

AZƏRBAYCAN RESPUBLİKASI

MİLLİ MƏCLİSİNİN

ATƏT PA-da NÜMAYƏNDƏ HEYƏTİ



DELEGATION OF THE MILLI MAJLIS

OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

TO THE OSCE PA

TO: Mr. Pere Joan Pons
OSCE PA Vice-President and Special Representative on South Caucasus

CC: OSCE PA Bureau Members, Delegations to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly,
OSCE PA International Secretariat

Baku, 26 January 2023

Dear Vice-President Pons,
Dear Pere,

The Delegation of Azerbaijan to the OSCE PA would like to bring to your attention the following 5 points in connection to your public statement dated on 24 January 2023 concerning the situation on the Lachin road, which are of paramount importance for understanding and also objectively and fairly assessing the real situation on the ground:

Constructively addressing the issues and legitimate ecological concerns raised by Azerbaijani NGOs and eco-activists

For 44 days now in a row, the representatives of Azerbaijani non-governmental organizations and eco-activists have been picketing on the Lachin-Khankendi road against illegal exploitation and pillage of natural resources in the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan where Russian peacekeepers have been temporarily deployed, especially in the Gyzybulag gold and Demirli copper-molybdenum deposits.

There are undeniable facts and evidence of predatory exploitation and depletion of the mining sites, cutting thousands of hectares of forests, hazardous leaks from tailing dumps and ponds and many other cases of pollution which severely damaged the environment of the region.

On 3 December 2022 the officials of relevant state institutions of Azerbaijan held discussions with the command of the Russian peacekeeping forces, with participation of representatives from local Armenian residents and agreement was reached to conduct on-site inspection of mentioned mineral deposits to assess potential environmental damage and risks, including impact on underground and surface water sources, but after a week of this agreement, the access of monitoring group to the mining sites were artificially prevented by the instructed and unidentified persons.

Subsequent discussions with the Russian peacekeeping contingent's command to implement the previously reached agreement did not yield result. Accordingly, such negligence and irresponsible actions caused justified indignation of the NGOs, environmentalists and civil society activists which led to peaceful protests on the Shusha-Lachin road continuing to date. The demands of the representatives of civil society are quite simple: to put an end to the illegal exploitation and plunder of the natural resources of Azerbaijan and not to impede a work of transparent monitoring mission in these mines.

It would be wrong and unacceptable to dismiss Azerbaijan's relevant state and civil society institutions' abovementioned demands as purely the ecological concerns themselves deserve to be treated with same seriousness and urgency by all those who raised the issue, exclusively in the humanitarian context.

Misrepresentation of humanitarian situation on the ground with political purposes

Unfortunately, Armenia and its strong lobby groups are deliberately distorting the nature of the peaceful protest of Azerbaijani NGOs, misleading the international community by spreading groundless information and false alarm of a "blockade" of Armenians living in Garabakh and exposing them to a "humanitarian catastrophe" or "ethnic cleansing".

The Delegation of Azerbaijan has already officially informed the OSCE PA President Cederfelt and would like to reiterate again that Azerbaijan has not put any restriction on the traffic along the Lachin road. It is enough to mention that since the peaceful protests started, a total of 1138 vehicles of the Russian peacekeeping contingent, the ICRC and local Armenian residents passed in both directions along the Lachin road without any impediment. There is no obstruction whatsoever as to the supply of goods for the use of local residents or in terms of delivery of essential medical services. No single local resident was denied to pass. No humanitarian or civil vehicles denied passage at all.

Nevertheless, the Government of Azerbaijan on several occasions over the past weeks declared its readiness to address any humanitarian concern of our citizens of Armenian origin on the ground.

Now, it becomes clear that the main target of Armenian propaganda machine in making such a big fuss and false alarm over the "humanitarian catastrophe" is to evade responsibility of Armenian leadership for its illegal activity in this area and also not to allow of Azerbaijani expert group to monitor the ecological situation on its own internationally recognized sovereign territories in gross violations of all international legal norms, international conventions and Constitution of Azerbaijan.

Misusing of Lachin road in blatant violation of the Trilateral Statement of 10 November 2020

As you know, the Delegation of Azerbaijan has many times expressed its serious concern at the OSCE PA sessions and events on blatant violations of the Trilateral Statement of November 2020 by Armenia, in particular its para 4, 6 and 9.

According to para 4, Armenia has committed to withdraw the remnants of its illegal armed forces from Azerbaijan, but this commitment has not been implemented yet.

Under the para 6, Lachin road shall only be used for humanitarian purposes, namely for movement of citizens, vehicles and goods. In fact, this provision has been also grossly violated by Armenia as Lachin road is being misused for an illegal military build-up of this country, rotation of its armed forces and illegal transfer of weapons and personnel in Garabagh as well as for the trafficking of minerals and other wealth from the area of temporary deployment of peacekeeping contingent to Armenia and elsewhere.

Of particular concern is the transfer via the Lachin road and implantation in the territories of Azerbaijan of new anti-personnel mines produced in Armenia in 2021, i.e. after the signing of the trilateral statement in November 2020. As a matter of fact, since August 2022, some 2728 pieces of anti- personnel landmines produced in Armenia in 2021 have been found in the territories of Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, the mines already killed or maimed some 282 innocent Azerbaijanis for the last 2 years of the post-conflict period.

The continuation of planting of mines demonstrates a clear intention of Armenia to inflict as much human cost as possible on Azerbaijan in order to impede the large-scale restoration and reconstruction work carried out in liberated territories and return of former IDPs to their place of origin.

Resumption of a constructive dialogue and interaction of Azerbaijani authority with its Armenian citizens residing in Garabagh

As there are calls for dialogue, it should be reminded that Azerbaijan has consistently counted on dialogue in addressing issues in the context of post-conflict stabilization. This includes interaction with local Armenian residents in many areas of mutual interest and pertinent for reintegration agenda.

Azerbaijan has been consistent and clear in expressing its resolve to reintegrate its citizens of Armenian origin into its political, social, and economic space in accordance with the legislation and Constitution of Azerbaijan, guaranteeing equal rights to all of its citizens regardless of their national or ethnic origin.

To this end, Azerbaijan has taken consistent and successful efforts to build interactions with local Armenian residents, thus solving important issues of water, transportation and energy supply in the region. These contacts need to be encouraged and sustained.

However, this interaction was interrupted after illegal arrival of Russian made billionaire Ruben Vardanyan, a person known for dirty business schemes, to Garabakh last September. For a man who never lived in Garabagh and just recently renounced his Russian citizenship in a blaze of publicity, surprisingly left a lot behind. The installation of Vardanyan in Garabagh and self-proclamation him as “state minister” has a single agenda: to torpedo both re-integration and reconciliation process of the area where Russian peacekeeping contingent have temporarily stationed. Moreover, a fugitive banker Vardanyan’s destabilizing and destructive existence in Garabakh negatively impact on Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process consequently to keep a tension alive.

It is not coincident that, Vardanyan makes serious obstacles for some civilians wishing to travel through Lachin road in order to make a false impression of non-existence “blockade”, “humanitarian catastrophe”, “genocide”, “ethnic cleansing” of “120k Armenians”. Let alone to mention the fact of obstruction of Azerbaijani monitoring mission in the mines sites by the provocative group led by Vardanyan which still continues to date.

Azerbaijani authorities have shown considerable restraint, but will not engage with such instructed spoiler and “stranger” as Ruben Vardanyan with dubious record, who was deliberately implanted from outside into the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan to derail the fragile peace-building process.

OSCE PA’s support to the peace process and normalization of inter-state relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Despite devastating consequences and unhealed wounds of war and occupation, it was Azerbaijan which, after the end of the conflict, initiated the process of normalizing inter-State relations with Armenia based on five basic principles that include mutual recognition and respect for each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within their internationally recognized borders; delimitation and demarcation of the State border; the soonest conclusion of a peace treaty; and the opening of transport communications in the region.

At the meetings held last year in Brussels, Prague and Sochi at the highest level both sides confirmed their mutual recognition of each other’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders. This can lead to and provide a good basis for the peace treaty.

However, despite the strong support from the international community for this initiative and the diplomatic efforts made to move the normalization agenda forward, the progress remains limited. Armenia seems to stick to its past practice of imitation of negotiations and, instead of good-faith implementation of its commitments, continues to artificially delay the practical work on different tracks by putting forward groundless preconditions.

In conclusion, Delegation of Azerbaijan truly appreciates the OSCE PA readiness to support peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan in an unbiased manner and ensure the advancement of constructive negotiations, based on the principles of the Helsinki Final Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Guliyev', with a horizontal line underneath.

Azay Guliyev
Head of the Delegation of Azerbaijan to the OSCE PA