

# THE EUROPEAN UNION MISSION AS AN ATTEMPT TO INTERVENE IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

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## Introduction

Years of Armenian aggression have perpetuated chaos in the region, undermining stability and fostering lawlessness. Despite Azerbaijan's consistent commitment to constructive dialogue and peace, Armenia—relying on the backing of both virtual and real-world allies—persisted in using negotiations as a platform for escalating its propaganda and advocating for a new phase of warfare. Attempts to implement peace agreements and reintegrate occupied territories were met with resistance, highlighting Armenia's strategic use of the situation to further its ambitions. This resistance served as a reminder of the nation's disregard for the region's legitimate inhabitants, including Azerbaijani citizens, and the pivotal role of neighboring powers, particularly Turkey, in shaping regional dynamics. The situation escalated in July 2020 when Armenia launched attacks along the Tovuz border region of Azerbaijan, signaling a deliberate provocation. These actions, which included the killing of General Polad Hashimov and several Azerbaijani soldiers, aimed to stoke internal tensions and mobilize public unrest. Moreover, certain European powers' apparent interest in interfering in regional affairs further exacerbated the fragile situation, illustrating their lack of impartiality. From July 12, 2020, it became evident that external involvement sought to manipulate the growing tensions rather than contribute to peace.

Extensive negotiations followed to stabilize the region. Although external actors claimed no direct connection to the regional disputes, their eventual interference in local conflicts underscored the long-term interests of foreign powers in influencing developments within the South Caucasus.

## The Path Leading to the Arrival of the European Union Mission in the Region

On September 27, 2020, large-scale provocations by Armenian armed forces along the border regions with Azerbaijan escalated into full-scale military operations, marking the beginning of the 44-day

Patriotic War [22, p. 10]. Concerned about Azerbaijan's success in the conflict, various powers began to pursue their regional interests. As the war neared its conclusion, the Russian Federation deployed troops under the guise of "peacekeepers," delaying the resolution of the conflict. This intervention opened the door for European states to leverage the ongoing tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan to establish their presence in the South Caucasus. Following the signing of the capitulation agreement, the Armenian government sought to shift the situation in its favor by actively engaging European states to the region.

In this context, the European Union attempted to project a "peaceful" image while deploying its mission in the South Caucasus. The EU established a civilian mission in Armenia under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), with the stated objective of contributing to stability in border areas, building trust, and creating a conducive environment for normalization efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, emphasized that this mission marks a new phase in the EU's involvement in the South Caucasus. He affirmed the EU's commitment to supporting de-escalation efforts and working closely with both sides to achieve lasting peace in the region [4].

However, the Russian Federation, a key regional power, was resistant to European involvement in the South Caucasus. Some European states, expressing divergent views on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, held meetings in various countries to influence regional politics under the pretext of seeking a "positive resolution." The Brussels meeting, in particular, symbolized the geopolitical interests and power dynamics of global actors shaping the region's future.

Following the signing of the capitulation agreement, anti-Russian sentiments gradually emerged within Armenian society, accompanied by growing demands for alignment with Europe. This shift, coupled with rising tensions, created a conducive environment for European states to establish a presence

in the South Caucasus. Concerns were heightened as Armenians continued to transport weapons and ammunition to Karabakh via routes under the control of Russian peacekeepers. In response, various non-governmental organizations began to take significant steps. On December 11, 2022, members of the Azerbaijani Union of Ecologists and other NGOs launched a protest on the Khankendi-Lachin road, denouncing ecological destruction with a range of slogans [16].

The protest gained momentum, and despite its humanitarian objectives, even Russian peacekeepers expressed unease. Eventually, faced with the firm actions of Azerbaijani ecologists, Russian peacekeeping forces were compelled to retreat. However, this development elicited strong reactions from several European states. Subsequently, with the mediation of European Council President Charles Michel, regular meetings between the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia were initiated. As reported on the "EU Neighbours East" platform under the title "European Political Community: Meeting of Azerbaijan and Armenia Leaders in Prague," Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met on October 6, 2022, at the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron and European Council President Charles Michel. During the meeting, both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the UN Charter and the Alma-Ata Declaration of 1991, which recognizes each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. They agreed that this would serve as a basis for the work of border delimitation commissions, with the next meeting scheduled for late October in Brussels. Armenia agreed to facilitate the deployment of an EU civilian mission along the border with Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan expressed its willingness to cooperate with the mission where appropriate. The mission, set to last a maximum of two months, aimed to foster trust and support the work of the border commissions through its reports [7]. It is worth noting that while these developments were formally aligned with agreements, Europe's dual approach in the region became increasingly evident.

The substantial financial and trade turnover between France and Azerbaijan highlights the rapidly growing economic ties between the two nations. These relations have been achieved largely due to Azerbaijan's foreign policy initiatives and the agreements signed during the official visit of National Leader Heydar Aliyev to France [17, pp. 161-168].

In contrast, economic relations between France and Armenia have never reached a significant level, as Armenia lacks major economic projects capable of attracting French interest.

Currently, French companies play an active role in Azerbaijan's energy projects, valued at approximately 2 billion euros. Furthermore, 45 French-capital companies operate across various sectors in Azerbaijan, including industry, services, telecommunications, trade, banking, insurance, and agriculture [5]. Meanwhile, the European Union launched a civilian mission in Armenia under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) framework. Officially established by a Council Decision on January 23, 2023, this mission, known as EUMA, aims to enhance stability in Armenia's border regions, foster trust, and improve human security in conflict-affected areas. It also seeks to create a conducive environment for normalization efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as supported by the EU [4].

The EU mission was created in response to a formal request from the Armenian government to deploy a full-fledged civilian mission on the ground. This followed the successful implementation of the EU Monitoring Capacity (EUMCAP) along Armenia's border with Azerbaijan from October 20 to December 19, 2022. The mission is expected to support the EU's broader efforts to promote peace in the region [3]. However, the EU's proclaimed commitment to fostering peace is met with skepticism, as subsequent developments in the region reveal inconsistencies in its approach.

### **A Geopolitical Analysis of the Activities of the European Union Mission**

Based on Azerbaijan's observations of the European Union's initial monitoring mission in Armenia, it is evident that the mission lacks substantive arguments to contribute to peace. The mission focuses on portraying Armenians positively while ignoring the crimes committed by Armenians on Azerbaijani territories. Despite being aware of the destruction of mosques, looting of underground and surface resources, and the desecration of sacred sites, the mission has remained silent on these issues. Meanwhile, global media outlets have highlighted concerns about the closure of the Lachin-Shusha road, frequently placing such reports on their front pages. The progression of events indicates that the EU

is preparing to launch a new, long-term mission in the region. Despite the complexities of political developments in the region, Azerbaijan maintains an active and constructive role on the global stage, contributing positively to various international initiatives. Furthermore, the number of European states seeking to cooperate with Azerbaijan continues to grow [14]. One of the headlines in the media addressed Russia's ambassador to the UN Security Council, whose statements about the Lachin road raised concerns for Armenia's representative Simonyan. During UN discussions, Western countries adopted a biased stance, applying double standards to the issue. At the Security Council meeting, Anna Evstigneeva, Russia's deputy permanent representative to the UN, reiterated Russia's traditional position, calling on Azerbaijan and Armenia to show restraint, avoid actions that could escalate tensions, and adhere to the trilateral agreements signed on November 10, 2020, January 11, and November 26, 2021, as well as October 31, 2022. She emphasized that fully implementing these agreements would provide the most stable foundation for normalizing relations between Baku and Yerevan, contributing to lasting peace in the South Caucasus [19].

As European representatives deepen their involvement in the South Caucasus, Russia's stance toward Armenia, its longstanding ally, appears to be shifting. This has led to potential geopolitical changes in the region. For example, Russia's relatively neutral position frustrated Armenian parliamentary speaker Alen Simonyan, who criticized Russia for its perceived indifference: "I view Russia's statement at the UN negatively. As an ally, Russia could have made a more targeted statement, similar to those by countries with less close ties to Armenia. I think Russia either cannot, does not want to, or neither can nor wants to support Armenia. After recent events, this no longer surprises me" [18]. Reports on the EU mission indicate that Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed on the deployment of the mission along the border. This step coincided with heightened tensions at the border as the two countries moved closer to signing a peace agreement. Armenia agreed to facilitate the EU civilian mission along the border with Azerbaijan, while Azerbaijan expressed conditional willingness to cooperate [3]. However, the EU's October 6 statement lacked detailed information on the mission's scope, potential, and objec-

tives, merely noting that the mission would begin in October for a maximum duration of two months, aiming to build trust and support border commissions through its reports [3].

This progress appears to stem from the October 6 bilateral talks in Prague between Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, held as part of the European Political Community Summit. French President Emmanuel Macron and European Council President Charles Michel also participated in the discussions.

When commenting on the activities of the EU's mission in Armenia, political analyst Tigran Grigoryan told Eurasianet that these developments represent positive progress, adding that specific steps from Armenia are expected during the two-month mission. He noted that "Baku is pressuring Yerevan to expedite a peace agreement, finalize border demarcation, and resolve other outstanding issues, such as new transport routes between the two countries" [3]. Based on Grigoryan's remarks, Azerbaijan's insistence on reaching a peace agreement is perceived as pressure rather than constructive engagement. Amid these developments, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev visited the administrative headquarters of the Western Azerbaijan Community on December 24, 2022, where he emphasized historical Azerbaijani lands. Aliyev stated, "I am confident that the day will come when our compatriots, their children, and grandchildren will return to their historic homeland in Western Azerbaijan" [20]. Meanwhile, during the protests by Azerbaijani environmental activists on the Lachin-Khankendi road, certain states maintained their traditional double standards, adopting biased stances. Reflecting on these events, President Aliyev remarked during his New Year and Solidarity Day address, "We hope that donor organizations will end this injustice. Unfortunately, international donor organizations have not provided a single cent or dollar of aid to Azerbaijan, despite the large-scale destruction we have faced. We have carried out and will continue to carry out all restoration efforts at our own expense" [18].

In assessing the geopolitical interests surrounding the South Caucasus, the positions of regional actors merit attention. Israel, for instance, has taken notable steps toward collaboration with Azerbaijan. In an interview, Israeli Ambassador to Azerbaijan George Deek expressed Israel's readiness to assist

with the development of "smart cities" in the liberated territories and reiterated its commitment to supporting infrastructure restoration in Karabakh [13]. However, such initiatives have raised concerns in some countries, including Iran, which has expressed hostility toward Azerbaijan's partnerships while overlooking Armenia's actions against Islamic values [6]. This hypocritical stance further exacerbates regional tensions.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has also expressed dissatisfaction with the role of Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh, stating, "Clarifying the specifics of Russia's peacekeeping operation is essential. While I have repeatedly emphasized the importance of Russian peacekeepers for ensuring Armenian security, their recent inaction regarding regional developments raises questions" [12]. This shift in tone reflects broader tensions in Armenia-Russia relations, as highlighted in reports suggesting that Yerevan may openly support Ukraine despite Moscow's disapproval [1].

The evolving geopolitical landscape also includes broader international dynamics. Ukrainian officials remain optimistic about victory in their conflict with Russia, with plans for intensified counteroffensives in the coming months. Meanwhile, institutions like the U.S.-based Hudson Institute have urged the American government to prepare for potential scenarios involving the collapse of the Russian Federation [1]. Such developments suggest that while Russia's global influence may wane, it is more likely to transition from a geopolitical superpower to a regional player. In this context, media outlets like Charlie Hebdo in France have published biased articles against Azerbaijan, falsely alleging that the country seeks to eliminate the Armenian population of Karabakh [24]. These baseless claims, clearly aligned with Armenian narratives, undermine European values and exacerbate misinformation. Simultaneously, Ruben Vardanyan, a newly appointed Karabakh separatist leader, continues to use humanitarian pretexts to issue statements against Azerbaijan, raising concerns over violations of Azerbaijani sovereignty and airspace.

The OSCE Minsk Group failed to achieve any tangible results over three decades, and similarly, following the 44-day war, Russian peacekeeping forces did not ensure the withdrawal of Armenian military units from Karabakh. As stated in the fourth

clause of the Declaration signed by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan: "The Russian peacekeeping contingent is deployed in parallel with the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces" [21].

In 2023, a trilateral meeting in Brussels between European Council President Charles Michel, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan aimed to foster confidence in peace. However, the EU Mission's actions, perceived as encouraging Armenia toward conflict, suggest that Armenia remains reluctant to abandon its revanchist policies. After the victory in the Patriotic War, which began on September 27, 2020, in response to Armenian provocations, the positions of international organizations toward Azerbaijan shifted significantly. Prior to this, Armenia and Azerbaijan were treated equally at negotiation tables, without explicitly identifying Armenia as the aggressor.

In total, six meetings have been held between Michel, Aliyev, and Pashinyan. Key topics of discussion included the return of the Western Azerbaijan community and the provision of essential services to Armenians in areas under peacekeepers' control by Azerbaijan, rather than Armenia. During these discussions, Pashinyan's acknowledgment of "Karabakh being part of Azerbaijan" reflected a recognition of the new geopolitical realities. Additionally, Armenia's military provocations along the provisional border on February 12 raised questions about the EU's semi-military mission stationed in Armenia. This mission, intended to build trust between the two countries, had achieved no tangible success in that regard [9].

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of our research, the arrival of the European Union mission in the South Caucasus, the resurgence of Armenia's revanchist sentiments, and the futile resistance of Armenians in the Karabakh region compelled the Azerbaijani government to launch an anti-terror operation. This operation, lasting only 23 hours, concluded with the Armenians raising a white flag. While Armenia's military had agreed to sign a capitulation in 2020 after 44 days of war, the remnants of its forces in Karabakh surrendered within 23 hours.

Following the operation, approximately 27,000–

30,000 residents left Karabakh, which exposed Azerbaijan to various international pressures. A key reason for their departure was that the majority of these individuals were not Azerbaijani citizens but nationals brought to the region from Armenia and other countries. Another significant factor was their involvement in crimes against Azerbaijan, including acts of ethnic cleansing and genocide in collaboration with separatist forces. These realities underline the challenges faced in restoring stability and sovereignty in the region.

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### XÜLASƏ

Məqalə Ermənistanın və bəzi dövlətlərin regionda sülh prosesinə maneə olan destruktiv fəaliyyətlərini və separatizmi dəstəkləyən siyasətlərini təhlil edir. Xankəndi-Şuşa yolunda ekoloji ziyana qarşı etiraz edən azərbaycanlı gənclərin fəaliyyətləri beynəlxalq mediada vurğulanır və bu, təhlilin mühüm hissəsini təşkil edir. Araşdırma həmçinin bu fəaliyyətlərin davamını, Cənubi Qafqazda Avropa nümayəndələrinin monitoring missiyasında iştirakını və regional mün-

aqişələrdə geosiyasi maraqların həyata keçirilməsini əhatə edir. Xüsusi diqqət Avropa İttifaqının Cənubi Qafqazdakı missiyasına yönəldilir, bu da regionda əhəmiyyətli təsirə malik olan dövlətlər arasında narahatlıq doğurur.

**Açar sözlər:** *Avropa İttifaqı, Cənubi Qafqaz, Azərbaycan, Ermənistan, Missiya.*

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### РЕЗЮМЕ

Статья анализирует деструктивные действия Армении и некоторых государств, которые препятствуют мирному процессу в регионе и способствуют поддержке сепаратизма. Деятельность азербайджанской молодежи, протестующей против экологического ущерба на дороге Ханкенди-Шуша, которая освещается в международных СМИ, составляет значительную часть анализа. Исследование также охватывает продолжение этой деятельности, участие европейских представителей в наблюдательных миссиях на Южном Кавказе и реализацию геополитических интересов в региональных конфликтах. Особое внимание уделяется миссии Европейского Союза на Южном Кавказе, которая вызывает беспокойство среди государств региона, обладающих значительным влиянием.

**Ключевые слова:** *Европейский Союз, Южный Кавказ, Азербайджан, Армения, Миссия.*

### SUMMARY

The article examines the obstructive actions of Armenia and certain states, which hinder the peace process in the region and promote policies supporting separatism. The ongoing activities of Azerbaijani youth protesting against ecological damage on the Khankandi-Shusha road, as highlighted in international media, form a significant component of the analysis. The study also addresses the continuation of these activities, the involvement of European representatives in surveillance missions in the South Caucasus, and the pursuit of geopolitical interests in regional conflicts. Particular focus is given to the

European Union's mission in the South Caucasus, which has raised concerns among regional states with substantial influence in the area.

**Keywords:** *European Union, South Caucasus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Mission.*