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OF INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS

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This book was jointly prepared by Azerbaijani and French analysts and scholars at the initiative of the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center)



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EDITOR: VASIF HUSEYNOV

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FOREWORD

Farid Shafiyev

Chairman of the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center)

Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the French Republic are rooted in long-standing ties based on mutual respect, strategic interests, and a shared commitment to international engagement. Since gaining independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has consistently regarded France as an important partner in Europe – politically, economically, and culturally. The significance of this relationship was underscored by the fact that, after assuming office, both President Heydar Aliyev and President Ilham Aliyev made their first official overseas visits to Paris – Heydar Aliyev on December 19–22, 1993, and Ilham Aliyev on January 23, 2004. These landmark visits symbolized Azerbaijan's recognition of France as a vital interlocutor in the West and laid the foundation for deepened cooperation in the decades that followed.

The bilateral partnership between France and Azerbaijan has been especially strong in the economic domain. French companies have played a notable role in Azerbaijan's energy sector, including in upstream oil and gas exploration and strategic pipeline projects. The long-standing presence of companies such as TotalEnergies, which has participated in major developments like the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Absheron gas field, demonstrates the depth of this cooperation. Beyond energy, French expertise in areas such as transportation, water management, renewable energy, and urban infrastructure continues to contribute to Azerbaijan's modernization and diversification agenda.

Despite this promising foundation, one aspect of the bilateral relationship has posed serious challenges – France's approach to the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and one of the co-chairs of the now-defunct OSCE Minsk Group, France was entrusted with a special responsibility: to uphold the principles of international law and to serve as a neutral and honest broker in the peace process. Unfortunately, France has not lived up to these expectations.

Throughout the nearly three-decade-long occupation of Azerbaijani territories by Armenian forces, France failed to exert meaningful pressure on Yerevan to comply with United Nations Security Council Resolutions

822, 853, 874, and 884, which demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from Azerbaijani lands. Instead of promoting the implementation of these resolutions, successive French administrations allowed domestic political considerations – particularly the lobbying efforts of influential Armenian diaspora groups—to overshadow their commitment to impartial diplomacy. This imbalance emboldened Armenia's military and political elite, reducing their incentive to engage seriously in peace negotiations and to return the occupied territories through dialogue.

Regrettably, France's position towards this issue started to take a more radical pro-Armenian character in the period following the Second Karabakh War in 2020. Rather than acknowledging the new post-war realities on the ground and contributing to sustainable peace in the region, France opted to deepen its military support to Armenia. French authorities have signed arms agreements, provided surveillance and defense equipment, and voiced overt political backing for Yerevan's positions. Such actions have done little to promote peace. Instead, they have encouraged revanchist elements within Armenia that remain opposed to reconciliation and continue to challenge the integrity of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized borders.

And yet, despite these difficulties, we now stand at a hopeful juncture in the history of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. Azerbaijan has fully restored its territorial integrity. The illegal armed formations of Armenia have withdrawn from Azerbaijan's sovereign lands. For the first time in over three decades, both Armenia and Azerbaijan are seriously engaged in direct negotiations and are closer than ever to signing a historic peace treaty that can lay the groundwork for long-term stability in the South Caucasus.

In this context, it is our hope that France – guided by its values and its long-standing interests in the region – will re-evaluate its policies and resume a balanced and constructive role. We believe that the future of Franco-Azerbaijani relations still holds immense potential, not only in the economic and cultural spheres, but also in contributing to the new architecture of peace and cooperation in our region.

This book brings together valuable insights and critical analyses from leading French and Azerbaijani analysts and scholars. They shed light on France's past and present engagement in the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. It is our intention to contribute to an informed and open discussion that can help advance mutual understanding and more responsible diplomacy in the years ahead.

INTRODUCTION

Vasif Huseynov

The former Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict represented one of the most protracted and complex territorial disputes in the post-Soviet space. Its origins lie deep in historical, ethnic, and geopolitical factors, unfolding against the dramatic backdrop of the Soviet Union's dissolution and the reconfiguration of regional and global power dynamics. Over the course of more than three decades, this conflict has drawn the attention of regional powers, international organizations, and global actors, all of which have sought – albeit with varying degrees of success – to mediate, contain, or capitalize on the tensions.

At the heart of this dispute was the territorial claim of Armenia to the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, a mountainous region internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan. The initial war in the early 1990s resulted in the Armed Forces of Armenia occupying the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) and seven adjacent Azerbaijani districts, precipitating mass displacements, violence, and profound humanitarian suffering. Despite several ceasefire attempts and protracted negotiations, a final settlement remained elusive for decades, punctuated by intermittent skirmishes and renewed hostilities. Peace negotiations failed for three decades due to Armenia's refusal to return the occupied Azerbaijani territories in blatant defiance of four resolutions of the United Nations Security Council that demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from Azerbaijani soil.

The second major escalation, known as the Second Karabakh War or 44-day war, which took place in 2020, reshaped the conflict landscape dramatically. The counteroffensive military operations of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan resulted in the liberation of the occupied territories. Azerbaijan succeeded in putting a complete end to this conflict in September 2023 through one-day anti-terror measures against the separatist regime installed by Armenia in the Azerbaijani territories following the occupation in the early 1990s. The conflict chapter was closed with the dissolution of the separatist regime and the restoration of Azerbaijan's sovereignty over all its internationally recognized territories.

This conflict's complexity was not merely territorial: it was embedded within a multilayered geopolitical matrix involving regional powers such as Russia,

Türkiye, and Iran, as well as global actors including the European Union, the United States, and France. Each external actor – both during the conflict and in the post-conflict peace process – has pursued competing interests shaped by strategic considerations, energy security, historical ties, and domestic political factors. Notably, France's role has been both distinctive and evolving, as it has sought to balance its legalistic commitment to international law, its historical relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the influence of its sizable Armenian diaspora.

Historical and Geopolitical Context

Understanding the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict requires situating it within the broader historical context of the South Caucasus, a region marked by diverse ethnic groups and imperial legacies. As the authors of this book highlight, the Soviet policy of 'divide and rule' complicated interethnic relations by creating autonomous oblasts and delineating borders without fully reflecting demographic realities. The collapse of the Soviet Union unleashed suppressed national aspirations and territorial claims, igniting violent confrontations.

The geopolitical dimension is equally critical. Azerbaijan's abundant energy resources and its strategic position connecting Europe and Asia through the Caspian Sea have attracted substantial international interest. Countries such as Türkiye have pursued assertive policies supporting Azerbaijan, while Russia has acted as a power broker, leveraging its military presence and historical ties to maintain influence. Iran's nuanced role, as a neighbor concerned with stability and minority issues, adds further complexity.

The involvement of international institutions like the United Nations and the OSCE – particularly the Minsk Group, co-chaired by Russia, the United States, and France – reflected the global recognition of the conflict's potential to destabilize the wider region. Yet, as noted by Sultan Zahidov and the French authors of this book, the Minsk Group's peace process has often been criticized for stagnation and ineffectiveness, with the 2020 war underscoring the limitations of diplomatic efforts when confronted with renewed military realities.

France's Role: Between Law, Diaspora, and Diplomacy

France's engagement with the conflict has been shaped by a confluence of legal principles, historical relations, domestic political factors, geopolitical

and other interests. Early on, France supported Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, aligning with United Nations Security Council resolutions condemning the acquisition of territory by force. Its participation as a Minsk Group co-chair emphasized its commitment to peaceful negotiation based on international law.

However, the influence of France's Armenian diaspora – numbering approximately 600,000 individuals – has been significant in shaping public opinion and parliamentary debates. This community, deeply rooted and politically active, has mobilized support for Armenian causes, framing the conflict not only in territorial terms but also as a struggle for self-determination and protection of Christian minorities. This dynamic has complicated France's diplomatic posture, leading to perceptions of bias and loss of impartiality in Baku.

The French Parliament's non-binding resolutions condemning Azerbaijani military actions and affirming support for Armenian claims to Karabakh, particularly after the 2020 war and the subsequent crises, have exacerbated tensions. Concurrently, French government actions – such as military cooperation with Armenia and humanitarian aid – have reinforced these concerns. Yet, France continued to officially recognize Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and the inviolability of internationally recognized borders, indicating a nuanced but often contradictory stance.

Economically, France and Azerbaijan have shared significant cooperation, especially in the energy sector, with French companies like TotalEnergies playing key roles in the development of Azerbaijan's oil and gas infrastructure. Cultural and educational exchanges, exemplified by institutions such as the French-Azerbaijani University, have further cemented the relationship. These ties illustrate the multifaceted nature of Franco-Azerbaijani relations, which encompass diplomacy, economics, culture, and civil society.

The Contemporary Landscape and Challenges

The post-2020 environment has brought new challenges and opportunities. The trilateral statement that was brokered by Russia following the war has imposed a delicate balance, with unresolved issues – such as the return of displaced populations, the fate of cultural heritage, border demarcation, and regional security – remaining contentious. The deepening military cooperation between Azerbaijan and Türkiye, as well as the increasing Western support for

Armenia, including French military aid, have heightened regional tensions and complicated prospects for lasting peace.

Diplomatic incidents between France and Azerbaijan, including reciprocal expulsions of diplomats and cancellations of cultural projects, illustrate the fraying of what had been relatively stable bilateral relations. The international community's role remains pivotal, but traditional mechanisms, such as the Minsk Group, have lost some influence amid shifting geopolitical realities, including the impact of the Ukraine conflict and evolving Russian policies.

Reconciliation efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan are cautiously progressing, with recent announcements about peace agreement negotiations offering a glimmer of hope. The involvement of major international actors, including France, the European Union, Russia, and the United States, underscores the conflict's continuing global significance.

Structure of the book

This book presents a critical analysis of France's evolving role in the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict and its aftermath, particularly in light of the 2020 Second Karabakh War and subsequent geopolitical developments. Bringing together the perspectives of five prominent scholars and analysts – Sultan Zahidov, Jean-Emmanuel Medina, Gil Mihaely, and Christian Vallar – the volume offers a multidisciplinary examination of the diplomatic, legal, historical, and ideological dimensions of France's involvement in the former Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. Collectively, these contributions provide a well-rounded Azerbaijani viewpoint on why France has failed to act as a neutral and constructive mediator, despite its formal responsibilities as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and former co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group.

The two opening chapters are authored by **Sultan Zahidov**, a leading fellow at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), who meticulously examines France's obligations under international law concerning the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. Zahidov's contribution is grounded in a legal analysis of the four UN Security Council resolutions adopted in 1993 – Resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884 – which demanded the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of Armenian occupying forces from the territories of Azerbaijan. He argues that France, by virtue of its privileged role in the UN and its co-chairmanship of the OSCE Minsk Group, bore a special

responsibility to ensure the enforcement of these resolutions. However, as Zahidov demonstrates, Paris systematically failed to exert meaningful pressure on Armenia to comply with these international demands. Instead, France adopted a policy of passive toleration toward Armenia's occupation and, over time, even lent rhetorical and political support to the Armenian position. Zahidov contends that this abdication of responsibility not only undermined the UN framework but also emboldened the Armenian military and political elite to maintain the status quo of occupation, which eventually led to renewed hostilities in 2020.

The third chapter, by **Jean-Emmanuel Medina**, a lawyer and international relations expert, explores the broader historical trajectory of France–Azerbaijan relations and how these ties have been tested by recent developments. Medina offers a balanced yet critical overview of the longstanding cooperation between Paris and Baku. He recalls the early diplomatic recognition granted by France to Azerbaijan following its independence in 1991, and he underscores the productive partnerships in the energy, infrastructure, and education sectors. However, Medina meticulously details how these ties began to unravel after the Second Karabakh War, as French officials made a series of statements and policy moves perceived in Baku as overtly pro-Armenian. In particular, he focuses on the French Parliament's non-binding resolutions calling for the recognition of the so-called 'Nagorno-Karabakh Republic,' and the French Ministry of Armed Forces' growing military cooperation with Armenia, including arms supplies and defense training. Medina argues that these actions are inconsistent with France's stated commitment to international law and have significantly damaged its image as a credible mediator.

In the chapter "Baku–Paris–Yerevan: Reason and Emotion in the South Caucasus," **Gil Mihaely** explores the evolution of France's foreign policy toward Azerbaijan, tracing its transformation from early strategic engagement in the 1990s to a more openly pro-Armenian orientation in recent years. Mihaely argues that this shift cannot be fully explained by traditional realist paradigms, which emphasize geopolitical interest and elite decision-making, but must also account for the influence of public opinion, historical narratives, and identity politics – particularly the growing role of the Armenian diaspora in shaping France's political discourse. He situates France's initial alignment with Azerbaijan in the early post-Soviet period within a pragmatic strategy centered on energy diplomacy and geopolitical positioning. The chapter demonstrates how emotion, memory, and national identity can significantly impact foreign policy decisions, particularly within democracies, and warns

that France's recent tilt toward Armenia, including military support, risks undermining regional stability and reshaping the balance of power in the post-2020 South Caucasus.

The final chapter is authored by **Professor Christian Vallar**, a prominent expert in constitutional and international law. Vallar offers a legal-political critique of recent legislative and executive actions taken by French institutions in relation to the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. He scrutinizes the constitutional implications of parliamentary resolutions advocating for the recognition of the so-called 'Nagorno-Karabakh Republic' and argues that such initiatives, while symbolic, are in conflict with France's obligations under international law and its diplomatic commitments. He suggests that these moves risk escalating tensions in the region and run contrary to France's declared interest in promoting peace and stability in the South Caucasus. Ultimately, Vallar calls for a recalibration of French foreign policy to prioritize neutrality, legality, and genuine conflict resolution.

Taken together, the five chapters in this book offer a sobering and evidence-based assessment of France's recent behavior in the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process. The authors, who are from diverse intellectual and professional backgrounds, converge on a common conclusion: that France's current posture is incompatible with the expectations placed upon it by virtue of its international status, and that a shift toward greater balance and responsibility is urgently needed.

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: PARTICIPATION OF FRANCE IN THE ARMENIA–AZERBAIJAN CONFLICT BEFORE THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR

Sultan Zahidov

France's enduring strategic and economic interests in the Near and Middle East, as well as the South Caucasus region, have historically positioned it as a significant external actor influencing developments in these areas. Since the 19th century, and particularly during the reign of Napoleon III – who proclaimed himself the protector of Eastern Christians, including Armenians – France has actively supported the 'Armenian Question,' which entailed the establishment of an Armenian state through the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. During the First World War, France created the Armenian Legion, composed of four battalions and approximately 5,000 troops, with the aim of occupying and securing a regime in Eastern Anatolia.¹ The formation of this legion was initiated by Boghos Nubar Pasha, an Egyptian Armenian who would later lead one of the two Armenian delegations at the Paris Peace Conference. In 1916, following several months of negotiations in Paris, Nubar successfully persuaded the French government to form the Armenian Legion as a means of safeguarding French geopolitical interests in the region. In the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire's anticipated defeat, the Armenian nationalist movement, which sought to establish a state in Eastern Anatolia, viewed French political and military support as essential to the realization of its territorial aspirations. To this end, France not only supplied arms and training to Armenian forces in Eastern Anatolia but also sought to widen the front against the Ottoman Empire. Ultimately, France's main goal was to ensure the fragmentation of the Ottoman state and thereby consolidate its influence over former Ottoman territories.

Following the First World War, France continued to rely on Armenian cooperation to capitalize on the evolving geopolitical conjuncture in the South Caucasus. Advocating for the concept of a 'Greater Armenia' extending from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea—largely at the expense of Ottoman and Azerbaijani territorial integrity—France sought to consolidate its influence in the

¹ Carzou.J.M., *La Légion d'Orient et le mandat français en Cilicie (1916-1921)*, imprescriptible.fr, Available at: <https://www.imprescriptible.fr/rhac/tome3/p2a> (Accessed: April 20, 2025).

region through Armenian assistance, particularly in the context of the Ottoman Empire's collapse and the concurrent Russian Civil War. Between 1918 and 1920, as three independent republics—Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia – emerged in the South Caucasus, France aimed to assert its geopolitical and geo-economic interests in the region. At the Paris Peace Conference, where the postwar international order was being negotiated, Armenia was represented by two separate delegations comprising approximately 40 members. In the early stages of the conference, France offered diplomatic support for Armenian claims to independence but did not extend the same level of recognition or assistance to Azerbaijan. Notably, the French authorities delayed the issuance of visas to the Azerbaijani delegation traveling from Istanbul to Paris, thereby trying to limit Azerbaijan's participation in the proceedings.² Although France, alongside other Allied powers, eventually granted de facto recognition to both Armenia and Azerbaijan, it subsequently, on August 10, 1920, co-signed the Treaty of Sèvres. This treaty included extensive territorial concessions to Armenia. Under Articles 88 and 89, Türkiye was obligated to recognize Armenian independence and cede several provinces in Eastern Anatolia and along the Black Sea coast—including Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, and Trabzon.³ However, the rise of the Turkish National Movement radically altered these plans. Through a successful military campaign, Turkish forces reasserted control over Eastern Anatolia, nullifying the proposed territorial reassignments. The new status quo was formalized in the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which marked international recognition of the new geopolitical reality.

Among the factors underlying France's historical support for Armenians – beyond religious solidarity and geopolitical objectives – it is also necessary to note the influence of the Armenian diaspora, which holds a certain degree of sway within the country. According to some sources, the number of Armenians in France reaches approximately 600,000, making it the largest Armenian community in Europe.⁴ Of these, nearly 400,000 are French-born Armenians, which indicates a long-standing presence and a degree of involvement in

2 Musa. İ Foreign Policy of Azerbaijan (XX century), Baku, 2005, p.136

3 **Dipublico.org**, *The Treaty of Sèvres (1920): The Treaty of Peace Between the Allied and Associated Powers and Türkiye, Signed at Sèvres, August 10, 1920*, Available at: <https://www.dipublico.org/100760/the-treaty-of-sevres-1920-the-treaty-of-peace-between-the-allied-and-associated-powers-and-türkiye-signed-at-sevres-august-10-1920/> (Accessed: May 10, 2025)

4 Briand.C., Armenia-France Relations: An Overview, Networkstate.io, Available at: <https://networkstate.io/publications/armenia-france-relations-an-overview/> (Accessed: May 10, 2025)

France's political, social, economic, and cultural processes. As early as the late 19th and early 20th centuries, some Armenians who had emigrated to France attempted to influence French politics by appealing to Christian solidarity. For instance, Archag Tchobanian, who settled in France in 1895, established the journal *Pro-Armenia* and succeeded in garnering the sympathy of notable French intellectuals and politicians such as Georges Clemenceau, Jean Jaurès, and Anatole France. Nevertheless, Georges Clemenceau – who would later become Prime Minister – adopted a more pragmatic stance toward Armenia, basing his policy on France's strategic interests. On January 14, 1919, the Patriarch of the Cilician Catholic Church, Terzian XIII, sent a letter to Clemenceau requesting official French support for Armenian independence in the Southern Caucasus and Eastern Anatolia. Clemenceau, however, remained skeptical of such proposals.⁵ During the Paris Peace Conference, his government opposed allocating financial aid to Armenia and limited its support to diplomatic recognition. Aware of Azerbaijan's greater strategic value to France – due to its oil resources and geographic position – the Clemenceau government, acting within the framework of the Allied Supreme Council, granted de facto recognition to Azerbaijan on January 11, 1920,⁶ and to Armenia on January 19, 1920.⁷ It is worth noting that, during this same period, Armenia asserted territorial claims against Azerbaijan and submitted maps to the Paris Peace Conference on which the Karabakh, Zangezur, and Nakhchivan regions of Azerbaijan were depicted as part of Armenian territory.⁸

During the Cold War, the influence of Armenians residing in France on the country's political and social landscape remained significant. This enduring presence created favorable conditions for the Armenian diaspora to more actively promote the 'Armenian Question' within the French public and political agenda. Following the 1981 attack on the Turkish Consulate in Paris by the Armenian terrorist organization ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for

5 **Diplomatie.gouv.fr**, *Diplomatic Archives: The Peace Conference, Paris, 18/01/1919*, Available at: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/the-ministry-and-its-network/the-diplomatic-archives/documents-from-the-diplomatic-archives/article/diplomatic-archives-the-peace-conference-paris-18-01-1919> (Accessed: May 10, 2025)

6 Mamoulia.G. and Abutalibov.R., The history of the recognition of Azerbaijan's de facto state independence at the Paris Peace Conference, *İrs.az*, 2016, Available at: <https://irs-az.com/new/files/2017/194/2498.pdf> (Accessed: May 1, 2025)

7 **History.state.gov**, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1920, Volume III, Document 933*, 1920, Available at: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1920v03/d933> (Accessed: May 7, 2025)

8 Musa. İ *Foreign Policy of Azerbaijan (XX century)*, 2005, Baku, p.183

the Liberation of Armenia), the relatively lenient sentences imposed by French courts on the perpetrators provoked widespread criticism. The incident also fueled speculation about the existence of a covert agreement between the French government and ASALA.⁹ It is important to note that ASALA carried out another major terrorist attack in 1983 at Orly Airport. The bomb exploded at the Turkish Airlines check-in counter, killing eight people and injuring fifty-five others. On this occasion, however, the French government responded more decisively: the arrested individuals of Armenian origin received significantly harsher sentences than in previous cases.¹⁰

One of the more complicated and telling episodes in France's approach to Armenian militancy was the case of Varoujan Garabedian. It should be noted that he led the French branch of ASALA and was responsible for the 1983 Orly Airport bombing, which left several people dead and many more injured. Even though he was sentenced to life in prison in France in 1985, Armenian advocacy groups pushed for his release over the years – eventually gathering over a million signatures, according to some reports. In 2001, the French authorities released him, citing good conduct and humanitarian grounds, and decided to deport him to Armenia. There, he was met with applause – welcomed by Prime Minister Andranik Margaryan and praised by public figures who cast him not as a terrorist, but as a 'patriot.'¹¹ Garabedian's glorification, despite his conviction for a deadly act of terrorism, highlighted the extent to which nationalist and anti-Turkish sentiment have shaped public narratives in Armenia and within the diaspora, often at the expense of universal norms of justice and accountability. The heroization of someone convicted in a deadly bombing did not sit well in Türkiye or Azerbaijan, where it was seen as deeply offensive and damaging to already fragile relations with France.

Meanwhile, the 1980s marked a time when winds of change and geopolitical turbulence began to impact various regions around the world. By the second half of the 1980s, Armenians in Karabakh, taking advantage of the weakening of the Soviet Union, began organizing a separatist '*Miatsum*' movement aimed

9 Gunter, M. M., "Armenian Terrorism: A Reappraisal", *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 27(2), 2007, Available at: <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/view/10546> (Accessed: May 1, 2025)

10 Giniger, H., Freudenheim, M. and Douglas, C.C. The World: Sympathy Won't Help, *New-York Times*, July 24, 1983, Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/07/24/weekinreview/the-world-sympathy-won-t-help.html> (Accessed: May 10, 2025)

11 Varoujan Garabedian, *Timenote.info*, Available at: <https://timenote.info/en/Varoujan-Garabedian> (Accessed: May 3, 2025)

at uniting Karabakh with Armenia, with the support of the Armenian SSR and Moscow. In 1987, the removal of the late President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, from the Cabinet of Ministers and the Politburo of the Soviet Union created a new opportunity for Armenians to pursue this goal. Another event that served as a catalyst for these developments occurred on November 16, 1987, when Abel Aganbekyan, economic adviser to the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, met with representatives of the Armenian diaspora at the Intercontinental Hotel in Paris. During the meeting, Aganbekyan asserted that the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast ought to be incorporated into Armenia and stated that he had conveyed this recommendation directly to Gorbachev. Aganbekyan's statements were later published in the French magazine *L'Humanité*, which had a significant readership in the Soviet Union. These remarks, which were subsequently widely disseminated by Armenian newspapers, journals, radio, and television, not only contributed to the spread of separatist ideas but also became one of the factors that triggered the Armenian–Azerbaijani confrontation during that period.¹² The escalation of events culminated in February 1988, when Armenian deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (within the Azerbaijan SSR) sent an appeal to Moscow requesting the region's annexation to Armenia. This was soon followed by a similar resolution adopted by the Armenian SSR Supreme Soviet, the mass deportation of approximately 300,000 ethnic Azerbaijanis from Armenia, and the subsequent rise of the national liberation movement in Azerbaijan.

Although the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the emergence of independent states, the conflict zones that had arisen in the 1980s across the post-Soviet space began to flare up even more. The Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict, which had previously been largely of an ethno-political nature, turned into an inter-state war following the independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The war, which began as a result of Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijan's territories recognized under international law and its policy of ethnic cleansing against Azerbaijanis, went down in history as the First Karabakh War. As a result of this full-scale invasion, 20% of Azerbaijan's territory was occupied by Armenia, more than 20,000 Azerbaijanis were killed in the fighting, and nearly one million people became refugees and internally displaced persons. During the war, Armenia violated fundamental principles of international law and international conventions by carrying out acts of terror,

12 Niftaliyev, I., 1988: Final stage of the deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia, *İrs. az*, 2014, Available at: <https://irs-az.com/new/pdf/201412/1418906674879867137.pdf> (Accessed: April 12, 2025)

massacres (in Khojaly, Bashlibel, Aghdaban, etc.), and a policy of ethnic and cultural cleansing against Azerbaijani civilians. The First Karabakh War lasted from 1991 until the signing of the Bishkek Protocol on a ceasefire in 1994. During the war, the UN Security Council adopted four resolutions (822, 853, 874, 884) demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of occupying forces from Azerbaijani territories. However, despite their binding nature under international law, the international community failed to exert sufficient pressure on Armenia to ensure their implementation.¹³

Several proposals and mechanisms were put forward regarding the resolution of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict during the First Karabakh War. Although the United Nations initially demonstrated some involvement in resolving the conflict, it later deemed it more appropriate to transfer this responsibility to the CSCE. Consequently, the OSCE Minsk Group, established in 1992, began to engage in efforts to resolve the conflict.¹⁴

During that period, France, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, sought to assert a role in the resolution of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. However, the influence of the Armenian diaspora in France was clearly noticeable in Paris's official stance on the issue. According to various sources, while France urged Türkiye to provide humanitarian assistance to Armenia during the war, it simultaneously turned a blind eye to the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis as a result of the Armenian occupation.¹⁵ Furthermore, according to information from the U.S. Department of State, in April 1993, France's representative to the UN Security Council, Jean-Bernard Mérimée, played a direct role in softening the language of a draft resolution proposed by the U.S. representative concerning the occupation of Azerbaijan's Kalbajar region by Armenian armed forces. This revision involved replacing the explicit reference to Armenia with the phrase "local Armenian forces." At the time, France reportedly threatened to veto the resolution if Armenia were directly named, ultimately leading to the removal of Armenia's name as a party to the conflict in the final version of UN Security Council Resolution 822.¹⁶

13 **President.az**, *Karabakh – A Historical Overview*, Available at: <https://president.az/en/pages/view/azerbaijan/karabakh> (Accessed: May 13, 2025)

14 Musa. İ *Foreign Policy of Azerbaijan III part*, 2010, Baku, p.127

15 Shukurlu.F., *France's Role in the Armenia–Azerbaijan Conflict in Perspective*, Theliberum.com, February 3, 2025, Available at: <https://theliberum.com/frances-role-in-the-armenia-azerbaijan-conflict-inperspective/> (Accessed: May 13, 2025)

16 Sanamyan.E., *From the Archives: How France Influenced UN'S Karabakh Resolution*,

It should be noted that Azerbaijan has always attached great importance to establishing constructive relations with France, including in the spheres of trade, energy, and economic cooperation. It was for this reason that the first official overseas visit by Azerbaijan's then-President Heydar Aliyev was to France, on December 19, 1993. During that visit, President Aliyev met with French President François Mitterrand to discuss the prospects for cooperation between the two countries, as well as the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. Within the framework of the visit, President Aliyev signed the Agreement on Friendship, Mutual Understanding and Cooperation between Azerbaijan and France, as well as the Paris Charter for a New Europe.¹⁷

France's involvement in the resolution of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, as one of the three co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (alongside the United States and Russia), formally began in 1997. At the time, Azerbaijan's President Heydar Aliyev initially viewed France's mediating role with skepticism, largely due to the influence of the powerful Armenian diaspora in France. However, he later consented to France's participation following assurances from President Jacques Chirac regarding France's commitment to neutrality.¹⁸ While France generally maintained a formally neutral stance during negotiations – particularly in the period leading up to the Second Karabakh War in 2020 – this posture shifted noticeably during the presidency of Emmanuel Macron, who adopted a more openly pro-Armenian position. France's earlier support for the 1993 UN Security Council resolutions condemning the occupation of Azerbaijani territories, its recognition of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity at the 1996 OSCE Lisbon Summit, and its declared intention to act as a neutral mediator in the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict all indicate that, at the time, Paris sought to pursue a more balanced and even-handed policy toward both South Caucasus states.

Between 1997 and 1998, the OSCE Minsk Group proposed several initiatives aimed at resolving the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. Among these, the 'stage-by-stage approach' was regarded as a promising framework by both Azerbaijan and Armenia. On October 10, 1997, in a joint statement issued

dornsife.usc.edu, May 28, 2020, <https://dornsife.usc.edu/armenian/2020/05/28/from-the-archives-how-france-influenced-uns-karabakh-resolution/> (Accessed: May 11, 2025)

17 Lib.aliyev-heritage.org, Azərbaycan - Fransa münasibətlərinə dair ümumi tarixi arayış, Ümumi Tarixi Arayışlar, January 23, 2018, Available at: <https://lib.aliyev-heritage.org/az/178352.html> (Accessed: May 2, 2025)

18 Sadiqov.F., Heydar Aliyev Lessons, Xalq newspaper, May 13, 2023, Available at: <https://xalqgazeti.az/az/sosialheyat/127829-heyder-eliyev-dersleri> (Accessed: May 10, 2025)

in Strasbourg, the presidents of the two countries stated that “the recent proposals of the Co-Chairmen were a hopeful basis for the resumption of negotiations within the framework of the Minsk Group.” According to the proposal, the first stage entailed the withdrawal of occupying forces from the regions surrounding Karabakh, with the exception of Lachin. However, radical and militaristic factions within Armenia quickly opposed the plan. In response to their mounting pressure and organized protests, President Levon Ter-Petrosyan was compelled to resign. Subsequently, Robert Kocharian assumed power in March 1998 and formally withdrew Armenia’s consent for the stage-by-stage settlement proposal, effectively returning the peace process to a stalemate.¹⁹

During Heydar Aliyev’s second official visit to France, from January 13 to 15, 1997, he held a meeting with French President Jacques Chirac. During this meeting, Chirac stated that, as an active member of the Minsk Group, France would further expand its activities and intensify efforts to use its influence to facilitate a swift resolution of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. It should be noted that, during this visit, an agreement was signed between the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) and the French oil companies Elf Aquitaine and Total concerning the joint development of the Lankaran-Talysh Sea oil fields. The contract, valued at approximately US\$1.5 billion, envisaged the extraction of 350 million barrels of oil. Subsequently, Heydar Aliyev met with French Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette, and during the meeting they discussed the development of Franco-Azerbaijani relations and the peaceful settlement of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict.²⁰

The aforementioned meetings underscore Azerbaijan’s prioritization of pragmatic relations with France and its emphasis on cooperation across various sectors, including trade, economics, energy, culture, and science, since the early years of its independence. Heydar Aliyev’s policy of rapprochement with France was driven by two primary objectives: (a) to establish an effective geopolitical balance against Russia’s ambitions in the region, and (b) to introduce rational elements into Franco-Azerbaijani relations while mitigating the influence of the Armenian diaspora. It is important to note that France,

19 **Mfa.gov.az**, *Conflict Settlement Process 1991–2020*, Available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/category/conflict-settlement-process-1991-2020> (Accessed: April 10, 2025)

20 **Azertag.az**, *Azerbaijan State Oil Company and French Companies ELF, Akiten, and Total Sign Oil Agreement*, Available at: https://azertag.az/xeber/azerbaycan_dovlet_neft_sirketi_ile_fransanin_elf_akiten_ve_total_sirketleri_arasinda_neft_muqavilesinin_imzalanma_merasimi-804072 (Accessed: May 10, 2025)

influenced by the Armenian diaspora, has intermittently adopted a biased stance towards Azerbaijan, often compromising pragmatic strategic interests in favor of certain lobby groups. The Armenian diaspora in France, which holds a significant position, exerts influence across various domains, including the political, social, cultural, religious, educational, scientific, and economic spheres. France hosts the third-largest Armenian diaspora worldwide and the largest in Europe, with an estimated population of approximately 600,000 individuals. Consequently, Armenian lobbying efforts have considerable capacity to shape both public opinion and French foreign policy. In general, the main goals of the Armenian diaspora and lobby, which are notably active in France, can be listed as follows: ensuring the active participation of the Armenian diaspora in political processes; keeping the issue of the so-called Armenian genocide constantly on the agenda for specific purposes; strengthening France–Armenia relations; preserving Armenian identity; obtaining support for Armenia's unfounded territorial claims related to Karabakh; and influencing France's foreign policy, especially its policies regarding Türkiye and the South Caucasus, in line with the interests of the Armenian diaspora.²¹

The activities of the Armenian diaspora in France can be exemplified by the official recognition of the so-called Armenian genocide by the French government in 2001. On May 19, 1998, the French National Assembly, influenced by the Socialist faction, adopted a legislative act recognizing the alleged genocide. Subsequently, in 2000, the French Senate passed a resolution concerning the “1915 genocide in the Ottoman Empire,” which President Jacques Chirac ratified in January 2001, thereby enacting it into law. Further legislative efforts followed in 2006 and 2012, when laws aimed at penalizing the denial of the ‘Armenian genocide’ were introduced by the French Parliament. In 2012, the French Senate approved a law imposing penalties of up to one year of imprisonment or fines amounting to €45,000 for those who deny the so-called genocide.²² However, in the same year, the French Constitutional Council invalidated the law on the grounds of its inconsistency with the constitution.²³ It is noteworthy that, during his third official visit to

21 Mammadli.M., *Armenian Lobby and Foreign Policy of France*, aircenter.az, July 2021, Available at: <https://aircenter.az/uploads/files/lobbi.pdf> (Accessed: May 10, 2025)

22 BBC.com, *French Senate passes Armenian genocide law*, January 23, 2012, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-16677986> (Accessed: April 15, 2025)

23 *Azertag.az*, *France's Constitutional Court Overturns Armenian Genocide Denial Law*, 28 February, 2012, Available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/frances_constitutional_court_overturns_armenian_genocide_denial_law-220907 (Accessed: May 22, 2025)

France in 2001, President Heydar Aliyev publicly condemned the adoption of this legislation by the French Parliament, arguing that it would have adverse implications for international relations.²⁴

A striking contradiction is evident in the fact that, although France has consistently adopted resolutions and issued official statements recognizing the so-called ‘Armenian genocide,’ it has refrained from granting similar legal recognition to the Khojaly Genocide – perpetrated by Armenian armed forces against Azerbaijani civilians during the First Karabakh War. The massacre, which occurred on the night of February 25–26, 1992, resulted in the brutal killing of 613 residents of Khojaly, including 106 women, 63 children, and 70 elderly individuals. To date, several national parliaments have adopted resolutions and declarations acknowledging the events in Khojaly as an act of genocide.²⁵

Despite these circumstances, French President Jacques Chirac sought to play an active role in the diplomatic discussions surrounding the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. In January and March 2001, two successive high-level meetings were held in Paris between the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Nevertheless, Armenian President Robert Kocharyan’s lack of genuine commitment to the negotiation process, his obstructive stance, and the performative character of his engagement resulted in a failure to produce substantive outcomes. Consequently, the status quo in the conflict remained unchanged.

Since assuming the presidency of the Republic of Azerbaijan in October 2003, President Ilham Aliyev has prioritized the resolution of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict within his foreign policy agenda. Initially, intensive contacts at the level of Foreign Ministers laid the groundwork for the ‘Prague Process,’ which was subsequently continued through meetings at the level of heads of state. It is noteworthy that President Ilham Aliyev, who also attached great importance to relations with Paris, made his first official visit to France in 2004. During this visit, bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and France, including the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, were discussed between the Azerbaijani and French presidents.²⁶

24 Adigozelov.Z., *Azərbaycan və Fransa münasibətlərinin formalaşması tarixi: siyasi aspekt, Tarix və onun problemləri №1*, 2011, Available at: <http://static.bsua.az/w8/Tarix%20ve%20onun%20problem/2011%20%201/138-145.pdf> (Accessed: April 23, 2025)

25 Aliyev.J., *Khojaly: One of Humankind’s Most Terrifying Tragedies*, Anadolu Agency, February 27, 2021, Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/khojaly-one-of-humankinds-most-terrifyingtragedies/2157974> (Accessed: May 11, 2025)

26 Lib.aliyevheritage.org, *Azerbaijan-France relations*, July 23, 2008, Available at: <https://>

In February 2006, a subsequent meeting took place at the Château de Rambouillet near Paris between the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and the President of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, with the participation of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs. Prior to the negotiations, both heads of state held private meetings with French President Jacques Chirac, where they conveyed their positions on the conflict. During the Rambouillet talks, significant disagreements emerged between the Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders concerning the status of Karabakh and the liberation of the Kalbajar district from occupation. Ultimately, the negotiations remained incomplete as President Kocharyan unexpectedly departed from Paris for Yerevan without informing anyone.²⁷

It should be noted that, despite pressure from the Armenian diaspora, French President Jacques Chirac maintained a relatively neutral position regarding the resolution of the conflict, spared no effort to facilitate progress, and placed significant importance on maintaining relations with Azerbaijan. In recognition of these efforts, President Ilham Aliyev awarded Jacques Chirac the Heydar Aliyev Order, Azerbaijan's highest state honor, in 2007.²⁸

During the tenure of Nicolas Sarkozy, although France–Azerbaijan relations developed along a normal trajectory, France's efforts to resolve the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict did not yield fruitful results. During his visit to Paris in 2007, President Ilham Aliyev met with French President Nicolas Sarkozy to discuss bilateral relations; topics included potential solutions to the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict.²⁹ In 2011, Nicolas Sarkozy paid an official visit to Baku, during which several important documents were signed, political and economic cooperation prospects were discussed, and the peaceful resolution of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict was addressed. One notable event during this visit was the participation of both presidents in the ground-breaking ceremony for the French Lyceum in Baku. At that time, Sarkozy emphasized the importance of resolving the conflict within the framework of the OSCE

lib.aliyevheritage.org/az/5654040.html (Accessed: May 10, 2025)

27 Hamid.S., A “peace dove” caged in Yerevan, Xalq newspaper, January 12, 2025, Available at: <https://www.xalqgazeti.az/az/siyaset/210223-irevanda-qefese-salinmis-sulh-goyercini> (Accessed: April 10, 2025)

28 *Azertag.az*, *President Ilham Aliyev Signs Order Conferring the Order Heydar Aliyev Upon Jacques Chirac*, January 29, 2007, Available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/president_ilham_aliyev_signs_order_conferring_the_order_heydar_aliyev_upon_jacques_chirac-564555 (Accessed: April 7, 2025)

29 Baxışov M. Republic of France, 2024, Baku, p.176

Minsk Group.³⁰ However, it was already evident that the Minsk Group was unable to play an effective role in the peace process and, instead, contributed to maintaining the conflict in a frozen state. The contradictory stance of France under Sarkozy regarding the resolution of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict was, however, evident during the voting on United Nations General Assembly Resolution 62/243, “Situation in the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan,” adopted on March 14, 2008. Although many countries voted in favor of the resolution, which recognized Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and demanded the cessation of Armenian occupation, all three co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, including France, voted against it.³¹

Azerbaijan–France relations continued to develop along an upward trajectory during the presidency of François Hollande, with cooperation expanding in numerous fields, including the economy, energy, transportation, science, education, culture, and others. Bilateral collaboration reached its peak, particularly in the field of information and communication technologies (ICT). A notable example of this was the development of Azerbaijan’s first satellite by French companies and its successful launch into space from French Guiana on February 8, 2013.³² Since 2014, the launch of the Azerbaijan–France Chamber of Commerce and Industry—along with the organization of a business forum in Baku during François Hollande’s visit, attended by entrepreneurs from both countries – has exemplified the strengthening economic cooperation between the two nations.

During his 2014 visit to Baku, French President François Hollande, together with Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev, attended the inauguration ceremony of the French Lyceum in Baku. Subsequently, a number of bilateral cooperation agreements were signed, and discussions were held on the Armenia–Azerbaijan negotiation process.³³ Notably, it was during this visit that President Hollande and President Aliyev proposed the establishment of the

30 **Azernews.az**, “Sarkozy, Aliyev hold talks in Baku”, October 8, 2011, Available at: <https://www.azernews.az/nation/37197.html> (Accessed: May 14, 2025)

31 Musa. İ Foreign Policy of Azerbaijan III part, 2010, Baku, p.120

32 Jalilzade.S., France in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, Azlogos.eu, December 23, 2020, Available at: <https://azlogos.eu/erm%C9%99nistan-az%C9%99rbaycan-munaqis%C9%99sind%C9%99-fransa/> (Accessed: May 11, 2025)

33 **President.az**, İlham Əliyev və Fransa Prezidenti Fransua Olland Bakı Fransız Liseyində yaradılmış şəraitlə tanış olmuşlar, May 11, 2014, Available at: <https://president.az/az/articles/view/11703> (Accessed: May 15, 2025)

France-Azerbaijan University in Baku. The official opening of the university in 2016 marked a significant milestone in the expanding cooperation between Azerbaijan and France in the fields of science and education, underscoring Baku's commitment to fostering closer ties with Paris.³⁴ Following his visit to Azerbaijan, Hollande traveled to Armenia and Georgia, where he invited Armenia and Azerbaijan to return to the negotiating table to discuss a peaceful settlement of the conflict.³⁵ In response to this initiative, a new round of talks was held in October 2014 in the presence of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, thus bringing together Presidents Ilham Aliyev, Serzh Sargsyan, and François Hollande. The negotiations began with separate meetings between the delegations of both countries and the co-chairs, followed by a trilateral meeting with the participation of the French President.³⁶ During the talks, President Aliyev called on Armenia to end the occupation and comply with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. However, official Yerevan once again adopted a counterproductive approach, contributing to the prolongation of the process. It is worth noting that this meeting went down in history as the last occasion on which the leaders of the two countries participated in the negotiation process on French soil.

President Ilham Aliyev's next visit to France took place in January 2017. During this, he held a number of high-level meetings, including with his French counterpart, François Hollande, and the President of the French Senate, Gérard Larcher. In the meeting between the presidents, mechanisms for resolving the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict and France's role in the settlement process were discussed. President Aliyev also addressed the prospects for bilateral cooperation in the economic, energy, humanitarian, scientific, and educational spheres, and signed significant agreements with prominent French companies. For his part, François Hollande described the visit as the beginning of a new stage in France-Azerbaijan relations.³⁷

34 **Edu.gov.az**, *Minister of Education Attends International Conference*, September 19, 2016, Available at: <https://edu.gov.az/en/news-and-updates/12974> (Accessed: May 10, 2025)

35 **Anadolu Agency**, *French President Visits Azerbaijan*, 12 May, 2014, Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/french-president-visits-azerbaijan/160262> (Accessed: May 17, 2025)

36 **Azertag.az**, *President Ilham Aliyev Met with President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan in Paris, October 27, 2014*, Available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/president_ilham_aliyev_met_with_president_of_armenia_serzh_sargsyan_in_paris_video-806056 (Accessed: April 18, 2025)

37 **President.az**, *İlham Əliyev və Prezident Fransua Olland mətbuata bəyanatlarla çıxış ediblər*, 14 March, 2017, Available at: <https://president.az/az/articles/view/23113> (Accessed: April 18, 2025)

In summary, France–Azerbaijan relations during the Hollande era were marked by positive economic momentum, particularly through large-scale investments by French companies in Azerbaijan's energy, ICT, and transportation sectors, as well as frequent high-level political engagement. While France sought to maintain a more balanced stance on the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict during this period, the negotiations ultimately failed to produce tangible outcomes.

Conclusion

Since gaining independence, Azerbaijan, faced with Armenian occupation and a series of geopolitical challenges, has consistently supported the establishment of normal relations with both regional and non-regional states, including France. Even in the early years of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, despite France taking certain pro-Armenian steps under the influence of the Armenian diaspora, Azerbaijan remained interested in developing pragmatic bilateral relations with France based on mutual interests. During this time, official Baku signed agreements with France in economic, energy, transport, and other sectors and, although with some skepticism, agreed to France's participation as a co-chair in the OSCE Minsk Group aimed at resolving the conflict. Thus, Azerbaijan's policy toward France during that period yielded successful results, and despite pressures from the Armenian diaspora, official Paris maintained a relatively neutral and balanced position on the conflict's settlement. This demonstrates that the French leaders of that era—whether Jacques Chirac, Nicolas Sarkozy, or François Hollande—favored pursuing pragmatic policies in relations with Azerbaijan, an approach grounded in France's national interests. From this perspective, although France provided some support to Armenia during this period, such support was not explicit and was mostly carried out through unofficial channels. During this period, several representatives who served as French co-chairs in the OSCE Minsk Group, including Hugues Pernet, Bernard Fassier, Brice Roquefeuil, and Stéphane Visconti, made multiple visits to the region and participated in meetings with officials from both Azerbaijan and Armenia in various formats. Nevertheless, neither their efforts, nor those of the Minsk Group more broadly, contributed significantly to resolving the conflict by means of negotiations. While official Paris's efforts as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group to mediate the conflict did not yield the desired results, bilateral political and economic relations between Azerbaijan and France developed positively during this period.

THE POST-2020 TRANSFORMATION: NEW DYNAMICS IN FRANCE'S ARMENIA–AZERBAIJAN POLICY

Sultan Zahidov

The second decade of the 21st century was marked by a series of geopolitical upheavals and tense events in international politics. The confrontation between Russia and Ukraine, the rampant instability in the Middle and Near East, the economic difficulties faced by Europe and its exposure to a wave of mass migration, as well as the trade wars between the United States and China have all contributed to intensifying geopolitical competition among regional and global powers. Against the backdrop of these geopolitical challenges, the South Caucasus also continued to experience conflict and instability, with the Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territory posing serious threats to regional development and security. During this period, the role of the already ineffective OSCE Minsk Group – co-chaired by France – in the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict had become virtually irrelevant, allowing the Armenian leadership to exploit the situation by stalling the negotiation process and attempting to maintain the status quo. At the same time, the failure of the international community to exert the necessary pressure on the Armenian government and compel it to implement the United Nations Security Council resolutions led Yerevan to adopt an even more aggressive policy toward Azerbaijan. The escalations between the sides in April 2016 and July 2020 can be cited as clear evidence of this.

In 2018, the destructive rhetoric of Nikol Pashinyan – who had just assumed the position of Prime Minister of Armenia – regarding the conflict, including his rejection of the core principles underpinning previous negotiations, was largely driven by the indifference of international institutions and the overt support extended to Armenia by certain states. Among them, France was particularly notable as one of the leading countries offering such support. Regrettably, it must be noted that, although France had not made serious contributions to the negotiation process in the past, it had at least attempted to pursue a more balanced and neutral policy. However, during the tenure of Emmanuel Macron, Paris significantly disrupted this balance in favor of Armenia. Macron's full support of the Pashinyan government – which sought to recognize the separatist regime in Karabakh as a party in the negotiations, claimed that Karabakh belonged to Armenia, and promoted the aggressive military doctrine known as

‘new wars for new territories’ targeted at Azerbaijan – made the peace process even more difficult, instead of facilitating it. This was, in fact, a turning point in France’s policy toward the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. Whereas in the past France had supported Armenia in a more discreet manner, mainly through unofficial channels, under Macron, a clearly pro-Armenian shift occurred in the official position of Paris.

Although the Armenian diaspora factor played a role in France’s policy of openly supporting Armenia during Macron’s presidency, this factor alone is not sufficient to explain the overall picture. Behind Macron’s pro-Armenian stance were also geopolitical considerations. From the moment he came to power, Macron, under the ‘*grandeur*’ concept based on Gaullism, sought to re-establish France as a major power, both in Europe and globally. Alongside supporting Europe’s strategic autonomy, he also aimed to strengthen France’s position in Africa, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific region, as well as in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. To achieve this goal, Macron began to actively apply methods such as maintaining France’s military presence in different regions, conducting military operations, and intervening in the internal affairs of states. This aggressive policy, largely based on elements of hard power, came at a high cost for Macron. Not only did France’s influence diminish in most regions, but several African countries – including Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Senegal, and Côte d’Ivoire – also demanded the withdrawal of French military contingents stationed in their territories.¹ Given that French policy in the Middle East also did not proceed as desired, Paris turned its attention to the South Caucasus and Central Asia, two regions of strategic importance and with vast resources. The opportunity for France to pursue its geopolitical ambitions in the South Caucasus arose after the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war in 2022. For a long time, Moscow had tried to dominate the region, but due to its military involvement in Ukraine, it partially withdrew, and this was viewed by Paris as a favorable opportunity to expand its sphere of influence in the South Caucasus. Attempting to fill the vacuum in the region created by Russia’s focus on the war in Ukraine, France chose Armenia as both a tool and a geopolitical platform. Additionally, the geopolitical rivalry between France and Türkiye should also be considered as a factor pushing France to become more active in the South Caucasus. Just as France has tried to pressure Türkiye in regions such as the Mediterranean, Libya, Lebanon, and Syria, it intends

1 Laval, S., *Frexit: Why Ivory Coast Is Joining African Campaign to Expel French Troops*, Aljazeera.com, January 3, 2025, Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/1/3/frexit-why-ivory-coast-is-joining-african-campaign-to-expel-french-troops> (Accessed: May 1, 2025)

to continue the same role in the South Caucasus. For this reason, Azerbaijan, together with Türkiye, is resisting France's attempts to draw dividing lines in the region and to implement certain geopolitical ambitions through Armenia. From this perspective, Macron's South Caucasus policy should be linked not only to the influence of Armenian lobbying groups but also to France's desire to implement its geopolitical and geoeconomic plans through aggressive and biased methods. Paris had political and economic interests in the Caucasus in previous periods; however, these policies had been carried out in a more balanced and pragmatic manner, taking into account the interests of all parties. The political establishment led by Macron has, however, declared itself the patron of Armenia and has openly been displaying an anti-Azerbaijan stance, which has not only negatively impacted France's status in the region but has also seriously damaged France–Azerbaijan relations.

The first signs of cracks in relations between France and Azerbaijan during Emmanuel Macron's presidency appeared in 2018, following his visit to Yerevan to attend the 17th Francophonie Summit.² In his address, President Macron spoke about France's historical support and emotional affinity for Armenia – while disregarding the fact that Armenia, as the occupying party in the conflict, had made little to no effort toward a peaceful resolution of the Armenia–Azerbaijan dispute.³ Furthermore, Macron's decision not to visit Baku following his trip to Yerevan—as his predecessor had done – raised questions regarding France's neutrality in the conflict.⁴ Therefore, Macron's overtly pro-Armenian speech in Yerevan, coupled with his refusal to visit Baku, provoked a strong backlash in Azerbaijan. As one of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, tasked with mediating the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, France was expected to maintain a more neutral position. In addition to his pro-Armenian rhetoric, Macron frequently held meetings with Armenian diaspora organizations in France and made efforts to incorporate their views into key components of national policy. A notable example supporting the argument that the Armenian diaspora had significant influence over Macron is his 2019

2 Shukurlu.F., France's Role in the Armenia–Azerbaijan Conflict in Perspective, Theliberum.com, February 3, 2025, Available at: <https://theliberum.com/frances-role-in-the-armenia-azerbaijan-conflict-in-perspective/> (Accessed: May 2, 2025)

3 Arka.am, French President Stressed the Role of Armenians in His Country's Life, October 11, 2018, Available at: https://arka.am/en/news/politics/french_president_stressed_the_role_of_armenians_in_his_country_s_life/ (Accessed: May 2, 2025)

4 AzerNews.az, "Azerbaijan shouldn't expect objectivity from Macron on Karabakh conflict, says expert", November 14, 2018, Available at: <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/140845.html> (Accessed: May 2, 2025)

decision to officially recognize April 24 each year as a day of commemoration for the ‘Armenian genocide’ in France.⁵ This move further strained relations between France and Azerbaijan, as Baku viewed it as yet another indication of Paris’s decision to side with Armenia. Thus, it became increasingly evident that, unlike former President François Hollande, Macron failed to accord sufficient attention to Azerbaijan’s significance in France’s South Caucasus policy, thereby initiating a gradual departure from the country’s previously balanced approach.

In the previous section, it was noted that following his rise to power in Armenia, Pashinyan adopted bellicose rhetoric and pursued destructive policies, issuing statements that undermined the negotiation process and instigated military provocations against Azerbaijan. After the subsequent provocation on September 27, 2020, when Armenian armed groups targeted civilians, Azerbaijan decided to put an end to the occupying and terrorist regime, and thus the Second Karabakh War started. As a result of the 44-day war, Azerbaijan defeated the Armenian army, ended the occupation, and unilaterally implemented the UN Security Council resolutions, thereby restoring its territorial integrity. Following the war, a trilateral statement was signed by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia. Through this statement, Armenia was compelled to return the Lachin, Kalbajar, and Aghdam districts to Azerbaijan, while other districts had already been liberated by Azerbaijan during the course of the war.⁶

It should be noted that during the Second Karabakh War, French President Emmanuel Macron not only openly supported Armenia but also issued unfounded statements hostile to Azerbaijan. Ironically, Macron never once criticized Armenia, despite its nearly three-decade-long occupation of twenty percent of Azerbaijani territory, which displaced approximately one million people, involved ethnic cleansing against Azerbaijanis, and led to the plundering of the country’s religious and cultural heritage. Instead, he chose to find fault with Azerbaijan for seeking to end the occupation. In reality, in reclaiming its territories, Azerbaijan acted in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, on the right to self-defense; relevant UN Security Council resolutions; and the

5 **Dw.com**, *France Declares Day Marking Armenian Genocide*, February 6, 2019, Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/france-declares-day-marking-armenian-genocide/a-47377098> (Accessed: May 2, 2025)

6 **President.az**, Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation, November 10, 2020, Available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45923> (Accessed: May 3, 2025)

principles of justice. Furthermore, Macron went beyond unwarranted criticism of Azerbaijan by accusing Türkiye of allegedly dispatching Syrian militants to assist Azerbaijan.⁷ Moreover, during this period, France not only issued anti-Azerbaijani statements but also launched a propaganda campaign against the country within international institutions. On October 19, 2020, it introduced a draft resolution at the UN Security Council condemning Azerbaijan's actions. However, due to the firm stance of Non-Aligned Movement countries, which were serving as non-permanent members of the Council at the time, the resolution was ultimately not adopted.⁸

It should also be noted that French journalists, representing *Le Monde* and other media outlets, who illegally entered Karabakh during the Second Karabakh War, failed to provide objective coverage of developments in the region, instead presenting the events exclusively from the Armenian perspective.⁹ Consequently, an anti-Azerbaijani narrative became widespread in the French media during that period. It is also worth recalling that, even prior to the war, some French journalists had unlawfully visited Karabakh and produced reports critical of Azerbaijan. During the occupation period, not only journalists but also political and public figures, as well as foreign companies, were involved in illegal activities in Azerbaijan's Karabakh region, leading to their inclusion on Azerbaijan's blacklist.

During the war, French President Emmanuel Macron called Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev several times, requesting a ceasefire and the resumption of negotiations. However, President Aliyev responded that Armenia was not genuinely interested in negotiations and was instead targeting Azerbaijani civilians.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Macron, who accused Azerbaijan of deploying fighters allegedly brought from Syria, failed to present any credible evidence to support this claim. Macron's call for a negotiated resolution to the conflict, viewed from a historical perspective, appears unconvincing and inconsistent with both the events of the period and Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan's anti-Azerbaijan

7 France24.com, Macron reprimands Türkiye, accuses Erdogan of sending 'jihadists' to Azerbaijan, October 2, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20201002-macron-reprimands-turkey-accusing-erdogan-of-sending-jihadists-to-azerbaijan> (Accessed: May 3, 2025)

8 Baxışov M. Republic of France, 2024, Baku, p.192

9 Azernews.az, "French media reported second Karabakh War only from Armenia's viewpoint - famous photojournalist", 19 January, 2021, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/175227.html> (Accessed: May 3, 2025)

10 President.az, President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron made a phone call to President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, October 3, 2020, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/41495> (Accessed: May 3, 2025)

rhetoric. Until 2020, Azerbaijan had consistently sought a diplomatic solution to the conflict. However, the negotiations – conducted with France as one of the mediators – yielded no results. As a consequence, the Second Karabakh War occurred, and Azerbaijan restored its territorial integrity by liberating its occupied territories.¹¹ Moreover, it is worth noting that France's contradictory stance during and after the Second Karabakh War undermined its credibility as a neutral mediator. Paris's biased, pro-Armenian position compromised the principle of neutrality – one of the fundamental tenets of effective mediation. For instance, on November 20, 2020, President Emmanuel Macron stated in an interview that France would work to protect Armenian cultural heritage in Karabakh. However, he never issued any statement regarding the destruction of 63 mosques in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan during its occupation by Armenia.¹²

France's pro-Armenian stance in its South Caucasus policy reached a peak after the Second Karabakh War, as marked by the adoption of biased resolutions by the French Parliament against Azerbaijan. On November 25, 2020, the French Senate overwhelmingly adopted a resolution urging the government to recognize the so-called 'Nagorno-Karabakh Republic' as an independent state.¹³ A few days later, on December 3, the National Assembly – the lower house of the French Parliament – adopted a similar resolution condemning the actions of Azerbaijan and Türkiye and calling for the withdrawal of Azerbaijani forces from the territories they had liberated.¹⁴ Although these resolutions were non-binding and were subsequently rejected by the French government, their adoption underscored the strong influence of the Armenian diaspora within the French Parliament. These decisions contradicted the UN

11 **Aircenter.az**, *Fransa və Ermənistan–Azərbaycan Munaqişəsi Mövzusunda Beynəlxalq Konfrans Keçirilib*, January 31, 2025, Available at: <https://aircenter.az/az/post/fransa-ve-ermenistan-azerbaycan-munaqisesi-movzusunda-beynelxalq-konfrans-kecirilib-1627> (Accessed: May 4, 2025)

12 **Armenpress.am**, *French Senate Adopts Resolution Recognizing Nagorno-Karabakh*, November 26, 2020, Available at: <https://armenpress.am/en/article/1035424> (Accessed: May 5, 2025)

13 **Commonspace.eu**, *French Senate Adopts Resolution to Recognize “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic”*, November 26, 2020, Available at: <https://www.commonspace.eu/news/french-senate-adopts-resolution-recognise-nagorno-karabakh-republic> (Accessed: May 5, 2025)

14 Zeytinoğlu.Ö., *The Resolutions of the French Senate and National Assembly Regarding Upper Karabakh*, Center for Eurasian Studies, 03.12.2020, December 3, 2020, Available at: <https://avim.org.tr/Blog/THE-RESOLUTIONS-OF-THE-FRENCH-SENATE-AND-NATIONAL-ASSEMBLY-REGARDING-UPPER-KARABAKH-03-12-2020> (Accessed: May 5, 2025)

Security Council resolutions – which France itself once supported – and, paradoxically, labeled Azerbaijan, which had restored its territorial integrity, as the aggressor. This contradiction raises important questions. How could a country that is regarded as a beacon of democracy and a pioneer of the 18th-century Enlightenment – home to intellectual giants such as Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot, Hugo, Dumas, Balzac, Proust, Zola, Flaubert, and Sartre – pass such resolutions? Instead of condemning the occupying regime, the French Parliament chose to blame Azerbaijan for liberating its lands and ending decades of Armenian violence and occupation. These resolutions can be seen as evidence of a broader shift in France's post-war foreign policy – from pragmatic diplomacy toward entrenched Armenophilia. As a result, from that point onward, the Azerbaijani public increasingly called for France's removal from the mediation process.¹⁵ Reflecting this sentiment, on November 26, 2020, the Azerbaijani Parliament formally recommended that the government should consider withdrawing France from its role as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group.¹⁶ Although the French government did not implement the resolutions adopted by its parliament, Macron remained persistent in maintaining its anti-Azerbaijani rhetoric.

As can be seen, a significant shift occurred in France's South Caucasus policy following the 2020 war. In the post-war period, Paris began to provide overt political, economic, and military support to Armenia, leaving behind its previously more balanced stance. The influence of the Armenian diaspora, personal relations with Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan, and regional geopolitical ambitions all indicated that, unlike his predecessors, Macron was pursuing a non-pragmatic policy detached from national interests. As a result of this approach, France not only damaged its relations with Azerbaijan – a country with which it had stronger trade and economic ties – but also began to lose its overall influence in the region. It should be noted that the support given to Armenia by Macron's France can largely be categorized into three areas: political, economic, and military.

France's post-war political support for Armenia has been most evident through anti-Azerbaijani resolutions and statements adopted by the president,

15 Aljazeera.com, Azeris Call for France to Lose Nagorno-Karabakh Mediation Role, November 26, 2020, Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/26/azeris-call-for-france-to-lose-nagorno-karabakh-mediation-role> (Accessed: May 6, 2025)

16 Azertag.az, Milli Məclis Fransanın Minsk Qrupunun Həmsədrliyindən Geri Çağırılması Barədə Hökumətə Müraciət Ünvanlayıb, November 26, 2020, Available at: https://azertag.az/xeber/milli_meclis_fransanin_minsk_qrupunun_hemsedrliyinden_geri_chagirilmasi_barede_hokumete_muraciet_unvanlayib-1651775 (Accessed: May 21, 2025)

parliament, city mayors, and other officials, as well as through France's actions within the UN, the European Union, and other international institutions aimed at pressuring Azerbaijan. Immediately after the war, the French Parliament's adoption of resolutions condemning Azerbaijan's actions – along with critical remarks from public figures such as Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo – further strained bilateral relations between the two countries.

Furthermore, on November 15 and again on December 1, 2022, new resolutions adopted by both chambers of the French Parliament once again demonstrated France's anti-Azerbaijani stance and disregard for international law. These resolutions called on the French government to recognize the so-called 'Nagorno-Karabakh Republic' and included demands for sanctions against Azerbaijan – labeled as the occupier – as well as for the provision of military assistance to Armenia.¹⁷ On January 17, 2024, the French Senate adopted a resolution condemning Azerbaijan's 'military attack' on 'Nagorno-Karabakh,' calling for the prevention of violations of Armenia's territorial integrity, urging sanctions against Azerbaijan, and demanding the protection of the rights of the Armenian population to return to 'Nagorno-Karabakh.'¹⁸ A few months later, the French National Assembly passed a resolution condemning the ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population in 'Nagorno-Karabakh' by Azerbaijan and demanding respect for Armenia's territorial integrity.¹⁹ These resolutions not only further strained Azerbaijan–France relations but also, once again, confirmed that some deputies in France serve the interests of the Armenian diaspora, thereby ignoring both French national interests and international law. This disregard for international law is evident, as the French parliamentary resolutions contradict United Nations Security Council resolutions²⁰ and other international legal documents, which clearly state that Karabakh and seven adjacent territories of Azerbaijan were occupied by Armenia and demand the

17 Hamalian.S., Arménie: le Sénat français demande des sanctions contre l'Azerbaïdjan, Euronews.com, November 16, 2022, <https://fr.euronews.com/2022/11/16/armenie-le-senat-francais-demande-des-sanctions-contre-lazerbaïdjan> (Accessed: May 21, 2025)

18 Caucasuswatch.de, French Senate Adopts Resolution Calling for Sanctions Against Azerbaijan, January 18, 2024, <https://caucasuswatch.de/en/news/french-senate-adopts-resolution-calling-for-sanctions-against-azerbaijan.html> (Accessed: May 21, 2025)

19 Assemblée-nationale.fr, Résolution Européenne visant à dénoncer le nettoyage ethnique des populations arméniennes du Haut-Karabakh par l'Azerbaïdjan et à exiger le respect de l'intégrité territoriale de la République d'Arménie, March 4, 2024, https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/16/textes/116t0248_texte-adopte-seance.pdf (Accessed: May 21, 2025)

20 State.gov, 1993 UN Security Council Resolutions on Karabakh, July 29, 1994, Available at: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/13508.htm> (Accessed: May 12, 2025)

immediate withdrawal of the occupying forces.²¹ Furthermore, this stance ignores France's national interests, given that France has a deeper economic and energy partnership with Azerbaijan than with Armenia, as will be detailed in the next section.

During this period, Paris actively engaged in criticism of Azerbaijan across various international platforms, seeking to exert diplomatic pressure through international institutions and advocating for the adoption of resolutions against Azerbaijan.²² For example, on December 20, 2022, following Armenia's official appeal regarding the alleged 'closure' of the Lachin corridor, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) held an open debate. France proposed the adoption of a Presidential Statement; however, despite submitting four revised drafts, consensus among the council members was not achieved.²³ In September 2023, following Azerbaijan's localized anti-terrorist operation in Karabakh, France once again submitted draft resolutions to the UNSC condemning Azerbaijan and called for sanctions. These efforts were ultimately unsuccessful.²⁴ Notably, the operation conducted by Azerbaijan on September 19–20 resulted in the dismantling of the separatist administration in Karabakh and the full restoration of Azerbaijan's sovereignty. Despite this development, France continued to approach the issue in alignment with Armenia's position and maintained a stance that was critical of Azerbaijan. France's position was not confined to the United Nations. At the 2022 Francophonie Summit in Tunisia, France sought to insert language critical of Azerbaijan into the summit's final declaration. This attempt was unsuccessful due to opposition from several member states, including Romania, Moldova, Albania, and

21 [Digitallibrary.un.org](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/622595?ln=en&v=pdf), Letter dated 13 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, March 13, 2008, Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/622595?ln=en&v=pdf> (Accessed: May 12, 2025)

22 Hajiyevev.S. and İscan.T., The UN Security Council Session on Armenia–Azerbaijan: A Struggle for Peace or Manipulation?, AIR Center, August 21, 2023, Available at: <https://aircenter.az/en/post/the-unsecurity-council-session-on-armeniaazerbaijan-a-struggle-for-peace-or-manipulation-1259> (Accessed: May 10, 2025)

23 Mammadli M., "Tensions in France-Azerbaijani relations following the Second Karabakh War", Aircenter, May, 2024, Available at: <https://aircenter.az/uploads/ILxOpTeM6BhR.pdf> (Accessed: May 12, 2025)

24 Ahmadzada.R., France Continues to Derail the Peace Process in the South Caucasus Despite Countless Diplomatic Defeats, thegeopolitics.com, January 27, 2024, Available at: <https://thegeopolitics.com/france-continues-to-derail-the-peace-process-in-the-south-caucasus-despite-countless-diplomatic-defeats/> (Accessed: May 12, 2025)

Morocco.²⁵ France also pursued similar objectives within other multilateral institutions, such as the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), seeking the adoption of resolutions aligned with its political approach. Despite these pressures, Azerbaijan maintained its principled position, supported by a significant number of countries and international organizations. This support was rooted in Azerbaijan's consistent adherence to the fundamental norms and principles of international law. A notable example of such recognition was the unanimous decision by the international community in 2023 to designate Baku as the host city for the 29th Conference of the Parties (COP29) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).²⁶

After 2020, Macron, who frequently met with Pashinyan, made public statements that not only distorted the realities in the region but also openly promoted a biased anti-Azerbaijani narrative. A clear example of this was Macron's call to boycott COP29, which was held in Azerbaijan in November 2024.²⁷ France's refusal to participate in this prestigious summit and its urging of other countries to boycott the event, demonstrated not only France's anti-Azerbaijani stance but also official Paris's indifference toward addressing global challenges such as climate change. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan extended invitations to participate in COP29 not only to France, but also to Armenia, thereby once again demonstrating its commitment to peace with Armenia. However, Armenia rejected Azerbaijan's gracious invitation and refused to send a delegation to the event.²⁸ Despite calls for a boycott, Azerbaijan hosted the conference at the highest level, with 80 heads of state and government, and over 76,000 representatives from more than 190 countries participating. It should also be noted that COP29 resulted in several important decisions in the

25 Mirzazade.P., "By siding with Armenia, France has finally lost its chance to mediate", Azernews, December 9, 2022, Available at: <https://www.azernews.az/region/203358.html> (Accessed: May 12, 2025)

26 Trend.az, Unanimous decision of about 200 countries to hold COP29 in Azerbaijan demonstrates respect and support for our policies - President Ilham Aliyev, October 24, 2024, Available at: <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3961034.html> (Accessed: May 13, 2025)

27 Aze.media, Why France is Actually Calling for a Boycott of COP29, May 24, 2024, Available at: <https://aze.media/why-france-is-actually-calling-for-a-boycott-of-cop29/> (Accessed: May 13, 2025)

28 Azertag.az, Hikmet Hajiyev Speaks on France's and Armenia's Absence from COP29, November 16, 2024, Available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/hikmet_hajiyev_speaks_on_frances_and_armenias_absence_from_cop29-3286332 (Accessed: May 14, 2025)

fight against climate change, including the adoption of Article 6 of the Paris Protocol on the regulation of carbon credit markets and agreement on a \$300 billion climate finance target.²⁹

After the Second Karabakh War, although France completely abandoned its neutrality, it still sought to play a role in the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia. It should be emphasized that, despite having endured Armenia's policy of occupation for many years, it was Azerbaijan that took the initiative in pushing for peace after the war and presented five basic principles for a peace treaty to Armenia as early as 2022.³⁰ Nevertheless, Armenia's continuous presentation of various excuses, its destructive approach at the negotiation table, and its provocations along the provisional border with Azerbaijan posed serious threats to the peace process. Furthermore, Armenia's insistence on holding negotiations only with the involvement of mediators caused additional delays. As each mediator attempted to pursue its own geopolitical interests, the existing rivalry among them significantly narrowed the space for compromise between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Indeed, although multiple meetings were held at different times in Brussels, Washington, and Moscow between the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia—with the participation of the European Union, the United States, and Russia as mediators—none of these efforts resulted in tangible outcomes. Despite France's openly biased stance against Azerbaijan during that period, Baku did not initially oppose Paris's involvement in the negotiations in the interest of achieving lasting peace. On October 6, 2022, a meeting held in Prague was attended not only by the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia, but also by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and the President of France, Emmanuel Macron. At that meeting, the Armenian Prime Minister, for the first time, verbally recognized Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. However, the proposal – pushed by France – to deploy a European Union Monitoring Mission to the conditional border between Armenia and Azerbaijan did not serve the purpose of accelerating the peace process.³¹ As a party genuinely

29 President.az, Azerbaijan's COP29 Presidency, 2024, Available at: <https://president.az/en/pages/view/azerbaijan/cop29> (Accessed: May 15, 2025)

30 Report.az, Azerbaijan's 5-Point Proposal: 5 Steps Towards Peace in Region, March 14, 2022, Available at: <https://report.az/en/analytics/azerbaijan-s-5-point-proposal-5-steps-towards-peace-in-region> (Accessed: May 15, 2025)

31 Consilium.europa.eu, Statement Following Quadrilateral Meeting Between President Aliyev, Prime Minister Pashinyan, President Macron and President Michel, October 7, 2022, Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/10/07/statement-following-quadrilateral-meeting-between-president-aliyev-prime-minister-pashinyan>

interested in peace, Azerbaijan initially agreed to the two-month deployment of this mission. However, the later extension of the mission's mandate and increase in its personnel without notifying Azerbaijan became factors that damaged mutual trust between the two sides and hindered the overall peace process. In fact, instead of putting an end to Armenia's provocations along the conditional border, the mission's presence seemed to embolden Yerevan. Armenia not only increased its military provocations against Azerbaijan but also adopted a more destructive position at the negotiating table.

At the meeting held on June 1, 2023, within the framework of the European Political Community Summit – attended by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia, the European Union, and France and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz – no agreement was reached on the peace treaty.³² Citing France's military assistance to Armenia, President Ilham Aliyev declined to participate in the subsequent meeting in Granada, emphasizing the failure of multilateral mediation efforts and advocating for a bilateral negotiation format with Armenia. It is important to note that France not only extended political and military support to Armenia but also further compromised its neutrality by officially receiving the 'leader' of the separatist regime – responsible for war crimes – at the highest level in Paris.³³ As a result, negotiations transitioned to a bilateral format at the level of Foreign Ministers. This approach led to meaningful progress, both in the delimitation of borders and in finalizing the text of the peace agreement. By March 2025, Azerbaijan and Armenia had reached full agreement on the terms of the treaty.³⁴ Nonetheless, two key obstacles remained before the formal signing could take place: the removal of Armenia's territorial claims against Azerbaijan from its constitution, and the official dissolution of the now-defunct OSCE Minsk Group.³⁵

president-macron-and-president-michel-6-october-2022/ (Accessed: May 15, 2025)

32 Euneighbourseast.eu, Leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan Meet Charles Michel, Olaf Scholz and Emmanuel Macron in Moldova, June 2, 2023, Available at: <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/leaders-of-armenia-and-azerbaijan-meet-charles-michel-olaf-scholz-and-emmanuel-macron-in-moldova/> (Accessed: May 16, 2025)

33 Turksoy.T., France Hosts Criminal Head of Armenian Armed Separatists Deployed in Azerbaijan's Karabakh Region, Caspiannews.com, December 10, 2022, Available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/france-hosts-criminal-head-of-armenian-armed-separatists-deployed-in-azerbajians-karabakh-region-2022-12-10-0/> (Accessed: May 16, 2025)

34 CNN.com, Armenia and Azerbaijan agree to peace treaty after nearly four decades of war, March 13, 2025, Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/03/13/europe/armenia-and-azerbaijan-peace-agreement-conditions-intl-latam> (Accessed: May 16, 2025)

35 Karimli.I., President Aliyev Outlines Two Key Obstacles to Peace Treaty with Armenia,

France's engagement in the South Caucasus following the 2020 war has not been limited to providing political and military support to Armenia; Paris has also increased its humanitarian and economic aid to Yerevan. In 2023 alone, France's humanitarian assistance to Armenia exceeded €12.5 million.³⁶ It should be emphasized that France has not extended similar support to Azerbaijan, the territories of which were under Armenia's occupation for decades, resulting in over one million refugees and internally displaced persons, and which continues to suffer from landmines laid by Armenian forces even in the post-2020 period. In addition to humanitarian aid, France has sought to strengthen its presence in Armenia by increasing its economic engagement and investments. As a result, France is, today, the second-largest foreign investor in Armenia after Russia. It is also worth noting that, as Armenia attempts to reduce its military and economic dependence on Russia by leaning more toward the West, this may present opportunities for France to expand its influence in the country. However, it also risks turning Armenia into a battleground in the broader geopolitical rivalry between France and Russia – a dangerous game for Yerevan to be part of. On the other hand, if France is truly guided by pragmatic economic interests, then adopting a more balanced policy in the South Caucasus would be a more rational approach. A look at France's trade with both Armenia and Azerbaijan reveals that Baku holds a stronger position in the French economy. For example, in 2024, France's trade turnover with Armenia amounted to approximately \$158 million,³⁷ whereas its trade with Azerbaijan reached \$241.5 million between January and September of the same year.³⁸ Furthermore, French investment in Azerbaijan has exceeded \$6.6 billion to date.³⁹ Since the 1990s, Azerbaijan and France have cooperated

Caspiannews.com, May 22, 2025, Available at: <https://caspiannnews.com/news-detail/president-aliyev-outlines-two-key-obstacles-to-peace-treaty-with-armenia-2025-5-22-0/> (Accessed: May 16, 2025)

36 Diplomatie.gouv.fr, Nagorno-Karabakh: France Mobilizes Additional Assistance, September 27, 2023, Available at: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/azerbaijan/news/article/nagorno-karabakh-france-mobilizes-additional-assistance-27-09-23> (Accessed: May 16, 2025)

37 Arka.am, Armenia's Foreign Trade Turnover in 2024 Exceeded \$30 Billion – Growth Slows Down for Half a Year, February 6, 2025, Available at: <https://arka.am/en/news/economy/armenia-s-foreign-trade-t2024-exceeded-30-billion-growth-has-been-slowing-for-six-months/> (Accessed: May 17, 2025)

38 Abc.az, Azerbaijan's Trade Turnover with France Reduced by 50%, November 7, 2024, Available at: <https://www.abc.az/en/news/160452/azerbajians-trade-turnover-with-france-reduced-by-50> (Accessed: May 17, 2025)

39 Report.az, France Boosts Direct Investments in Azerbaijan by 25 Times, March 22, 2025,

in areas such as energy, transportation, communications, agriculture, advanced technologies, and more. Prominent French companies such as TotalEnergies, Alstom, Thales, Suez, Danone, Airbus, Iveco, Sanofi, Rothschild, and others have been operating in various sectors of the Azerbaijani economy for many years. As of 2020, more than 40 French companies were involved in the implementation of various projects across Azerbaijan.⁴⁰

Since 2020, France's active involvement in the militarization of Armenia has further deepened the tensions in France–Azerbaijan relations. It should be noted that, in recent years, the military support provided by Paris to Yerevan has included not only defensive weapons but also lethal offensive arms. This has inevitably reinforced Baku's perception of the narrative that "Paris is arming Yerevan against Baku." Consequently, Azerbaijan has become increasingly skeptical of France's declarations about its support for peace in the region and its desire to act as a mediator in negotiations.⁴¹ On February 21, 2024, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan paid another visit to Paris. During his meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron, the two leaders discussed the current state of bilateral relations and prospects for future cooperation.⁴² In the press statement following the meeting, Macron's groundless accusations against Azerbaijan—including claims that Baku is committing aggression against Armenia—were perceived as yet another manifestation of France's anti-Azerbaijan rhetoric. These remarks were officially condemned by Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which reminded Paris of the fact that Azerbaijani territories had been under Armenian occupation for 30 years and called on France to adopt a more objective stance on the matter.⁴³ Two days after Pashinyan's visit to Paris, French

Available at: <https://report.az/en/finance/france-boosts-direct-investments-in-azerbaijan-by-25-times> (Accessed: May 17, 2025)

40 Report.az, French Companies Work on Over 40 Projects in Azerbaijan – Ambassador, May 31, 2020, Available at: <https://report.az/en/business/french-companies-work-on-over-40-projects-in-azerbaijan-ambassador> (Accessed: May 17, 2025)

41 Zahidov S., "Armenia's Militarization Fueling a Security Dilemma in the South Caucasus – Op-ed", *Eurasiareview*, January 27, 2025, Available at: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/27012025-armenias-militarization-fueling-a-security-dilemma-in-the-south-caucasus-op-ed/> (Accessed: May 19, 2025)

42 Radar.am, A meeting between Nikol Pashinyan and Emmanuel Macron took place at the Elysee Palace, February 21, 2024, Available at: <https://radar.am/en/news/politics-2617018201/> (Accessed: May 19, 2025)

43 Mfa.gov.az, Commentary on the Biased Statement of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, February 21, 2024, Available at: <https://mfa.gov.az/en/news/>

Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu traveled to Armenia, where he met with Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan. During this visit, the two sides signed a package of agreements on military cooperation. It should be noted that this was the first official visit of a French defense minister to Yerevan in the history of France–Armenia relations. At the press conference following the meeting, Lecornu announced that France would provide Armenia with air defense systems, night vision goggles, and other weaponry.⁴⁴ It is worth recalling that, in October 2023, the defense ministers of the two countries had already reached an agreement in Paris, under which France committed to supplying Armenia with 50 Bastion armored vehicles and three Thales Ground Master (GM200) radar systems.⁴⁵ France's military aid to Armenia and the delivery of lethal weapons did not end there. On June 18, 2024, following another meeting between Lecornu and Papikyan, it was announced that France had agreed to sell 36 Caesar howitzers to Armenia.⁴⁶ All these developments have significantly damaged France–Azerbaijan relations and have deepened Baku's skepticism toward France's proclaimed peace agenda in the South Caucasus. Baku sees the lethal weapons supplied to Armenia as a potential threat aimed at Azerbaijan. Furthermore, Armenia's growing militarization – seemingly encouraged by France – has led Yerevan to adopt a more destructive stance in negotiations and to repeatedly violate the ceasefire by provoking incidents along the conditional border with Azerbaijan. It must also be noted that, against the backdrop of serious political, social, and economic challenges within France and its overseas territories, the French government's allocation of substantial funds to militarize other countries – including Armenia – has been met with criticism from the French public and President Macron's political opponents.

no06624 (Accessed: May 20, 2025)

44 Rfi.fr, France Ups Military Ties with Armenia with First-Ever Visit by a Defense Minister, February 22, 2024, Available at: <https://www.rfi.fr/en/international/20240222-france-ups-military-ties-with-armenia-with-first-ever-visit-by-a-defence-minister> (Accessed: May 20, 2025)

45 Thearmenianreport.com, France Strengthens Defense Ties with Armenia: New Armament Delivery and Historic Ministerial Visit, February 22, 2024, Available at: <https://www.thearmenianreport.com/post/france-strengthens-defense-ties-with-armenia-new-armament-delivery-and-historic-ministerial-visit#:~:text=In%20October%202023%20> (Accessed: May 20, 2025)

46 Bisht.I.S., Armenia Signs 36 Caesar Cannon Deal With France, thedefensepost.com, June 26, 2024, Available at: <https://thedefensepost.com/2024/06/26/armenia-caesar-cannon-france/> (Accessed: May 20, 2025)

One of the incidents that caused tension in France–Azerbaijan relations was the act of vandalism against the statue of Azerbaijani poet Nativan in the French city of Évian in March 2024. The failure of the French authorities to take any steps toward restoring the statue indicated that this act of vandalism was not a mere coincidence. It should be noted that the desecration of Nativan's statue in Évian and the inadequate response from the French authorities triggered a strong protest from Azerbaijan at the highest level.⁴⁷

In summary, France's support for Armenia following the 2020 war has so far only served to delay the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia, increase tensions in the region, damage France–Azerbaijan relations, and undermine France's regional standing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should once again be emphasized that, during and after the Second Karabakh War—marked by Azerbaijan's decisive victory and the liberation of its occupied territories—relations between France and Azerbaijan became increasingly tense. The escalation of political and diplomatic relations between the two countries has been unequivocally linked to official Paris's hybrid war-style actions against Azerbaijan on various fronts and its military-political support for Armenia. After the Second Karabakh War, France's strategic interests in the region, its neo-imperialist ambitions, and the influence of deeply rooted Armenian diaspora networks within the country pushed Paris to take an openly pro-Armenian stance.

While France attempted to pursue a relatively balanced policy in the South Caucasus before 2020, it clearly broke that policy by siding with Armenia after 2020. From this perspective, it can be said that the main reason for the deterioration in France–Azerbaijan relations after the Second Karabakh War of 2020 is the biased, pro-Armenian policy pursued by official Paris during Emmanuel Macron's presidency. This policy has not only negatively impacted the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process and increased regional tensions but has also caused serious problems in France–Azerbaijan relations and undermined France's overall standing in the South Caucasus. Therefore, if France wishes

47 Caliber.az, Controversy Erupts as France Dismantles Monument to Azerbaijani Poetess, March 6, 2024, Available at: <https://caliber.az/en/post/controversy-erupts-as-france-dismantles-monument-to-azerbaijani-poetess> (Accessed: May 20, 2025)

to change the current situation, it must stop arming Armenia, put an end to its anti-Azerbaijan rhetoric, and implement a more inclusive and balanced policy toward the South Caucasus.

As for Azerbaijan, Baku has always been interested in pursuing a pragmatic policy based on mutual interests with France, particularly in the areas of trade, economy, energy, transportation, and other fields. The fact that more than 40 French companies are currently operating in Azerbaijan, that France has made substantial investments in Azerbaijan's energy sector, and that there were strong scientific and cultural ties between the two countries—especially prior to the Macron era—clearly demonstrates this.

FRANCO-AZERBAIJANI BILATERAL RELATIONS IN LIGHT OF THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR

Jean-Emmanuel Medina

Relations between France and Azerbaijan are rooted in a rich and complex history that goes well beyond Azerbaijan's declaration of independence from the Soviet bloc on October 18, 1991. The earliest ties were commercial, dating back to the Abbasid dynasty of the 9th and 10th centuries.

Azerbaijan served as a key transit point along the Silk Road. These commercial exchanges took on greater significance starting in 1708, the year of the first trade agreement between France and the Safavid state, which included the territory of present-day Azerbaijan.

In France, certain intellectuals sparked interest in the Caucasus and Azerbaijan, particularly within the collective imagination. The French public's growing awareness of Caucasian and Azerbaijani culture in the 19th century was shaped in part by writers such as Alexandre Dumas,¹ whose travels to the Caucasus were chronicled in his *Voyage au Caucase*, and George Sand,² who supported the translation and dissemination of Eastern oral epics such as the Azerbaijani *Koroğlu*.

The 20th century brought a new dimension to Franco-Azerbaijani relations. Prominent Azerbaijani figures helped foster cultural ties through their deep engagement with France. They included Ahmet Ağaoğlu (Ahmed Bey Agayev)³

1 Alexandre DUMAS (father) published a work in 1858 entitled *Journey to the Caucasus*.

2 George SAND translated the Azerbaijani epic *Köroğlu* (*Kourroglou*) into French in 1843. This epic had been collected in Azerbaijan by Mr. Alexandre CHODZKO and was first published in English (London – Duprat, Paris – Brockhaus and Co., Leipzig – Chodzko, Alexander. 1842. *Kourroglou*).

3 Eminent intellectual, philosopher, politician, journalist, writer, and university professor, Ahmed Bey is considered one of the most prolific Azerbaijani intellectuals of his generation. His interests include educational reform, the role of women in Islamic society, the role of the clergy and religious leaders in society, constitutionalism in the Muslim world, and the relational conflicts between Sunnis and Shiites as well as Armenians and Turks. See Éditions Kapaz, preface by Jean-Emmanuel MEDINA, “Ahmed Bey AGAYEV: A Light at the Crossroads of Two Worlds,” *The Reform of the Muslim World – When Western Success Inspired the Awakening of the East*, Strasbourg, Éditions Kapaz, December 2017, p. 6.

and Ceyhun Hacibeyli.⁴ During World War II, the sacrifice of Azerbaijanis fighting alongside the French Resistance against the German occupiers is a little-known reality, but one that deserves to be highlighted: Nuru Abdullayev, Veli Veliyev, Kurban Mamedov, and Ahmadiyya Jabrayilov distinguished themselves through their courage.

This rich and fruitful relationship, initially built on longstanding foundations of cultural, economic, and political cooperation, has undergone significant developments over the past decades. Today, as we navigate a period of diplomatic tensions, it is essential to take a pragmatic and unflinching look at the state of Franco–Azerbaijani bilateral relations in light of the Second Karabakh War of 2020 (the '44 day war') (I), and to explore possible paths for their renewal (II).

Traditionally Stable Diplomatic Relations, Recently Disrupted

France's position toward Azerbaijan has always been rooted in a strict respect for international law. From the moment of Azerbaijan's independence, France was one of the first states in the international community to recognize the country – implying recognition of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. France notably demonstrated its commitment to international law through its role as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, alongside the United States and Russia, in which it worked for nearly thirty years to find a peaceful solution to the Karabakh conflict that had erupted in the context of the Soviet Union's collapse.

France has consistently supported the United Nations Security Council resolutions, notably Resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884 of 1993.⁵ These resolutions affirmed Azerbaijan's sovereignty over the Karabakh region as well as over all the territories occupied by Armenia since the early 1990s. They called for the immediate, complete, and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian occupying forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan. The resolutions

4 Ceyhun Hacibeyli, linguist, journalist, and ethnographer Ceyhun HADJIBEYLI studied in France at the Sorbonne. In 1919, he was part of the Azerbaijani delegation that participated in the Versailles Peace Conference. In 1920, when the First Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan ceased to exist, he remained living in Paris until the end of his life, during which he worked to promote a better understanding of Azerbaijani culture in France.

5 Hans-Joachim HEINTZE, Legal Opinion on the 1993 UN Security Council Resolutions concerning the Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Corresponding Legal Documents of International Organizations, KAPAZ, Strasbourg, 2021, 93 pages.

reaffirmed respect for Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the inviolability of its internationally recognized borders. This consistent position of France was reflected in concrete diplomatic initiatives, such as organizing peace talks, actively participating in international negotiations, and supporting economic development projects in the region.

On December 20, 1993, the French Republic and the Republic of Azerbaijan signed a Treaty of Friendship, Understanding, and Cooperation, Article 2 of which states that both parties “shall join their efforts to ensure international security, to prevent conflicts, and to uphold the primacy of international law in relations between states, respecting the principle of the inviolability of borders.”⁶

During the adoption of UN General Assembly Resolution 62/243 in 2008, although France, the United States, and Russia – acting as co-chairs of the Minsk Group – voted against the resolution, they reaffirmed during the debates their commitment “to the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan” and that they “do not recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh.”⁷ Subsequently, the European Parliament – led, in particular, by numerous French members – consistently reaffirmed its position in its resolutions dated May 20, 2010; April 18, 2012; October 23, 2013; and July 9, 2015, condemning the military occupation of Karabakh and supporting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

Economic cooperation has also been a major pillar of bilateral relations. French investment in Azerbaijan, particularly in the energy sector with the longstanding presence of Total, reflects this mutual trust – the French company has held shares in the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline and the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) for several years. Over the years, trade has diversified to cover various sectors, such as agri-food, information technology, and transport infrastructure.

6 Decree No. 99-354 of May 3, 1999, publishing the Treaty of Friendship, Understanding, and Cooperation between the French Republic and the Republic of Azerbaijan, signed in Paris on December 20, 1993, Official Journal of the French Republic (JORF) No. 107 of May 8, 1999.

7 During the debates, Mr. WOLFF, representing the United States of America, explained that the three co-chair countries of the Minsk Group (the USA, France, and Russia) would vote against the unilateral draft resolution presented by Azerbaijan because it risked “derailing the peace process,” while reaffirming their support for Azerbaijan. See: Minutes of the Debates of the 86th plenary session, Friday, March 14, 2008, at 10 a.m., New York, A/62/PV.86.

However, Franco–Azerbaijani relations have experienced a notable deterioration since 2020. Tensions have crystallized around several significant events, and France's growing support for Armenia is perceived in Baku as a radical shift in position. Resolutions passed almost unanimously by both chambers of the French Parliament, calling for the recognition of the so-called 'Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh' – a puppet regime established by Armenia in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan – have further deepened mistrust between Baku and Paris. Statements made by the French President and various ministers, including the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Armed Forces, particularly following the events in Karabakh in September 2023, triggered a strong reaction from Azerbaijani authorities.

On October 24, 2023, French Minister of the Armed Forces Sébastien Lecornu hosted his Armenian counterpart, Suren Papikyan, with the aim of supporting Armenia in modernizing its army and strengthening its military capabilities. Following these commitments, France announced its support for Armenia's military capacity along two main lines: the provision of enhanced training opportunities and the strengthening of Armenia's defensive capabilities through the acquisition of equipment such as GM-200 air surveillance radars produced by Thales and night vision binoculars from the defense manufacturer Safran. According to the Minister of the Armed Forces, this equipment will improve Armenia's ability to monitor and protect its population and borders.

On April 5, 2024, the European Union, through Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, announced the allocation of €270 million in loans to Armenia over four years. The announcement was made in the presence of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell.

This period witnessed a series of diplomatic incidents, exemplified by the expulsion in December 2023 of two French diplomats accused of activities incompatible with their status. In response, two Azerbaijani diplomats were also expelled. The tensions between Paris and Baku also led to the cancellation of several cultural and economic cooperation projects, including the announced closure of the French Lyceum in Baku in April 2024.⁸

Azerbaijan has specifically denounced what it considers to be French bias in

8 « Le Lycée Français de Bakou cesse ses activités » in APA, April 19, 2024, <https://fr.apa.az/politique/le-lycee-francais-de-bakou-cesse-ses-activites-mise-a-jour-2606> (accessed February 10, 2025).

the regional conflict, calling into question France's position and its legitimacy as an impartial mediator.

The Need for a Pragmatic and Balanced Approach

It is essential to understand that France's support for Armenia between 2020 and 2024 must be viewed within a specific political context that does not necessarily reflect the historical and structural position of French diplomacy in the region. In fact, the independence of the separatist regime in Karabakh, proclaimed on September 2, 1991, has never been recognized by France—or by any other UN member state.⁹

Several factors explain France's recent position in the region.

The first is the presence of a significant Armenian diaspora in France, estimated at around 600,000 people, which plays an active role in French civil society and public debate. Armenian community organizations in France are numerous and cover religious, cultural, social, sporting, and political spheres.

Second, there are humanitarian concerns regarding the situation of the civilian population who left Karabakh following the capitulation of the separatist authorities on September 20, 2023. Third is the French tradition of protecting Christian minorities in the Middle East, a legacy of French diplomatic history. Notably, during the reign of Napoleon III, France intervened to aid Christians in the Near East by landing forces in Beirut on August 16, 1860, following massacres of Christians perpetrated in Mount Lebanon (from March to July 1860) and in Damascus, Syria (from July 9 to 18, 1860).¹⁰

However, this position does not represent a fundamental reversal of France's foreign policy. France continues to uphold the principles of international law, with the territorial integrity of states as a cornerstone. Its support for Armenia is seen in Paris as a precautionary measure to prevent regional escalation and to protect civilian populations, rather than a challenge to internationally

9 Armenia has never gone as far as to recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh de jure but has limited itself to a de facto recognition, materialized by the conclusion of agreements with the so-called "Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh" in various fields.

10 Eric ANCEAU, "When Napoleon III Came to the Aid of the Christians of the Near East and Took an Interest in Lebanon," *La Revue politique et parlementaire*, International No. 1098, February 26, 2021, <https://www.revuepolitique.fr/lorsque-napoleon-iii-se-portait-au-secours-des-chretiens-du-proche-orient-et-sinteressait-au-liban/> (accessed January 30, 2025).

recognized borders, which France has never opposed. It is noteworthy that recent pro-Armenian initiatives in France involve many far-left and Green Party deputies. These groups view support for Armenia as a way of criticizing Azerbaijan, alongside denouncing its economic and military ties with Israel.¹¹

In this specific context, it would be strategically counterproductive for Azerbaijan and France to see each other as adversaries. France remains a major actor on the international stage, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the second-largest economy in the European Union, and a crucial partner for Azerbaijan's economic diversification.

French expertise is internationally recognized in key sectors for Azerbaijan's development: green technologies, the energy transition, modern agriculture, transport infrastructure, and higher education. French companies such as Alstom, Suez, and Thales have already demonstrated their ability to significantly contribute to the modernization of economies wherever they have operated. Moreover, France has risen to the top among European powers in the development of artificial intelligence and in creating a favorable ecosystem for its long-term establishment.

The recent stance of those in certain Azerbaijani circles regarding France's overseas territories deserves particular attention. Expressions of support for independence movements in these territories are perceived in Paris as fundamentally contradictory to Azerbaijan's position on Karabakh. Meanwhile, in Azerbaijan, this is seen as a reflection of France's support for the now-defunct 'Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh,' whose 'independence' was endorsed by resolutions of the French parliament in 2020. These tensions are harming relations between Azerbaijan and France, and both sides must find common ground to overcome these challenges.

France, as an influential member of the European Union, can play a crucial role in the development of its relations with Azerbaijan. The Eastern Partnership, energy cooperation agreements, and university exchange programs—these are all areas where France's voice can either advance or hinder various interests.

11 During his visit to Armenia on April 24, 2024, accompanied by MP Sébastien Delogu, the historical leader of this new French far-left movement, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, did not hesitate to draw a connection between “the necessary fight against the ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh and the ongoing genocide in Gaza.” See: “Mélenchon and Sébastien Delogu in Armenia to Commemorate the Genocide,” in L'insoumission, April 24, 2024. URL: <https://linsoumission.fr/2024/04/24/melenchon-delogu-genocide-armenie/> (Accessed 10/02/2025).

Cultural and educational cooperation also represents significant yet still underutilized potential. The French-Azerbaijani University (UFAZ), established in 2016, is the flagship of this essential bilateral cooperation in the fields of education and science. Currently, UFAZ offers dual bachelor's degrees in four scientific disciplines in partnership with the University of Strasbourg. Further expansion of these programs to include legal and political sciences would be worthwhile. Cultural cooperation should aim to accelerate the training of economic and political leaders, the formation of future elites, and the strengthening of ties between the two civil societies through the expansion of student exchange programs.

CONCLUSION

Franco–Azerbaijani relations are going through a turbulent period, but this should not overshadow the opportunities for future cooperation or the strategic importance of bilateral ties. The tensions arising from the second conflict of 2020–2023 are not insurmountable, provided that both countries manage to maintain a constructive dialogue based on mutual respect and the recognition of shared and overarching interests.

The future of relations is closely tied to the ability of both parties to move beyond their differences with the aim of building a balanced and mutually beneficial partnership. France remains willing to work in this direction, while upholding its principles and international commitments. It is up to both Azerbaijan and France to demonstrate diplomatic wisdom to preserve and develop a relationship that, beyond temporary tensions, retains its full potential and strategic relevance.

BAKU–PARIS–YEREVAN: REASON AND EMOTION IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Gil Mihaely

Why has France, once a friendly power, then a neutral and honest mediator within the framework of the Minsk process, been distancing itself from Azerbaijan in recent years? Charles de Gaulle said that nations have “no friends, only interests” (he probably also stated that men have friends, but statesmen do not ...). Be that as it may, this observation makes sense, but remains incomplete: if France and Azerbaijan have no friends, the French and Azerbaijanis, for their part, do. However, beyond this famous quote, some researchers in international relations question the influence of public opinion on the shaping of foreign policy and international affairs.

In his work *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (N. W. Norton, 2001), John Mearsheimer argued that the anarchic structure of the international system, a world devoid of a supranational authority capable of guaranteeing the security of states, forces nations to prioritize strategic imperatives dictated by the logic of survival and power maximization rather than by the preferences of public opinion. Thus, leaders make their decisions based on power dynamics rather than popular pressures. Mearsheimer illustrates this reality by explaining that, even in democracies, it is often political and military elites who shape foreign policy according to geopolitical imperatives.

Mearsheimer is not the only one to defend this idea. James D. Fearon, in “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes” (*American Political Science Review*, September 1994), and Kenneth N. Waltz, in *Theory of International Politics* (Waveland Press, 1979), to name only these best-known examples, also explain that public opinion is merely the expression of other dynamics and does not constitute an autonomous element in the geopolitical equation.

However, unlike researchers from disciplines such as political science and international relations, historians can nuance these models. The quintessential example is the Greek War of Independence. The chancelleries of London, Saint Petersburg, and Paris were initially unanimous in their support for the Sublime Porte against the Greek nationalists, considering it an affair that did not justify foreign interference. However, the philhellenes, who then dominated public

opinion, particularly in London and Paris, ultimately forced decision-makers to shift their stance. The narratives conveyed by the Greeks about the massacres of Christians perpetrated by the Turks eventually prevailed.

The shaping of foreign policy is not reduced to a simple calculation based on geography and human and natural resources. Those of you familiar with the concept of ontological security will surely agree: states seek to maintain a stable and coherent image of themselves through their policies and interactions. Unlike traditional security, which focuses on military or economic threats, ontological security concerns the continuity of national identity and the preservation of historical and cultural narratives. A country like France may be influenced by its historical attachment to principles such as democracy, human rights, and secularism. These values shape its foreign policy and guide its diplomatic choices.

Actors are thus guided by complex rationalities. In the case of France's attitude toward the Caucasus in general and Azerbaijan in particular, it is essential to examine the full range of factors at play: geopolitics, politics, and public opinion.

Above all, France has certain interests in the South Caucasus. As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, a military and nuclear power, a significant component of NATO, a leading economic actor, an arms exporter, and a key player in the energy sector, it is naturally concerned with this strategic region. Moreover, the fact that this essential crossroads between deep Asia and the Black and Mediterranean seas is the traditional playground of three major powers – Russia, Iran, and Türkiye – only heightens Paris's interest in closely monitoring it. Lacking the means to compete with major powers like Russia, the United States, and China, whether in arms sales or in deploying an active policy of influence, France seeks to position itself in areas that these powers cannot or do not wish to invest in and to forge alliances with actors unwilling to choose a side.

Finally, the foreign policy of France, as a liberal democracy, is also influenced by political considerations and the dynamics of public opinion. In the case of the South Caucasus, the presence in France of an organized and mobilized Armenian community favors a pro-Armenian orientation, which can sometimes take on a critical dimension toward Azerbaijan. While the weight of this community is a factor to consider, it should neither be underestimated nor exaggerated.

On December 19, 1993, shortly after being officially elected president of

Azerbaijan on October 3 that year, Heydar Aliyev landed in France for his first official overseas visit. The situation within the country was then difficult on all levels. Like many former Soviet republics, Azerbaijan was experiencing a severe recession. Its government had faced a major crisis during the summer with the mutiny of Surat Huseynov and the departure of Abulfaz Elchibey from power. The war with Armenia dragged on and increasingly turned to the latter's advantage with the fall of Zangilan in late October, preceded by the loss of Fizuli, Jabrayil, and Qubadli during the last week of August. To make matters worse, this instability affected relations with Türkiye.

The transition to a market economy was slow, and the country still heavily depended on infrastructure and trade relations inherited from the Soviet Union. Rampant inflation, rising unemployment, the presence of hundreds of thousands of displaced persons and refugees, and an industry paralyzed by conflict and lack of capital exacerbated the crisis.

Heydar Aliyev had an advantage over his predecessor: where Elchibey was openly anti-Russian, the then-new Azerbaijani leader maintained more balanced relations with Moscow and thus enjoyed greater room for maneuver in his opening to the West.

But why did he choose France? Why did he not turn to the other co-chair of the Minsk Group, the United States?

After its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Azerbaijan sought to establish and strengthen its diplomatic relations with the United States. The latter recognized the country's independence on December 25, 1991, and official diplomatic relations were established on February 19, 1992. Azerbaijan's embassy in the United States was inaugurated on March 6, 1992, and Hafiz Pashayev was appointed ambassador, a position he would hold for fourteen years, reflecting the strategic importance Baku placed on this mission. However, Azerbaijan's efforts to draw closer to Washington quickly encountered obstacles, slowing the development of deep bilateral relations.

On August 6, 1992, the U.S. Congress passed the Freedom Support Act to accelerate the transition to democratic government and a market economy in Russia and other newly independent states following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Subsequently, humanitarian, security, and counterterrorism dimensions were also integrated into the document.

A few months later, on October 24, the U.S. Senate adopted an amendment, known as Section 907, prohibiting any form of direct U.S. government or

military assistance to the Azerbaijani government. Due to this section, strongly supported by the Armenian-American community in the United States during the First Karabakh War, Azerbaijan became the only post-Soviet country unable to benefit from direct aid coming from the United States. When Bill Clinton came to power in January 1993, his hands were tied.

However, despite the restrictions imposed by this legislation, the Clinton administration actively supported energy projects in the Caucasus and Central Asia, aiming to reduce U.S. and European dependence on Middle Eastern oil while strengthening the autonomy of former Soviet republics and reducing their reliance on Russia.

Thus, his administration backed the ‘Contract of the Century,’ a vast agreement for the exploitation of Caspian Sea oil resources, and facilitated the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline project. This strategic pipeline was intended to transport Caspian Sea oil to the Mediterranean, bypassing Russia and Iran.

Finally, during his first months in power, Clinton hesitated regarding his policy toward Russia. He sought to avoid initiatives that might provoke Moscow, already preoccupied with tensions in Chechnya. Unable to secure an invitation to the White House, Heydar Aliyev settled for the Élysée Palace.

The choice of France in 1993 reflected a mix of pragmatism and strategic calculation. France offered clear advantages in terms of diplomacy, cultural influence, and involvement in Caucasian affairs—it has been a member of the Minsk Group since 1992. But there was also the weight of France’s image and prestige. From Baku’s perspective, Paris was not just any capital. As a major European power, France was perceived in Azerbaijan as a symbol of culture, democracy, and economic development. For many intellectuals and members of the elite, it represented a model of Western progress, liberal values, and diplomatic influence. This fascination was rooted in an older tradition, inherited from the Soviet period, when French culture enjoyed immense prestige. French literature, cinema, and philosophy were widely disseminated and admired, shaping an image of France as a country of intellectual and artistic refinement. In this context, Azerbaijanis harbored a generally positive view of France, seen as an influential and prestigious nation within the Western world. Being received in France with great pomp as an equal and as a partner, held particular significance for this young republic enduring severe hardships.

A central pillar of this opening to the West was energy diplomacy. In 1994, Aliyev laid the groundwork for the ‘Contract of the Century.’ This initiative

was not limited to attracting foreign investment; it also enabled Azerbaijan to reduce its dependence on Russia-controlled pipelines, integrating the country into global energy markets. By leveraging its strategic resources, Azerbaijan positioned itself as a key player in energy geopolitics while distancing itself from Russian influence.

The French company Total (now TotalEnergies) was among the founding members of the consortium involved in the Contract of the Century. Total held an initial 10% stake, making it one of the primary investors. Thus, the visit to France, French participation in the Contract of the Century, and its role in resolving the conflict with Armenia were interconnected elements, reflecting the strategy of both states to develop their bilateral relations.

From a geopolitical perspective, France had the opportunity to forge privileged relations and play a leading role in a region newly opening to the West, with the United States forced to keep its distance for political reasons. Just as with Section 907 in the United States, geopolitics was overtaken by politics. Although relatively few in number – about 600,000 citizens of Armenian origin out of a population of 65 million – French citizens of Armenian descent exert a particular influence on public opinion, politics, and the media.

However, while France and Azerbaijan were drawing closer, the Armenian community was undergoing a profound transformation.

Since the late 1980s, Armenian diasporas worldwide have experienced a notable evolution. Long focused on international recognition of what they present as the ‘Armenian genocide’ and relations with Türkiye; these communities gradually began to view Azerbaijan as a major adversary. This shift occurred in the context of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict and the Turkish–Azerbaijani alliance.

The Lyon ceremony of April 24, 1985, was an emblematic example of this transformation in Armenian commemorative practices. This event coincided with the end of a cycle of attacks perpetrated against Turkish diplomats, initiated in the mid-1970s by Armenian armed groups. It also marked the beginning of the international recognition of the 1915 events as genocide on the diplomatic stage.

This dynamic intensified in 1985 at the UN and in the European Parliament, where a report on the Armenian question was about to be examined. The year 1985 thus symbolized a key step in the internationalization of the ‘Armenian genocide issue’ and in the mobilization for its recognition.

Moreover, this year marked the 70th anniversary of the 1915 event, giving rise to particularly significant ceremonies organized both in Soviet Armenia and within the diaspora. These events testified to the renewal of actors and commemorative practices.

Control over the political aspect of the commemoration, beyond the ceremony, became a power struggle within the Lyon Armenian community. As with the rest of the diaspora, it had remained ideologically divided since the 1920s between sympathizers of Soviet Armenia and those who rejected that regime. Another political actor, the Armenian National Movement (MNA), a former supporter of ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia), conducted parallel actions on April 24 in Paris, Marseille, and Lyon.

A new dichotomy then emerged. Official demonstrations, associated with institutional actors, favored central spaces like Place Bellecour in Lyon, relied on solid political alliances, attracted larger numbers of participants, and adopted moderate slogans. In contrast, marginal groups, such as the MNA or the Committee to Support Armenian Political Prisoners (CSPPA), chose more peripheral locations, often in direct confrontation with Turkish representatives.

It was between 1986 and 1991, as the Cold War drew to a close and the Soviet Union crumbled under Mikhail Gorbachev's governance, that the Armenian diaspora's attention turned toward Azerbaijan. This period marked a decisive turning point in the mobilization of this community, particularly regarding the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict.

From 1991 to 1994, as the war intensified, numerous demonstrations took place in Paris, Lyon, and Marseille. In April 1993, on the occasion of the commemoration of the 1915 events, a demonstration was organized in Paris to denounce Azerbaijan. In 1994, with the signing of the ceasefire, the war ended, but the mobilization of the Armenian diaspora did not wane. On the contrary, this period was marked by a consolidation of militant actions, particularly around the international recognition of the independence of the Armenian separatist regime so-called 'Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.'

In May 2008, on the 20th anniversary of tensions in the region, rallies were organized in Paris to support the recognition of the so-called 'Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.' The Karabakh issue not only gave new momentum to the diaspora but also prompted a reorganization of its institutions.

The fragmented landscape, inherited from the Cold War and the terrorist decade, gave way to greater unity. The creation of structured organizations,

such as the Coordination of Armenian Political Organizations (COPA) in 1993 and the Council for the Coordination of Armenian Organizations in France (CCAF) in 1994, enabled better coordination of efforts to defend Armenian interests.

If Heydar Aliyev's visit to France in 1993 was a strategic move aimed at strengthening Azerbaijan's international relations, it also provoked a reaction from the Armenian diaspora. The latter sought to keep French foreign policy aligned with the concerns of the young, independent Armenia. This dynamic gradually turned Azerbaijan into a primary adversary for Armenians, replacing Türkiye as the quintessential enemy, an object of fear, opposition, and mobilization.

We are now facing a new phenomenon, a new diaspora. While the memory of massacres, exile, and the cultural dimension articulated around the Church remain present, it is now political support for the Republic of Armenia and concrete ties with it that occupy a central place. Armenia's independence and its opening to the world have allowed diaspora members to visit the country, forge emotional ties, and redefine their engagement. For the inhabitants of Armenia in the 1990s, the problem was neither the 1915 events nor Türkiye, but the Karabakh issue and Azerbaijan. This new perspective led to an almost uninterrupted mobilization against Azerbaijan.

In this context, a more politicized and better-integrated diaspora asserts itself within an increasingly fragmented French political system, active in the media, politics, and the business community. France has not only lost power and influence since 1993, but its presidential regime, historically marked by strong foreign policy prerogatives, is gradually shifting toward a parliamentary logic, transferring some power from the Élysée to the National Assembly. This institutional reconfiguration fosters the rise of influence groups, amplifying the weight of the Armenian diaspora in French political debates.

The paths of French and Azerbaijani foreign policy, initially convergent under the presidencies of Heydar Aliyev and François Mitterrand before becoming parallel, have taken divergent trajectories over the past decade. More than thirty years after their meeting, France appears to have changed its positioning.

Since Nikol Pashinyan came to power in Armenia, the 2020 war, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Yerevan considers itself, for the first time since independence, free to redefine its alignment and seek alliances in the West. As in 1993, France is once again playing the role of a pioneering Western power and hopes to accompany Armenia on its path toward the West. This

choice, politically straightforward, aligns with the preferences of the Armenian community in France. However, this same diaspora does not automatically align with Yerevan's strategy. And while Nikol Pashinyan leads a state with its own logic and interests, French (or American) individuals of Armenian origin reason in terms of identity, memory, and emotion.

Nevertheless, this recent reorientation of France's South Caucasus policy could prove risky. The military dimension of this rapprochement, marked by a significant improvement in Armenian capabilities through the supply of equipment, training, and restructuring of armed forces, fundamentally alters the post-2020 balance between the two adversaries.

Whether one rejoices or laments it, after long years of marginality, this stance once again places France at the heart of the South Caucasus equation, affirming its enduring interest in the region.

THE FRENCH POLICY ON THE ARMENIAN–AZERBAIJANI CONFLICT (1991–2025)

Christian Vallar

Relations between France and Azerbaijan were characterized by openness and mutual understanding from Azerbaijan's restoration of independence until the '44-day war' of 2020. France was one of the first countries to recognize, on December 31, 1991, the former Soviet republic that had gained independence with the fall of the Soviet Union. The French embassy was opened in 1992.

This was manifested internationally by systematic reference to public international law (I) and by the development of bilateral relations (II).

I: FRANCE AND THE REMINDER OF RESPECT FOR PUBLIC INTERNATIONAL LAW

The first Armenian–Azerbaijani war began in 1988, even before the collapse of the USSR, with the vote by the regional Soviet of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) requesting its transfer to the Soviet Republic of Armenia. This led to the departure of Armenians from Azerbaijan and, in parallel, the Azerbaijani exodus (280,000 were forced to leave in 1989).

Conflict broke out between the former Socialist Republics and lasted until 1994, when it ended with the defeat of Azerbaijan, which lost 20% of its territory that came under the illegal control of the Armed Forces of Armenia. France supported the international institutions that advocated for Azerbaijani sovereignty (A) and played a mediating role at the head of the Minsk Group (B).

A: International Institutions and Azerbaijani Sovereignty: France's Support

There is a fundamental principle that underpins international peace: No acquisition of territory by force can have legal value. The unanimity of the international community on this was firmly stated in the four resolutions of the UN Security Council in 1993 on the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict (Resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884), which emphasize:

Resolution 822 of April 30, 1993 (S/RES/822 (1993)):

Reaffirming that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States in the region must be respected, [...]:

1. Demands the immediate cessation of all hostilities and hostile acts in order to establish a durable ceasefire, as well as the immediate withdrawal of all forces occupying the Kelbadjar district and other recently occupied regions of Azerbaijan; [...].

Resolution 853 of July 29, 1993 (S/RES/853 (1993)):

Reaffirming the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan, [...]

3. Demands the immediate cessation of all hostilities and the immediate, complete, and unconditional withdrawal of the occupying forces from the Aghdam district and all other recently occupied areas of the Republic of Azerbaijan; [...].

9. Urges the government of the Republic of Armenia to continue to exert its influence in order to bring the Armenians of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan to implement Security Council Resolution 822 (1993) as well as the present resolution, and to accept the proposals of the Minsk Group of [OSCE]; [...].

Resolution 874 of October 14, 1993 (S/RES/874 (1993)):

Reaffirming the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan, [...]

5. Requests that the reciprocal and urgent measures foreseen in the ‘modified timetable’ of the Minsk Group be immediately implemented.

Resolution 884 of November 12, 1993 (S/RES/884 (1993)):

Reaffirming the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan, [...]

2. Calls on the Armenian government to use its influence to bring the Armenians of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan to implement Resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), and 874 (1993), and to ensure that the forces involved do not receive the means to extend their military campaign; [...]

4. Demands that the concerned parties immediately cease armed hostilities and hostile acts, that the occupying forces unilaterally withdraw from the Zangilan district and the city of Goradiz, and that the occupying forces withdraw from other recently occupied areas of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in accordance with the 'modified timetable' of urgent measures to implement Resolutions 822 (1993) and 853 (1993) of the Security Council (...), as amended at the Minsk Group meeting of [OSCE] held in Vienna from November 2 to 8, 1993.

France voted for these resolutions without hesitation as a permanent member of the Security Council.

In 2008, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 62/243 concerning the situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. It consistently called for respect and support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan within its internationally recognized borders, demanded the immediate, complete, and unconditional withdrawal of all Armenian forces from the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and reaffirmed the inalienable right of the people expelled from these occupied territories to return to their homes, emphasizing the need to create favorable conditions for their return.

NATO, in the Declarations of its summits in Lisbon (November 19–20, 2010, Article 35), Chicago (May 20, 2012, Article 47), Wales (September 4–5, 2014, Article 30), Warsaw (July 8–9, 2016, Article 24), and Brussels (July 11–12, 2018, Article 67), expressed its determination “to support the territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and

the Republic of Moldova. In this context, we continue to support efforts aimed at achieving a peaceful resolution of conflicts in the South Caucasus as well as in the Republic of Moldova, based on these principles and the standards of international law, the UN Charter, and the Helsinki Final Act.”

At the level of the European Union, France has consistently supported measures it has adopted that are favorable to Baku.

The European Parliament, for its part, consistently reiterated its position on the resolution of the conflict in its resolutions dated May 20, 2010, April 18, 2012, October 23, 2013, and July 9, 2015, which condemned the military occupation, supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and called for an immediate solution to the conflict based on the Security Council resolutions.

On June 10, 2020, the Chair of the Delegation to the EU-Armenia Parliamentary Partnership Committee, the EU-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, and the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Association Committee, MEP Marina Kaljurand, the EU's Permanent Rapporteur on Armenia, MEP Traian Băsescu, and the EU's Permanent Rapporteur on Azerbaijan, MEP Željana Zovko, adopted a Joint Declaration.

In this declaration, the MEPs condemned the illegal occupation of the Karabakh region and the surrounding districts, reiterated their support for the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group, and called on the authorities in Armenia and Azerbaijan to intensify their good-faith engagement in negotiations for the peaceful resolution of the conflict within the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan.

On June 19, 2020, the European Parliament adopted a Recommendation (2019/2209(INI)) regarding the Eastern Partnership, in preparation for the June 2020 summit. In this document, the European Parliament issued the following recommendations:

Reaffirm the Union's commitment to supporting the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of all Eastern Partnership countries within their internationally recognized borders, and support the efforts they make to fully implement these principles; emphasize the importance of unity and solidarity among Member States in this regard.

Reaffirm its support for the efforts of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh

conflict and their 2009 basic principles in order to reach a solution based on the norms and principles of international law, the United Nations Charter, and the 1975 OSCE Helsinki Final Act; encourage all parties to intensify dialogue and refrain from any inflammatory rhetoric that would further undermine any prospect of a settlement.

The EU/Azerbaijan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement of 1999 recognizes, in its preamble, that “Supporting the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan contributes to safeguarding peace and stability in Europe.”

The EU did not recognize the elections held episodically in the occupied territories and initiated by factional groups, as evidenced by the statement from the European External Action Service (EEAS) on March 31, 2020:

With regard to the so-called presidential and legislative elections of March 31, 2020, in Nagorno-Karabakh, the European Union recalls that it does not recognize the constitutional and legal framework in which they took place. This event cannot prejudice the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh or affect the outcome of the ongoing negotiation process. The EU reaffirms its unwavering support for the OSCE Minsk Group and, in particular, for the efforts of its co-chairs to move beyond the status quo and engage in substantive negotiations on the path to a comprehensive and lasting peace. The EU stands ready to continue supporting efforts for a rapid, peaceful settlement of the conflict.

B: The Minsk Group and France as a Mediator

The mediation process for resolving the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in and around the Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan began in February 1992 under the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, which in 1995 was renamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe – OSCE).

At a special CSCE Council meeting held on March 24, 1992, in Helsinki, a decision was made to convene a conference in Minsk on the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This would form a permanent framework

for negotiations “based on the principles, commitments, and provisions of the CSCE.” The countries participating in the conference included Armenia and Azerbaijan, the parties to the conflict, as well as Germany, the United States, Belarus, France, Italy, Russia, Sweden, the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, and Türkiye.

The decision to establish the co-presidency institution “for coordinating all mediation efforts within the framework of the CSCE” was made during the CSCE Summit in Budapest on December 5–6, 1994. The text of the decision clearly stated that “the co-presidents [...] would be guided in all their negotiation activities by the principles of the CSCE and by a mandate agreed upon mutually.” Additionally, the heads of state or government of the participating CSCE countries reaffirmed “their support for the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and called on the parties to the conflict (including Armenia and Azerbaijan) to engage in in-depth dialogue.”

A mandate for the co-presidents of the Minsk Conference was established, under which “the co-presidents of the Minsk Group should be guided in their activities by the principles and norms of the OSCE, the UN Charter, and the corresponding UN Security Council resolutions,” that is, those adopted in 1993. Since January 1997, the responsibility for leading the peace process has been entrusted to the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group – Russia, the United States, and France.

However, despite the resolutions and documents adopted by international organizations and the efforts of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, the negotiation process did not yield any results for the past 28 years. As a result, the American political scientist Jeffrey Mankoff aptly observed that “the peace process is more involved in managing the conflict than in resolving it.”

The co-presiding countries are concerned with maintaining good relations with Azerbaijan, particularly in economic matters. They are bound by an obligation of neutrality, impartiality, and balance.

In this tripartite co-presidency, France played a full role alongside the United States and Russia. Its regular initiatives were praised: the Paris Summit of March 2001 is one example. More recently, France called for another summit to advance the resolution of the conflict. On October 27, 2014, France hosted the other co-chairs of the Minsk Group, as well as the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents, to facilitate the resumption of direct dialogue between them. However, tangible results of this summit were scarcely visible, with each party blaming the other for the failure of the negotiations.

However, it was during this Paris Summit that France proposed a number of confidence-building measures aimed at enabling the resumption of dialogue. Among these was a humanitarian measure related to the exchange of information about missing persons from the war, under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Unfortunately, this was the only measure that was accepted by both parties, and it did receive some degree of initial implementation.

The role of mediator imposed on France a strict duty of balance and impartiality between the parties ... a role that it eventually abandoned as the Minsk Group was rendered ineffective by the resort to force.

II: France and Relations Based on Mutual Understanding with Baku

The cordial relationship of the years 1991–2020 (A) was replaced as diplomatic relations deteriorated (B).

A: 1991–2020: The Cordial Relationship

The relationship between Azerbaijan and France is longstanding, but it developed significantly after the fall of the Soviet Union, which facilitated the rebirth of Azerbaijan. The two countries grew closer economically, culturally, and politically. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev chose France as the destination for his first official foreign visit in January 2004.

The election of Heydar Aliyev as the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan in October 1993 accelerated the rapprochement between the two countries. Heydar Aliyev was eager to open his country to the international community. This culminated in the joint signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Understanding, and Cooperation between France and Azerbaijan on December 20, 1993.

French President Jacques Chirac invited Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev to France in 1997. Simultaneously, many French companies began investing in Azerbaijan's oil industry.

Primarily due to its vast reserves of hydrocarbons and gas, Azerbaijan became the country with the strongest economic ties to France in the South Caucasus. By 2000, France was among Azerbaijan's main trading partners, following Italy, Russia, Israel, and Türkiye.

Sectors such as banking, telecommunications, consumer goods, and the environment were areas in which French engagement was notable. Cultural,

academic, and scientific cooperation expanded with the opening of a French Lyceum in Baku in 2014. However, these relations began to deteriorate significantly post-2020.

B: The Deterioration of Diplomatic Relations

The 44-day war in 2020 quickly led to a cooling of relations, which had previously been cordial. The speech of the French President on October 1 in Brussels set the tone for this change.

First of all, I would like to express my support for the journalist and the photographer from Le Monde newspaper who were injured a few hours ago in Nagorno-Karabakh, on the frontlines of the conflict that erupted since Sunday. I want to express our full support to all the journalists at Le Monde and to their families. The journalists are injured. Since we learned of this, the crisis center at the Quai d'Orsay has been mobilized, along with all of our resources, to organize their repatriation as quickly as possible. A medical evacuation plane is ready to depart as I speak. We are doing everything we can to stabilize the injured on the ground before allowing their evacuation. We will, of course, remain mobilized on this issue with the journalists, our teams on the ground, our teams in Paris, Le Monde newspaper, and the families.

This obviously brings me to the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. As we have already stated, I had the opportunity to speak with Prime Minister Pashinyan and President Aliyev, and we have called for a ceasefire. The situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh region is grave, and we remain fully mobilized. I was able to speak last night with President Putin on this subject, and just a few minutes ago, we issued a joint statement, President Trump, President Putin, and myself, as the three co-presidents of the Minsk Group tasked with monitoring the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. We called for an unconditional ceasefire, also reminding all parties involved to act reasonably and avoid pushing any party to go beyond

what is reasonable. We are extremely concerned today. My thoughts are with the civilians, as well as the military personnel who have fallen and their families, and we will do everything we can to bring an end to the conflict quickly, on the one hand, and to resume the path toward a peaceful resolution of this dispute.

Let me be very clear. On Sunday, the strikes that came from Azerbaijan, to our knowledge, had no justification, and that is what I asked President Aliyev. I also want to be very clear: we now have reliable information that indicates Syrian fighters, jihadist group members, left the theater of operations, passing through Gaziantep to join the frontlines in Nagorno-Karabakh. This is a very serious and new fact that changes the situation, and in the coming hours... we will first discuss this at the European Council. We have agreed with President Trump and President Putin to exchange all the information we have on this situation and draw all the necessary consequences from it. In any case, we are mobilized as the Minsk Group. We will act for a return to normal, for an unconditional ceasefire, and for a resolution of this dispute through negotiation and law.

The French Parliament adopted non-binding resolutions condemning Baku, with Azerbaijan's anti-terror operation in Karabakh in September 2023 exacerbating tensions between the two parties. Thus, the resolution adopted on January 15, 2024, by the Senate reads:

Considering Senate Resolutions No. 26 (2020-2021), adopted on November 25, 2020, regarding the need to recognize the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, and No. 19 (2022-2023), adopted on November 15, 2022, aimed at imposing sanctions against Azerbaijan and demanding its immediate withdrawal from Armenian territory, enforcing the ceasefire agreement of November 9, 2020, and supporting any initiative aimed at establishing lasting peace between the two countries;

Considering the military aggression conducted by Azerbaijan on September 19 and 20, 2023, in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, in violation of the ceasefire agreement of November 9, 2020, and the right of peoples to self-determination;

Considering the inaction and inability of the Russian peacekeeping forces to enforce the ceasefire agreement of November 9, 2020;

Considering the repeated violations of Armenia's territorial integrity by Azerbaijan and its publicly stated ambitions to create a transport corridor through the Zangezur Mountains, located to the south of Armenia, to connect Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, thus providing a land link to its border with Türkiye;

Considering the inherent risks of the large-scale military maneuvers announced on October 23, 2023, conducted jointly by Azerbaijan and Türkiye in Nakhchivan;

Considering that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the broader conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia occur in a particularly unstable region, close to the European Union, and involve a risk of escalation potentially involving regional powers;

Considering the forced exodus of Armenian populations from Nagorno-Karabakh as a result of this military aggression, following ten months of blockade imposed by Azerbaijani authorities, recognized as a planned ethnic cleansing operation;

Considering the dramatic humanitarian situation resulting from this, in terms of water and food supply, health, housing for the more than 100,000 displaced Armenians, and education for the approximately 30,000 affected children;

Considering that the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, when placed under Azerbaijani administration, was subjected repeatedly to organized massacres; considering that reports from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance of the Council of Europe (ECRI) and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) attest to the impossibility of Armenians living freely in Azerbaijan and, consequently, the security and freedom of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh are not guaranteed;

Considering the proven threats of irreversible degradation looming over the Armenian cultural and religious heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh, which the occupiers wish to erase entirely, as part of their genocidal intentions; considering that, in the view of the International Criminal Court, such degradation would constitute a crime against humanity;

Considering the conditions under which the democratically elected authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh and its former leaders were arbitrarily arrested and detained;

Considering that France has made active efforts since 1994, within the framework of the Minsk Group, which it co-chairs alongside Russia and the United States, to achieve a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; considering that the Ukrainian conflict impacts the ability of the Minsk Group to fulfill its mission; considering, furthermore, that this process is being consistently hindered by Azerbaijan's reliance on military solutions;

Considering that France supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Armenia and is committed to advocating for a just and lasting peace in the Caucasus;

Considering that peace talks under the auspices of the European Union are suffering from the consequences

of both the conflict arising from Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the strategic challenges related to the European Union's energy autonomy;

Strongly condemns the military offensive launched by Azerbaijan on September 19 and 20, 2023, with the support of its allies, in Nagorno-Karabakh, which forced the near-total exodus of the Armenian population living there;

Reminds that the respect for the right of peoples to self-determination, which applies to the Armenian populations of Nagorno-Karabakh, is the only viable path to lasting peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and that it is the duty of states to respect and protect this right. Consequently, the international community must demand that Azerbaijan do everything necessary to guarantee the right of return for the Armenian populations to Nagorno-Karabakh, under conditions that ensure their security and well-being;

Praises the French Government's initiative to increase humanitarian aid to Armenia to meet the basic needs of the displaced Armenian populations from Nagorno-Karabakh, and encourages it to urge its European partners to do the same;

Reaffirms the inviolability of Armenia's territorial integrity and calls for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Azerbaijani forces and their allies from Armenia's sovereign territory, returning to their initial positions;

Warns the French Government, the European Union, and the international community about the hegemonic ambitions of Azerbaijan and Türkiye, and the danger they represent for the Republic of Armenia, its territorial integrity, and peace in the Caucasus;

Affirms Armenia's right to defend its territorial integrity and to have the means to ensure its security, including through military means; therefore, welcomes the French Government's decision to deliver military equipment to Armenia and supports any initiative aimed at defending, at the European Union level, the use of the European Peace Facility (EPF) in favor of Armenia;

Condemns the arbitrary arrest of political leaders of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, legitimate representatives of the people of this territory, and demands their immediate release;

Calls on the Government to demand, under threat of sanctions, the immediate release of civilian and military prisoners held by the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as the immediate return of the bodies of Armenian soldiers killed in combat;

Calls for the respect of the integrity of cultural and religious heritage, in accordance with the obligations of Azerbaijan and Armenia under their international commitments, and strongly condemns the damage to Armenian buildings, remains, collections, and cultural property in Nagorno-Karabakh;

Affirms the urgency of placing the protection of Nagorno-Karabakh's heritage on the agenda of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, and calls for Azerbaijan's suspension from this Committee;

Emphasizes the necessity of constituting an international group of experts under UNESCO and sending them on a mission to Nagorno-Karabakh to report on the state of cultural and religious heritage;

Invites the Government to take all necessary diplomatic actions in response to Azerbaijan's repeated aggressions

towards Armenia, and to consider, with its European partners, a comprehensive review of the European Union's relations with Azerbaijan, as well as the most appropriate firm responses—including the seizure of Azerbaijani leaders' assets and an embargo on Azerbaijani gas and oil imports—to sanction the military aggression carried out by Azerbaijan;

Calls on the Government to do everything possible to ensure that Azerbaijan urgently and peacefully engages in a diplomatic negotiation process in order to establish a lasting peace in the South Caucasus.

This resolution was preceded by a less critical, though still unfriendly to Baku, report. Dated July 7, 2021, the report presented by the Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee on "Nagorno-Karabakh: Ten Lessons from a Conflict that Concerns Us" called for strengthening and balancing France and the EU's actions and reinforcing relations with Armenia.

The left-wing political group "La France Insoumise" filed its own resolution in the National Assembly on November 19, 2024, aimed at ensuring the right of self-determination of the Armenians in Karabakh, condemning their ethnic cleansing by Azerbaijan, and demanding a firm policy toward Azerbaijan.

The holding of COP 29 in Baku in November 2024, which could have facilitated a thaw in relations, instead further exacerbated the diplomatic tension at the highest level.

The media, major periodicals and daily newspapers, as well as websites, tirelessly repeat the Armenian narrative, despite a few exceptions. The links between the two countries are either broken (with the suspension of parliamentary friendship groups) or have become strained.

What are some possible explanations for this phenomenon?

One major factor is the presence of a significant Armenian cultural community in France, which offered asylum to those who left Türkiye in the 20th century. These Armenians have put down roots and now represent 600,000 individuals. Beyond their numbers, their organization into political and lobbying groups is

impressive, granting them considerable influence over elected officials.

Another factor contributing to this sympathy is the biased portrayal of the conflict, which is framed as a centuries-old clash between Christianity and Islam, even though religion is hardly a factor, as Azerbaijan is officially a secular state.

A less overtly emphasized dimension also influences Paris's decisions. This concerns the aim of strengthening Armenia's ties with the West, thereby distancing it from Russian influence. Both NATO and the EU have indicated that Armenia's membership will be welcomed. In a way, France is acting as a precursor, thus also hoping to gain a geopolitical advantage.

In any case, the tension between France and Azerbaijan is significantly high, with both states accusing each other of trying to harm the national interests of the other. This situation is even more unfortunate in the context of the cultural, economic, and geopolitical factors that bring the two countries closer together. Neither party benefits from this crisis continuing.

The resolution of this situation can only originate with the two main actors: Armenia and Azerbaijan. On March 13, the leaders of both states declared that “the negotiation process for the peace agreement text with Armenia has been concluded” (Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister), and that “Yerevan is ready to start discussions on the place and date for the signing of the peace agreement” (Nikol Pashinyan, Armenia's Prime Minister).

This announcement was followed by a cascade of congratulations from the Council of Europe, the European Union, the United Nations, the U.S.A., Russia ... and also France. President Macron stated on X: “Nothing now stands in the way of signing a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which must open the way for lasting peace in the South Caucasus.”

The (futile) call for a boycott of COP29, held in Baku in November 2024, is a recent example of these tensions. So far, the sides have managed to keep their composure. Let us take this as an omen: peace and prosperity in the South Caucasus will benefit everyone, local actors and external powers alike.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

*Vasif Huseynov*¹

France has long projected itself as a promoter of peace and a staunch defender of international law. As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, it was expected to uphold neutrality, objectivity, and the principles of international law in mediating the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. However, the evidence and analyses presented in the chapters of this book converge on the conclusion that France has failed to maintain a balanced posture in this complex regional dispute. From inconsistent application of international norms to overt political bias and domestic lobbying pressures, multiple factors have eroded France's credibility as an honest broker in the South Caucasus.

This final section synthesizes the findings of the preceding chapters and explains why France, despite its legal and moral obligations, has not upheld neutrality in its engagement with the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. It argues that France's partial conduct stems from a combination of domestic political pressures, cultural diplomacy, geopolitical recalculations, and a deeply entrenched narrative that aligns more closely with the Armenian position. This conduct has not only undermined the peace process but has also damaged France's standing in Azerbaijan and called into question the viability of multilateral mechanisms such as the OSCE Minsk Group.

Historical Commitment to International Law and its Contradictions

As several contributors have emphasized, France's early approach to the conflict formally adhered to the principles of international law. In his chapter "The French Policy on the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict (1991–2025)," Christian Vallar documents how France initially upheld Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He notes that "France supported the international institutions that advocated for Azerbaijani sovereignty," recalling its backing of UN Security Council Resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884 adopted in 1993. These resolutions called for the immediate, complete, and unconditional

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withdrawal of Armenian occupying forces from the territories of Azerbaijan.

However, Vallar also highlights a gradual erosion of this principled stance. Particularly after the 44 day war in 2020, French political institutions increasingly adopted language and positions that aligned with Armenian narratives. The 2024 Senate resolution that condemned Azerbaijan and called the recapture of its sovereign territories ‘ethnic cleansing’ is a case in point. Such declarations starkly contradict the principles France itself previously endorsed through UN and EU frameworks.

This shift has not gone unnoticed. Jean-Emmanuel Medina, in his chapter “Franco-Azerbaijani Bilateral Relations in Light of the Second Armenia-Azerbaijan War,” underscores the contradiction between France’s traditional commitment to international law and its recent conduct. While France “never recognized the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh,” he writes, its political discourse “increasingly shifted toward supporting Armenia’s position,” especially after 2020. Medina notes that military cooperation between France and Armenia, including the provision of surveillance radar systems and training, is viewed in Baku as incompatible with France’s role as a neutral mediator.

The Role of Domestic Political Influences and Lobbying

A crucial theme throughout the volume is the influence of domestic Armenian lobbying on French policy. Both Vallar and Medina refer to the size and organization of the Armenian diaspora in France as a key metric. Vallar estimates the community at around 600,000 individuals and describes its influence as “considerable” due to its integration into political and civil society structures. “Beyond their numbers,” he writes, “their organization into political and lobbying groups is impressive, granting them considerable influence over elected officials.”

This pressure has manifested in repeated resolutions by both chambers of the French Parliament that call for the recognition of the former self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh regime—a move no state in the international community, including France itself, has officially taken. Sultan Zahidov, in his contribution “Historical Overview: Participation of France in The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict Before The Second Karabakh War,” argues that such initiatives reflect a broader politicization of the conflict in French domestic discourse. “The French political class is not immune to the incentives of diaspora politics,” he

notes, adding that this dynamic often overrides France's external diplomatic commitments.

This issue becomes particularly problematic when national legislatures adopt positions that diverge sharply from established international norms. In the next chapter, Zahidov criticizes the French Senate's resolution of January 17, 2024, which accused Azerbaijan of "genocidal intentions" without presenting a balanced assessment of the conflict's historical and geopolitical context. The invocation of international criminal terminology in such a partisan manner not only delegitimizes genuine legal concerns but also entrenches divisions, making reconciliation between the parties more difficult.

Media Narratives and Cultural Diplomacy

Gil and Medina, in their respective chapters, provide a valuable cultural and discursive analysis that complements the legal and political perspectives. They argue that "the dominant narrative in French media systematically frames Azerbaijan as an aggressor and Armenia as a victim," despite the complexity of the conflict and the reversal of occupation that occurred during the 2020 war. This selective storytelling has deeply shaped public opinion and, by extension, policymaking in Paris. The authors point out that France's cultural memory plays a significant role in shaping these narratives. "The protection of Christian minorities in the East has long been a pillar of French cultural diplomacy," Medina writes, referring to historical precedents such as the 1860 intervention in Lebanon. They argue that this legacy continues to influence French attitudes toward the Armenian cause, contributing to what they call a "civilizational bias" that underpins much of France's cultural and humanitarian rhetoric in the South Caucasus.

This perspective helps explain why France's public and political discourse has shown little concern for the one million Azerbaijanis who were displaced from their homes in the 1990s. As Jean-Emmanuel Medina rightly observes, "France's support for Armenia ... is seen in Paris as a precautionary measure to prevent regional escalation," but such support has often come at the expense of acknowledging Azerbaijani suffering and rights.

Erosion of the Minsk Group and France's Credibility

France's co-chairmanship of the OSCE Minsk Group placed it in a privileged

position to facilitate peace. But, as Christian Vallar documents, this institution has effectively collapsed due to its inability to produce tangible results. Vallar quotes American scholar Jeffrey Mankoff to underline this failure: “The peace process is more involved in managing the conflict than in resolving it.”

France’s engagement with its role in the Minsk Group, while active in earlier years, gradually lost momentum. Even when French presidents organized summits or confidence-building measures – such as the Paris summit in 2014 – the impact remained limited, and the trust between Baku and Paris eroded. As Vallar concedes, “The role of mediator imposed a strict duty of balance and impartiality on France ... a role that it eventually abandoned.”

This abandonment is not merely symbolic. As Sultan Zahidov argues, it represents a breach of France’s legal and political responsibilities under international law. The principle of neutrality is essential not only for effective mediation but also for preserving the legitimacy of multilateral platforms like the OSCE. Once one of the co-chairs is perceived as partial, the whole mechanism becomes vulnerable to collapse, as has happened with the Minsk Group.

Missed Opportunities and the Way Forward

Despite this grim portrait, the conclusion drawn by several contributors is not one of inevitability. The decline in Franco-Azerbaijani relations is not irreversible. Medina emphasizes that “France remains a major actor on the international stage ... and a crucial partner for Azerbaijan’s economic diversification.” He argues for a pragmatic recalibration of relations based on mutual interests, including green technology, education, and energy.

Gil proposes a rebalancing of France’s cultural diplomacy to include Azerbaijani perspectives and historical narratives. They argue that restoring trust will require a reset of symbolic language and a commitment to symmetrical empathy that takes into account both Armenian and Azerbaijani losses and aspirations.

Christian Vallar, though critical of France’s trajectory, also notes recent diplomatic gestures that point to a potential thaw, such as President Macron’s positive reaction to the March 2025 statements by the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders signaling readiness to sign a peace treaty. “Let us take this as an omen,” he writes, “peace and prosperity in the South Caucasus will benefit everyone, both local actors and external powers alike.”

Conclusion

France's deviation from neutrality in the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict has not occurred in a vacuum. It is the result of intersecting domestic, cultural, geopolitical, and historical influences that have gradually moved French diplomacy away from its earlier, balanced position. The contributors to this book – Christian Vallar, Jean-Emmanuel Medina, Sultan Zahidov, and Gil Mihaeli – have provided an in-depth and multifaceted account of this shift.

They converge on a common conclusion: France, by virtue of its role in the UN Security Council and its co-chairmanship of the OSCE Minsk Group, had a special responsibility to act as a fair and credible mediator. Instead, it allowed political expediency and domestic lobbying to undermine its neutrality, thereby compromising the peace process and weakening its own diplomatic leverage.

As the South Caucasus enters a new phase marked by tentative rapprochement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the time has come for France to reassess its role. A return to principled diplomacy – rooted in respect for sovereignty, non-interference, and balanced engagement – could allow France to regain the trust it has lost and contribute constructively to the post-conflict regional order. This, ultimately, is the true test of any great power's commitment to peace.

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