor/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>185</sup> Monument Watch, The Bridge of Halivor, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/the-bridge-of-halivor-oldman/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>186</sup> Caucasus Heritage Watch, Destruction Alert: Halevor Bridge, 14 June 2024, <https://caucasusheritage.cornell.edu/?p=1416#blog-layout> (accessed on 20 June 2024).

<sup>187</sup> Füzulidə Məngənə dağı və məşhur alban kilsəsi!!!, 14 June 2023, [https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid026nn89DTMQ2fyJaJ2tESfop7i2mr5LtpLmsgjJPPWfBNzs5cobXm2sQMRxpa6Mm\\_aSl&id=100060016715063&mibextid=Nif5oz&paipv=0&eav=Afb51hY53F8JC3t6FLROA-ooSv6kSTtOEEDukhu2rBOMYSpnz3OSoc\\_nrow\\_Jzez67o&rdr](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid026nn89DTMQ2fyJaJ2tESfop7i2mr5LtpLmsgjJPPWfBNzs5cobXm2sQMRxpa6Mm_aSl&id=100060016715063&mibextid=Nif5oz&paipv=0&eav=Afb51hY53F8JC3t6FLROA-ooSv6kSTtOEEDukhu2rBOMYSpnz3OSoc_nrow_Jzez67o&rdr) (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>188</sup> Monument Watch, Kavakavank Monastery, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/monument/kaqavavank-monastery> (accessed on 20 January 2024).



(built in 1742) and conducting earthworks. Additionally, judging by the equipment seen in the video, it appeared a new paved road was being built leading to the church. Inside the church, the video revealed significant damage to the porch, with ornate moldings nearly destroyed. Furthermore, the church that had original Armenian inscriptions was referred to as an "Albanian" church.<sup>189</sup>

168. On 16 June, the official website of the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, published his order declaring the historical area of the village of Togh as a state historical-architectural and nature reserve called "Tugh."<sup>190</sup> Meanwhile, Togh village has served as the seat of Armenian meliks (local noble governors) and held a prominent position as one of the political and spiritual centers of Artsakh's south, which was attested through various monuments found in the village and its surroundings adorned with Armenian inscriptions.<sup>191</sup>

169. On 9 July, a photo surfaced in the media depicting the destruction of a cross-stone erected in memory of the victims of the Artsakh war. The cross-stone, constructed in 2014 in Kyuratagh village of Hadrut was shown clearly vandalized. In the image, a young Azerbaijani man is seated on the pedestal of the fallen cross-stone, which bears desecrations in the form of writings and the emblem of the Gray Wolves. This emblem is associated with the Turkic "National Movement" party, which is known for its ultra-nationalist and racist values. The same gesture was extensively utilized by the Turkish-Azerbaijani military during the 44-day war.<sup>192</sup>

170. On 5 September, during the 12th Conference of Ministers of Culture of the Islamic World in Doha, Azerbaijan's Minister of Culture, Adil Karimli, nominated Shushi as a candidate city for the title of 2024 Islamic Cultural Capital by ICESCO,<sup>193</sup> obviously associating the city exclusively with the Muslim world and disregarding the Armenian heritage.<sup>194</sup>

171. Following the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan promptly focused its attention on the monastery complexes of Amaras and Gandzasar - the historically significant medieval centers of learning, culture, and spirituality of Armenians. Azerbaijan proclaimed as it had "liberated"

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<sup>189</sup> Monument Watch, Alert: The Kavakavank Church is Losing its Original Appearance 1 July 2023, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/alert-the-kavakavank-church-is-losing-its-original-appearance> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>190</sup> Распоряжение Президента Азербайджанской Республики О создании Государственного историко-архитектурного и природного заповедника «Туг», 16 June 2023, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/60283> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>191</sup> Monument Watch, By the order of the President of Azerbaijan, the historical Armenian Togh is being transformed into the Azerbaijani-Albanian "Tugh" reserve, 24 June 2023, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/by-the-order-of-the-president-of-azerbaijan-the-historical-armenian-togh-is-being-transformed-into-the-azerbaijani-albanian-tugh-reserve> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>192</sup> Monument Watch, Յարգարարի Քյուրատաղ գյուղում խաչքար է ոչնչացվել, 14 July 2023, <https://monumentwatch.org/hy/alerts/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%a4%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a1%d5%a9%d5%a1%d5%b2-%d5%a3%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b2%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b4-%d5%ad%d5%a1%d5%b9%d6%84%d5%a1%d6%80-%d5%a7/>, <https://monumentwatch.org/hy/alerts/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%a4%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a9%d5%ab-%d6%84%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d6%80%d5%a1%d5%a9%d5%a1%d5%b2-%d5%a3%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b2%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b4-%d5%ad%d5%a1%d5%b9%d6%84%d5%a1%d6%80-%d5%a7> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>193</sup> Apa.az, Azerbaijan's Shusha city declared Cultural capital of Islamic world for 2024, 5 September 2023, <https://apa.az/en/culture-policy/shusha-declared-cultural-capital-of-islamic-world-for-2024-412662#:~:text=During%20the%2012th%20Conference%20of%20Islamic%20world%20program%2C%20APA%20reports> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>194</sup> Monument Watch, Shushi Named Cultural Capital of the Islamic World for 2024, 5 October 2023, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/shushi-named-cultural-capital-of-the-islamic-world-for-2024/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

these renowned “Caucasian Albanian” sanctuaries and places of pilgrimage. This was followed by a propaganda and misleading narratives about these monasteries.<sup>195</sup>

172. On 27 September, Azerbaijani military forces fired shots in the direction of the Charektar Monastery in the village<sup>196</sup> - one of the prominent spiritual centers of the Upper Tartar valley in Nagorno-Karabakh build in 12th-14th centuries, a place of numerous khachkars and preserved inscriptions.<sup>197</sup>

173. On 29 September, on the days when Armenians were still fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh, video materials surfaced on social media depicting toppling of a 50-meter illuminated cross on a hill near Dashushen village, close to Stepanakert.<sup>198</sup>

174. On 6 October 2023, an extensive video program was aired on a state-sponsored Baku TV channel, primarily focusing on the monastic complexes of Gandzasar, Amaras, and Dadivank. The program asserted that following the “liberation” of these monasteries, the global scientific community, especially historians, would have the chance to witness and expose what was referred to as “Armenian fraud” on-site.<sup>199</sup>

175. In early November, reports from Telegram channels documented the toppling of the statue of Stepan Shahumyan in the occupied Stepanakert square, who was one of historically famous “26 Baku commissars,” after whom Stepanakert was named. The statue had also been targeted by the Azerbaijani armed forces during the 44-day war in 2020.<sup>200</sup>

176. The satellite photo taken on 3 November 2023, shows that the remnants of the Meghretsots Surb Astvatsatsin Church in the city of Shushi have been harmed due to construction works. Azerbaijani side utilized heavy machinery to deposit construction debris from the surrounding areas onto the foundations and structures of the church.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Monument Watch, [Azerbaijan's dangerous statements and initiatives](https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/azerbaijans-dangerous-statements-and-initiatives), <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/azerbaijans-dangerous-statements-and-initiatives>; Baku.ru, Another machination of the Armenians or how Albanian churches became Armenian, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BWfIQS8rqq>.

<sup>196</sup> Աղբրեցանցիները կրակել են Չարեքթարի վանքի ուղղությամբ, 27 September 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbYhLbwgEzE> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>197</sup> Monument Watch, Charektar Monastery Targeted by Azerbaijani Vandalism, 2 October 2023, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/charektar-monastery-targeted-by-azerbaijani-vandalism/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>198</sup> Աղբրեցանցիները կոտրել են Դաշուշենի խաչը, 1 October 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s1PonCbyJP8> (accessed on 20 January 2024); Monument Watch, Azerbaijan Toppled the Cross in Stepanakert, 19 November 2023, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/azerbaijan-toppled-the-cross-in-stepanakert/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>199</sup> Monument Watch, Azerbaijan's dangerous statements and initiatives, 7 October 2023, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/azerbaijans-dangerous-statements-and-initiatives/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>200</sup> Monument Watch, Azerbaijanis Vandalize Statue of Stepan Shahumyan in Stepanakert, 21 November 2023, <https://monumentwatch.org/en/alerts/azerbaijanis-vandalize-statue-of-stepan-shahumyan-in-stepanakert/> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>201</sup> Caucasus Heritage Watch, Damage Alert: Meghretsots Holy Mother of God church, 24 November 2023, <https://caucasusheritage.cornell.edu/?p=1501> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

177. Between 5 October and 3 November, bulldozers carved a road through a historic burial ground in Shushi known as the Yerevan Gate cemetery. Nestled amidst the trees there were at least 78 Armenian-inscribed tombstones dating between 1802 and 1913.<sup>202</sup>

178. Between 5 October and 3 November another Armenian cemetery in Shushi was damaged. It appears that bulldozers dumped heaps of debris atop the old Ghazanchetsots cemetery (southeast of the cathedral), endangering the already fragmented tombstones. This marked the sixth Armenian cemetery impacted since November 2020, following the destruction of cemeteries in Mets Tagher, Sghnakh and Vazgenashen villages, and of Shushi's Northern and Yerevan Gates cemeteries.<sup>203</sup>

### Other types of cultural terror

179. Within two weeks of the fall of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan published an updated map of Nagorno-Karabakh on GoMap, an online website and a platform sponsored by the government of Azerbaijan and promoted by government-owned enterprises. The map renamed streets in Nagorno-Karabakh towns, thus eliminating all Armenian historical names and references.<sup>204</sup>

180. Most notably, Ivan Tevosyan (Armenian Statesperson of Soviet period) street in Stepanakert was renamed "Envar Pasha" street, named after Enver Pasha, was a Turkish military officer and convicted war criminal, one of the main perpetrators of the Armenian genocide in Ottoman Empire in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, that forced deportations and massacres of Armenians where 1.5 million Armenians were murdered.<sup>205</sup>

181. In another map officially reissued by Azerbaijan, the street named after Nelson Stepanyan Street (Armenian hero of the World War II) was renamed to Nuri (Killigil) Pasha. Nuri Pasha was a general of the Ottoman army and the half-brother of Enver Pasha, who towards the end of World War I was sent to the Caucasus. In Baku, he played a significant role in violence and atrocities impacting various ethnic and religious groups, most specifically, in the massacre of 30,000 Armenian civilians.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Caucasus Heritage Watch, Damage Alert: Yerevan Gate cemetery (Shusha/Shushi), 24 November 2023, <https://caucasusheritage.cornell.edu/?p=1509> (accessed on 20 January 2024); Caucasus Heritage Watch, page 21 <https://indd.adobe.com/view/0da94550-19a5-4b85-a682-9666a644bb79> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>203</sup> Caucasus Heritage Watch, Damage Alert: Ghazanchetsots Cemetery (Shushi/Shusha), 24 November 2023, <https://caucasusheritage.cornell.edu/?p=1517> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>204</sup> Center for Truth and Justice, To All State Parties of the Genocide Convention Azerbaijan's Policy of Irredentism: Illegitimate Territorial Claims on the Republic of Armenia Primary Source of Evidence: Azerbaijan January 2023, <https://www.cftjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Azerbaijans-Policy-of-Irredentism-Illegitimate-Territorial-Claims-on-the-Republic-of-Armenia-.pdf> (accessed on 20 January 2024).

<sup>205</sup> Ibid

<sup>206</sup> Ibid

### REACTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

172. Azerbaijan's actions were met with some international condemnations, yet those not adequate to open the Lachin Corridor and to prevent the ethnic cleansing.

#### International governmental organizations

173. United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Gutierrez, on 2 August, expressed his deep concern regarding the challenges pertaining to freedom of movement along the Lachin corridor. He emphasized the imperative of implementing the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) Orders, which include those issued on 22 February, and reaffirmed on 6 July. The Secretary-General also expressed particular concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation on the ground and called for urgent measures to facilitate access for delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need. He also urged the conflicting parties to intensify efforts towards long-term normalization of relations to ensure peace and security in the region.<sup>207</sup>

174. On 7 August, UN special rapporteurs and independent human rights experts conveyed their alarm regarding the ongoing blockade of the Lachin corridor by Azerbaijan and the severe humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, which has resulted in acute shortages for the population and has placed the lives of people, particularly children, persons with disabilities, older individuals, pregnant women, and the sick, at significant risk.<sup>208</sup>

175. On 16 August, the UN Security Council held an urgent meeting to address the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Edem Wosornu, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) representative emphasized that the international humanitarian law unequivocally demands that parties permit and facilitate the swift and unobstructed movement of humanitarian aid for all civilians in need and the free movement of the humanitarian personnel to fulfill their responsibilities. She also stressed that "it is crucial that the ICRC is granted the opportunity to resume the delivery of humanitarian assistance via any available routes."<sup>209</sup>

176. Council of Europe (CoE) Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić, on 19 September, the day of military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh, issued a statement saying, "I called on Azerbaijan to immediately halt the military actions"<sup>210</sup>.

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<sup>207</sup> UN, Secretary-General 'Deeply Concerned' by Reports of Continued Challenges to Freedom of Movement along Lachin Corridor, Armenia-Azerbaijan, 2 August 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21896.doc.htm> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>208</sup> UN, UN experts urge Azerbaijan to lift Lachin corridor blockade and end humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, 7 August 2023, <https://armenia.un.org/en/241142-un-experts-urge-azerbaijan-lift-lachin-corridor-blockade-and-end-humanitarian-crisis-nagorno> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>209</sup> UN, Armenia-Azerbaijan: Crucial to have 'unimpeded passage' of aid through Lachin Corridor, Security Council hears, 16 August 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/08/1139822> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>210</sup> CoE, Military escalation around the Karabakh, Statement by Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić, 19 September 2023, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/military-escalation-around-the-karabakh-region> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

177. CoE's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) President, Tiny Kox, on 19 September, made a statement: "I am deeply shocked by the decision of the government of Azerbaijan to launch a new and aggressive military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh earlier today. In the space of hours this has resulted in casualties and deaths among civilians. I strongly condemn these actions and call on the authorities of Azerbaijan to cease their fire immediately."<sup>211</sup>

178. On 12 October, the PACE adopted a resolution calling on Azerbaijan to "create a climate of trust and the material conditions" for Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh to be able to return to their homeland – including active steps to encourage and reassure them to do so. The resolution, adopted following an urgent debate, regretted the "long-standing and continuing failure on the part of the authorities of Azerbaijan to reassure the Armenian population of the region of their safety and the full respect of their rights."<sup>212</sup>

179. On 18 October, at the CoE Committee of Ministers, the EU delegation made a statement on NK. A number of non-EU countries (Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, San Marino) supported the statement. "The European Union continues to follow with concern the extremely difficult situation arising from the mass exodus of Karabakh Armenians following Azerbaijan's military operation on 19 and 20 September and the nine months-long blockade on the Lachin corridor. Nearly the entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh, over 100,600 persons, have found refuge in Armenia." The statement also reminded "that Azerbaijan must comply with the interim measures indicated by the European Court of Human Rights on 22 September, i.e. to refrain from taking any measures which might entail breaches of their obligations under the Convention, notably Article 2 (right to life) and Article 3 (prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment)."<sup>213</sup>

180. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Permanent Council in Vienna, on 17 January, convened a special session to address the issue of blockade of the Lachin Corridor. Representatives from the US, France, and the UK emphasized the urgent need for the immediate and unconditional restoration of freedom and security of movement along the Lachin Corridor.<sup>214</sup>

181. On September 20, a special meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council was convened at the initiative of the Permanent Mission of Armenia to the OSCE to discuss the large-scale aggression unleashed by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh. Permanent representative of Armenia to the OSCE, Ambassador Armen Papikyan emphasized the imperative of the international community's immediate and targeted intervention and the introduction of international mechanisms to ensure the rights and

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<sup>211</sup> CoE PACE, Military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh: PACE President calls on Azerbaijan to cease fire immediately, 19 September 2023, <https://pace.coe.int/en/news/9200/military-operation-in-nagorno-karabakh-pace-president-calls-on-azerbaijan-to-cease-fire-immediately> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>212</sup> CoE PACE, Parliamentary Assembly, The humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, 12 October 2023, <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/33145/html> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>213</sup> EU, Delegation of the European Union to the Council of Europe, 1478th meeting of the Committee of Ministers on 18 October 2023, EU statement on Armenia/Azerbaijan, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/council-europe/1478th-meeting-committee-ministers-18-october-2023-eu-statement-armeniaazerbaijan\\_en?s=51](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/council-europe/1478th-meeting-committee-ministers-18-october-2023-eu-statement-armeniaazerbaijan_en?s=51) (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>214</sup> Delegation of EU to the international organizations in Vienna, OSCE Special Permanent Council 1406 Vienna, 17 January 2023, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/vienna-international-organisations/osce-special-permanent-council-1406-vienna-17-january-2023\\_en?s=66](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/vienna-international-organisations/osce-special-permanent-council-1406-vienna-17-january-2023_en?s=66) (accessed on 25 February 2024)

security of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. He mentioned that statements are no longer enough and it is necessary to take active steps against Azerbaijan, including targeted sanctions. He also called on the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and the Secretariat to monitor the developments and consistently employ all the tools at the disposal of the OSCE.<sup>215</sup>

182. On September 28, the OSCE Permanent Council Session discussed the “Renewed aggression by Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh resulting in ethnic cleansing of Armenian population from their ancestral homeland.”<sup>216</sup> EU representative highlighted that “Nagorno-Karabakh is currently emptying of its Armenian population. To date [September 28], reportedly more than 65,000 people, more than half of the population, has found refuge in Armenia.”<sup>217</sup>

183. On 11 October, the new Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Daniela De Ridder, expressed great concern over the developments in the South Caucasus region and the situation of Karabakh refugees. She stated that the Azerbaijani authorities must fully guarantee the safety and human rights of ethnic Armenians remaining in Karabakh. Additionally, she stressed the importance of a longer-term mission by the OSCE or the UN to contribute to the building of mutual trust between the communities and promote the willingness of Karabakh Armenians who have fled to return.<sup>218</sup>

184. On November 9, at the OSCE Permanent Council Session, the EU made a note of “the difficult situation arising from the almost total exodus of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia following Azerbaijan’s military operation of 19 and 20 September and the nine-month blockade of the Lachin corridor.” EU reiterated “that the forced displacement of the civilian population by military or other means is unacceptable. Azerbaijan has the responsibility to ensure the rights and security of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh – including their right to live in their homes with dignity and without facing intimidation or discrimination – and to establish the conditions for their voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return. Their cultural heritage and property rights must also be effectively guaranteed and protected by Azerbaijan.”<sup>219</sup>

### International non-governmental organizations and experts

185. On 1 January, a report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) “10 Conflicts to Watch in 2023” mentioned that “Russian peacekeepers have not stopped several flare-ups this past year. Azerbaijani troops in March and August captured more territory in Nagorno-Karabakh, including strategic

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<sup>215</sup> RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs, A Special Meeting of OSCE Permanent Council was convened at the initiative of the Permanent Mission of Armenia to the OSCE, 21 September 2023, [https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2023/09/21/OSCE\\_SpecialMeeting/12222](https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2023/09/21/OSCE_SpecialMeeting/12222) (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>216</sup> OSCE, Permanent Council No.1444, Agenda, Vienna, 28 September 2023, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/1/555102.pdf> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>217</sup> OSCE, Permanent Council No.1444, EU Statement in response to the Current Issue to be raised by the US, Vienna, 28 September 2023, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/0/555252.pdf> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>218</sup> OSCE, Press release: Support Armenia in overcoming the current refugee crisis, urges OSCE PA migration committee Chair, <https://www.oscepa.org/en/news-a-media/press-releases/press-2023/support-armenia-in-overcoming-the-current-refugee-crisis-urges-osce-pa-migration-committee-chair> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>219</sup> OSCE, Permanent Council No.1449, EU Statement On the situation around Nagorno-Karabakh, Vienna, 9 November 2023, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/b/558942.pdf> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

mountain positions. In September, Azerbaijani forces seized territory inside Armenia proper. Each bout of attacks was progressively bloodier.” The report did not mention the Azerbaijani blockade of Lachin Corridor that started on December 12, 2022.<sup>220</sup>

186. On 8 August, former International Criminal Court prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo released a report stating that the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh constitutes genocide. He highlighted that while there might not be crematories or machete attacks, starvation is the invisible weapon of that genocide. Unless there is an urgent and dramatic intervention, this community of Armenians could be wiped out within a matter of weeks.<sup>221</sup>

187. On 5 September, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention published a report on the risk of genocide by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh using the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes. The report stated a concern that what was taking place in Nagorno-Karabakh at the moment is genocide and urged the international community to act “boldly and swiftly.”<sup>222</sup>

188. On 19 September, when Azerbaijan initiated a large-scale military attack on the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, Freedom House made a post on X page, stating: “We strongly condemn the Azerbaijani government’s violent attacks in Nagorno-Karabakh, heightening the risk of ethnic cleansing against the region’s Armenian population. Any attempt to forcibly change the region’s demographics is illegal and unacceptable.”<sup>223</sup> In its later report on “Freedom in the world 2024” titled “The Mounting Damage of Flawed Elections and Armed Conflict” the Freedom House highlighted that people living in disputed territories often become victims of autocratic regimes’ hostility toward pluralism and expansionist agendas. In September, the Azerbaijani regime’s siege of Nagorno-Karabakh led to the dissolution of local government institutions and the forced displacement of over 100,000 Armenians, widely condemned as ethnic cleansing by foreign observers. Consequently, the territory, once partly free, experienced the world’s largest score decline in 2023, losing a total of 40 points.<sup>224</sup>

189. On 5 October, Human Rights Watch issued a statement, saying that governments involved in facilitating talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia “should secure concrete commitments from Azerbaijan’s president on respecting, protecting, and implementing the right to return of ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh.”<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> International Crisis Group, 10 Conflicts to Watch in 2023, 1 January 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/10-conflicts-watch-2023> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>221</sup> Center for Truth and Justice, Former International Criminal Court prosecutor, Luis Moreno Ocampo, issued report stating the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh is “GENOCIDE.”, 8 August 2023, <https://www.cftjustice.org/former-international-criminal-court-prosecutor-luis-moreno-ocampo-issued-report-stating-the-blockade-of-nagorno-karabakh-is-genocide/> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>222</sup> Lemkin Institute for the Genocide Prevention, Risk Factors and Indicators of the Crime of Genocide in the Republic of Artsakh: Applying the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes to the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, 5 September 2023 (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>223</sup> Freedom House, 19 September 2023, <https://twitter.com/freedomhouse/status/1704148655790276954> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>224</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024, The Mounting Damage of Flawed Elections and Armed Conflict, February 2024, [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW\\_2024\\_DigitalBooklet.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW_2024_DigitalBooklet.pdf) (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>225</sup> Human Rights Watch, Guarantee Right to Return to Nagorno Karabakh, 5 October 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/05/guarantee-right-return-nagorno-karabakh> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

190. On 12 December, Zovighian Public Office (Lebanon) published an open-source intelligence (OSINT) and geolocation report of blockade and crimes of atrocity by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh. The report made it evident that an unconventional war began on 12 December 2022, and climaxed into a conventional war on 19 September 2023, achieving resounding victories at every step of the way. The research showed that the appearance of so-called “eco-activists” was fully designed by the Azerbaijani state aiming “to create a physical obstruction and hostile space on the Lachin Corridor, evoking physical unsafety and psychological terror for any Armenian traveler. The report proved that on 23 April; by establishing an illegal checkpoint, Azerbaijan militarized and institutionalized a comprehensive siege of Nagorno- Karabakh on the grounds of international law and state rights to territorial integrity, effectively responding to global pressure to respect international humanitarian law by presenting a counter-commitment to international law centered on sovereign rights. The report concluded that “The blockade, both in its design and execution, was multi-dimensionally creative. It was a perfect blockade that exploited geographic and geopolitical vulnerabilities to achieve specific and complex objectives in a very short period of time.”<sup>226</sup>

### Statements and calls by key states’ representatives following the ethnic cleansing act

191. European Union’s (EU) representative body - the European Parliament representatives, on 19 September, issued a joint statement co-signed by the Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, MEP David McAllister, Chair of the Delegation for relations with the South Caucasus, MEP Marina Kaljurand, MEP Andrey Kovatchev, European Parliament’s Standing Rapporteur on Armenia and the Standing Rapporteur on Azerbaijan, MEP Željana Zovko. The statement said: “We condemn in the strongest terms today’s pre-planned and unjustified attack of Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh. We deplore the loss of life in reported landmine explosions earlier in the day and express our condolences to the families of the victims. However, this under no circumstances justifies Azerbaijan’s large-scale military escalation. The clearly pre-planned attack, reported along the entire line of contact, coming just hours after the blasts and following weeks of observed Azerbaijani military build-up and aggressive rhetoric, is totally unacceptable.”<sup>227</sup>

192. On 21 September, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, issued a statement: “The European Union condemns the military operation by Azerbaijan against the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh and deplores the casualties and loss of life caused by this escalation...The EU calls on Azerbaijan to allow immediate and unimpeded humanitarian access to the population in need, including through a full re-opening of the Lachin corridor in line with the ICJ Orders

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<sup>226</sup> Zovighian Public Office, From blockade to war: The ethnic cleansing of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh Genocide briefing, 12 December 2023, [https://irp.cdn-website.com/c75f4b97/files/uploaded/ZPO\\_ANK\\_RM1\\_Report\\_19122023\\_v17-Accessible.pdf](https://irp.cdn-website.com/c75f4b97/files/uploaded/ZPO_ANK_RM1_Report_19122023_v17-Accessible.pdf) (accessed on 28 February 2024).

<sup>227</sup> European Parliament, Joint statement by the Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, MEP David McALLISTER, the Chair of the Delegation for relations with the South Caucasus, MEP Marina KALJURAND, the European Parliament’s Standing Rapporteur on Armenia, MEP Andrey KOVATCHEV, and the European Parliament’s Standing Rapporteur on Azerbaijan, MEP Željana ZOVKO, on Azerbaijan’s attack on Nagorno-Karabakh, 19 September 2023, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/274935/20230919\\_Azerbaijani%20attack%20on%20NK\\_joint%20statement.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/274935/20230919_Azerbaijani%20attack%20on%20NK_joint%20statement.pdf) (accessed on 25 February 2024).



of February and July 2023. The humanitarian actors should be able to operate freely. The EU and its Member States stand ready to provide urgent humanitarian assistance.”<sup>228</sup>

193. On 5 October, European Parliament adopted, by a vote of 391 in favor and 9 against, a non-binding resolution on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, which mentioned: “ethnic cleansing is described by the UN Security Council as rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove from a given area persons of another ethnic or religious group and is contrary to international law; whereas there is a pressing need to stop and reverse the ongoing forced exodus of the local Armenian population, which amounts to ethnic cleansing, and to ensure the conditions for their safe return to Nagorno-Karabakh; whereas Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians have the right to live in their homes in dignity and security; whereas the Azerbaijani authorities have announced the registration of all Armenian residents of Nagorno-Karabakh...”<sup>229</sup>

195. The United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken, on 19 September, issued a statement: “The United States is deeply concerned by Azerbaijan’s military actions in Nagorno-Karabakh and calls on Azerbaijan to cease these actions immediately. These actions are worsening an already dire humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and undermine prospects for peace. As we have previously made clear to Azerbaijan, the use of force to resolve disputes is unacceptable and runs counter to efforts to create conditions for a just and dignified peace in the region. We call for an immediate end to hostilities and for respectful dialogue between Baku and representatives of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh”<sup>230</sup>.

196. On 20 September, US Secretary of State tweeted: “I spoke to Azerbaijani President Aliyev today and urged him to immediately cease military actions in Nagorno-Karabakh. It is crucial for Azerbaijan to deescalate the situation to promote a peaceful resolution of the conflict”<sup>231</sup>.

197. On 20 October, following the U.S.-EU summit<sup>232</sup>, the sides issued a joint statement. It also mentions Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh: “We remain committed to advancing a lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan based on mutual recognition of sovereignty, inviolability of borders and territorial integrity. We urge Azerbaijan to ensure the rights and security of those who remain in

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<sup>228</sup> Azerbaijan: Statement by the High Representative on developments in Nagorno-Karabakh, 21 September 2023, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/azerbaijan-statement-high-representative-developments-nagorno-karabakh\\_en?channel=eeas\\_press\\_alerts&date=2023-09-21&newsid=0&langid=en&source=mail](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/azerbaijan-statement-high-representative-developments-nagorno-karabakh_en?channel=eeas_press_alerts&date=2023-09-21&newsid=0&langid=en&source=mail) (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>229</sup> European Parliament, Resolution of 5 October 2023 on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh after Azerbaijan’s attack and the continuing threats against Armenia (2023/2879(RSP)), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0356\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0356_EN.html) (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>230</sup> US Department of State, Call for End of Hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh Press Statement Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, 19 September 2023, <https://www.state.gov/call-for-end-of-hostilities-in-nagorno-karabakh/?fbclid=IwAR3qFqYuUbbbezAppOloKv5EpBgacciAx9tIEQlz3K63b1Cif8khz6Y1MSU> (accessed on 19 February 2024).

<sup>231</sup> Secretary of State Antony Blinken on X, 20 September 2023, <https://twitter.com/SecBlinken/status/1704259914208604410> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>232</sup> The White House, US-EU Summit Joint Statement, 20 October 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/10/20/u-s-eu-summit-joint-statement/> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

## Anti-Armenian Xenophobia and Racism in Azerbaijan 2023

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Nagorno-Karabakh as well as for those who wish to return to their homes. We also call for all parties to adhere to the principle of non-use of force and threat of use of force”<sup>233</sup>.

198. France’s President Emmanuel Macron, on 20 September, tweeted: “Strong condemnation of the use of force by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh. The offensive must stop immediately and discussions must resume for the rights and security of residents. I remain in close contact with Prime Minister Pashinyan”<sup>234</sup>.

199. Russian Federation’s Foreign Ministry, on 20 September, published a statement, actually blaming the West for the events unfolding in Nagorno-Karabakh, where the Russian peacekeepers were responsible for ensuring people’s safety and security. The statement read, “The fate of the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement was radically influenced by the official recognition by Yerevan in October 2022 and May 2023, during summits under the auspices of the European Union, of Nagorno-Karabakh as part of the territory of Azerbaijan. This altered the fundamental conditions under which the Statement of the Leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia of 9 November 2020, was signed, as well as the position of the Russian peacekeeping contingent.”<sup>235</sup>

### International court rulings

200. International Court of Justice (ICJ), on 22 February, issued an order to Azerbaijan, demanding the implementation of all necessary measures to ensure unrestricted movement of individuals, vehicles, and cargo in both directions through the Lachin Corridor.<sup>236</sup> These provisional measures issued by the ICJ are legally binding. However, Azerbaijan has thus far failed to lift the blockade on the Lachin Corridor.

201. On 17 November, after the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh, ICJ issued an order in the case concerning Application of The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan). It stated that the Republic of Azerbaijan shall, in accordance with its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, protect and preserve registration, identity and private property documents and records that concern the persons identified in the order and have due regard to such documents and records in its administrative and legislative practices. Azerbaijan must, in accordance with its obligations under CERD, (i) ensure that persons who have left Nagorno-Karabakh after 19 September 2023 and who wish to return to Nagorno-Karabakh are able to do so in a safe, unimpeded and expeditious manner; (ii) ensure that persons who remained in Nagorno-Karabakh after 19 September 2023 and who wish to depart are able to do so in a safe, unimpeded and expeditious manner; and (iii)

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<sup>233</sup> European Commission, US-EU Summit Joint Statement, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/67448/us-eu-statement-final.pdf> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>234</sup> Emmanuel Macron on X, 20 September 2023, <https://twitter.com/EmmanuelMacron/status/1704239716176974122> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>235</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation, Заявление МИД России в связи с ситуацией вокруг Нагорного Карабаха, 20 September 2023, [https://mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/1905169/](https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1905169/) (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>236</sup> International Court of Justice, Order of 22 February 2023, <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/202552#:~:text=The%20Court%20concludes%20that%20Azerbaijan,Lachin%20Corridor%20in%20both%20directions.> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

ensure that persons who remained in Nagorno-Karabakh after 19 September 2023 or returned to Nagorno-Karabakh and who wish to stay are free from the use of force or intimidation that may cause them to flee. Additionally, the Court again reiterated the content of the previous orders issued for Azerbaijan.<sup>237</sup>

202. European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), on 6 July, responded to the Armenian Government's request to order Azerbaijan to remove all impediments to traffic along the Lachin Corridor. ECtHR reminded both parties that the interim measure, initially communicated to the Government of Azerbaijan on December 21, 2022, remains in effect. Consequently, ECtHR reiterated the necessity of enforcing its decision to implement interim measures under Rule 39 of the Rules of Court, within the context of the present situation, stressing that it is imperative that Azerbaijan complies with the ruling.<sup>238</sup>

### CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND CALL FOR ACTION

203. The evidence presented throughout the report shows that Azerbaijan's actions are not isolated incidents but part of a broader, deliberate strategy to erase Armenians from the South Caucasus, which lasted for 4 years, starting from September 2020 and completed with complete ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh. This was also recorded in the annual reports prepared by the non-governmental actors – the authors of this report.<sup>239</sup>

204. Azerbaijan's aggression policy has been met with an inadequate international response, which empowered its belligerent leadership to continue its campaign of ethnic cleansing with impunity and eventual success, hence also paving the way for similar hostilities other authoritarian regimes towards respective vulnerable communities.

205. It is imperative that the international community concerned with human rights and humanitarian law recognizes the grave failures of the inaction and takes immediate steps to retrieve the situation.

206. The international community must move beyond statements of concern and take meaningful and immediate actions to uphold human rights, preserve peace, and ensure justice for the Armenian people.

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<sup>237</sup>International Court of Justice, Order of International Court of Justice in the case concerning Application of The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan), 17 November 2023, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20231117-ord-01-00-en.pdf>.

<sup>238</sup> International Court of Justice, Application Of The International Convention On The Elimination Of All Forms Of Racial Discrimination (Armenia V. Azerbaijan), 6 July 2023 <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20230706-ord-01-00-en.pdf> (accessed on 25 February 2024).

<sup>239</sup>

207. Without its urgent intervention, Azerbaijan's next target will be an offensive against Armenia with an aim of ethnic cleansing of the southern Armenia covered under the name of getting "a corridor to Nakhchivan" or "return to Western Azerbaijan."

208. The following steps are critical to addressing the ongoing crisis:

- h. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) should leverage its follow-up procedures to closely monitor Azerbaijan's compliance with the recommendations provided in its 2022 concluding observations. CERD should specifically request comprehensive updates from Azerbaijan detailing measures taken to address anti-Armenian racism, including actions to counter hate speech and systemic discrimination. In cases of continued non-compliance, CERD should consider referring the matter to the Human Rights Council or the General Assembly, in line with its mandate to combat racial discrimination and uphold accountability.
- i. Council of Europe Committee of Ministers (CoM) should maintain enhanced supervision over the execution of European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments against Azerbaijan, with particular attention to cases involving racial hatred and discrimination targeting Armenians. The CoM should require Azerbaijan to submit detailed action plans and action reports demonstrating tangible progress in fulfilling its obligations under the execution proceedings of ECtHR judgments. Furthermore, the CoM should explore mechanisms to address persistent patterns of anti-Armenian racism and intolerance, utilizing findings from CERD, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), and other authoritative reports to enhance accountability measures.
- j. United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance should undertake a country visit to Azerbaijan under its standing invitation to UN special procedures. This visit should focus on monitoring and documenting incidents of racial discrimination and hate speech against Armenians in public discourse, media, and official statements. The findings should be presented in a detailed report to the Human Rights Council and other relevant UN bodies to inform concrete follow-up actions.
- k. The international community should advocate for the UN Human Rights Council, General Assembly, and Security Council to consider establishing accountability mechanisms to address systemic racism and xenophobia in Azerbaijan. Potential measures could include the creation of a Special Procedure or independent monitoring mechanism dedicated to assessing and addressing human rights violations stemming from systemic racism and ethnic discrimination.
- l. State Parties to the Rome Statute should actively support international efforts to prosecute the forced displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, including by considering a state referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

- m. Relevant international and regional organizations should ensure rigorous monitoring of hate speech and discriminatory rhetoric in Azerbaijani public discourse, media, and education systems. Media watchdogs, human rights organizations, and specialized UN bodies should collaborate to document and report on such practices, highlighting their implications for human rights and social cohesion, and propose actionable recommendations to mitigate these issues.
- n. The Government of the Republic of Armenia should continue its pursuit of international legal mechanisms to ensure accountability, including its ongoing cases before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Furthermore, the government should explore all available avenues under the Rome Statute, including the possibility of a self-referral to ICC to address crimes under its jurisdiction.